

A New Chance At Life

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After a night of suffering, Latios was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for Alto Mare, for his sister. But, fortunate events give him a new chance at life thanks to Latias and Ash. So, Alto Mare is saved and Latios is alive. With that behind them, both dragons decide to depart with Ash on his journey. How will he cope traveling with two Legendary Pokémon?

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Journey To A New Land

A New Chance At Life

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"Speech."

'Thoughts.'

"Telepathy."

Author Notes:

Important: I have an account on DeviantArt that I use to further stay in touch with the community and use to give out public messages, and can serve as an alternate way to contact me. I recommend that you check it out and follow it! Also, that page provides links to any and all art that I commission for my stories. The link to it is on my profile near the top.

Chapter rewritten. Well my fellow readers... I felt it was time I finally did a serious rewrite and re-structure of A New Chance at Life's first chapters and in general a quality update of the entire story. I think that my skill has increased greatly since I first started writing this and that I should go back to make that reflect on my initial chapters. I hope you like this clearer, more detailed and well-made version of the story's birth chapter!

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Chapter 1 - A New Chance At Life

The oceanic city of Alto Mare was a truly gorgeous architectural wonder of both old and modern human society. The city was erected right in the middle of the seas south-west of the Johto region, located several miles out from the region's coastline. Despite its unusual location the city of Alto Mare was fairly large, easily spanning across several square miles. Seen from a distance, the city lacked any exceptionally tall buildings, nearly all of the structures were only two to five stories tall at maximum with only a few exceptions for notable landmarks. The city had an amazing and complex infrastructure of water canals that served as the main streets and roads, with gondolas and boats of many traditional and modern designs being a common sight on them as they were the primary means of transportation throughout the ocean-bound metropolis. Alto Mare was marvelous to the eye for both tourists and visitors alike as it sported many great attractions all around, from lush and lively parks to historically outstanding museums. Designed and built with an exquisite antique-looking style that was based predominantly on stone and at the same time possessing many trees and plant life to ornament it, the ocean city of Alto Mare was a true beauty of the sea. Its wondrous visual appeal was greatly complemented with a fascinating series of events and folklore surrounding its origins and founding. Dating back for at least over a hundred years, they were dazzling myths that spoke of Legendary Pokémon and dark events.

Alto Mare was heavily rumored to be the home to a pair of majestic Legendary Pokémon. They served as one of the city's greatest mysteries and sources of attraction, both from touristic and historical points of view. For dozens of years hundreds upon hundreds of Pokémon trainers, explorers, poachers, scientists and researchers alike had tried to find the two rumored guardian Legends, but all of them had failed, their efforts completely in vain. The lack of sightings of the rumored Pokémon made a few skeptical people doubt they

even existed, regarding them as mere myths or tales of the elder generation. Despite skepticism, most of the city's population deeply believed in them and paid great respect and almost religious worship to the two guardian deities.

The main plaza of Alto Mare, in which the biggest and most predominant museum stood, had two huge pillars of stone with the statues of the two Legendaries adorning the top. They were the two Eon Pokémon, the legendary dragons Latias and Latios. Around the rest of the city, countless artworks of them could be seen ornamenting many things. Buildings, boats, statues, stained glass windows, murals, neatly trimmed bushes and much more. The city's inhabitants believed in them as guardians and divine protectors that brought peace and prosperity to the oceanic city.

The truth was that the grand majority who believed in them were right. For Latias and Latios *did* exist, and together, the two young dragon guardians had worked dutifully in protecting the city they called their home ever since their birth, over a hundred years ago. Protecting the city itself was just half of the two's responsibilities. The dragon twins also had to protect what was essentially the living heart of Alto Mare, its ultimate treasure. It was a very valuable and powerful jewel known as the Soul Dew, its name coming from the fact that the spherical crystal jewel housed the soul and power of a Legendary Pokémon inside of it. The spirit contained within the orb was none other than the first Latios, the father of the two current guardians. The Soul Dew's power kept all the water in the vicinity in place as well as maintaining the ocean's calming and protective aura over the city.

The night of the present day in Alto Mare was normal to nearly everyone in the city, quiet and peaceful, almost deceitfully uneventful. However, it was *not* a calm night for the city's revered guardians and their few human friends. For what had started like a wonderful day had quickly changed to a living nightmare.

Earlier that day, the dragon twins had met a human boy at the annual Tour of Alto Mare water chariot race. The boy was a young,

cheerful, innocent and enthusiastic eleven year old Pokémon trainer named Ash Ketchum. While Latios had a distasteful first meeting with him and took a while to warm up to the kid, Latias had taken an instant liking to him. After a joyful day of games and fun, the dark of the night accompanied the horrendous nightmare that struck the two young guardians and the unaware city.

Two vile agents of the international criminal organization known as Team Rocket had somehow managed to find their way into the Secret Garden, a lively and extensive garden hidden inside the city that Latios and Latias had always called their personal safe heaven. The Secret Garden was protected by powerful, almost magical illusions that helped conceal and protect the lush paradise from the prying eyes of humanity. However, through their technology and skills in the arts of espionage, the two skilled criminals named Annie and Oakley had succeeded in finding their way into it and defeated the young twins in a battle. Latias had barely managed to escape the fight thanks to the brave and selfless efforts of her brother, but with the dragon twins defeated, there was nothing stopping the women from kidnapping Latios and stealing the Soul Dew from its pedestal.

With both of their captures firmly secured, Annie and Oakley had set out towards the city's main plaza, where the central museum was located, and used the Soul Dew along with Latios to start an ancient machine that resided inside the museum. The machine in question was a powerful last resort weapon to protect Alto Mare from danger known as the Defense Mechanism of Alto Mare, often abbreviated to DMA.

With the machine's power, Oakley had quickly seized control of Alto Mare. However, Ash, his partner Pikachu, and Latias made sure it was brief, as they made a brave attack on the museum to stop the two thieves from abusing the power of the DMA. With their combined efforts they were able to stop Oakley and the raging ancient machine by retrieving Latios from it, thus cutting out the machine's main power source and causing it to forcefully shut down. The victory was short lived as Annie's greed spelled their doom when she touched

the weakened Soul Dew to try and retrieve it so she could keep it for herself. The end result had been catastrophic.

The Soul Dew had exploded violently, shattering the glass into dozens of pieces. Soon afterwards, a cataclysmic and seemingly unstoppable event had been set forth. Without the Soul Dew keeping the ocean bound to Alto Mare, the water had retreated from the city for the first time in a hundred years and disappeared well beyond the horizon. Now it was coming back in the form of a gigantic tsunami easily several hundred feet tall.

All of the Pokémon and humans involved, with the exception of the two Team Rocket women as they were trapped within the DMA's control chamber, watched in horror as the roaring wave approached the city. "Oh, no..." Lorenzo whispered fearfully, voice trembling as he watched the mass of water rapidly coming closer. "The water... it's coming back." He was frozen in place except for trembles of fear.

Bianca shook her head slightly in disbelief, taking a couple of steps backwards from sheer horror. "No... this can't be," she whimpered in grief, her mind refusing to accept the reality that the wave would surely kill everyone present in the city, including her. Lorenzo pulled his granddaughter closer to him, wrapping an arm around her in support and comfort.

Latios and Latias watched the oncoming tidal wave with wide, fearful eyes. Both psychic dragons were floating around the museum's tallest ornamental tower. Latias glanced at Latios, her form quivering. "W-what do we do!?" she shakily asked him. With the situation and the panic overwhelming her, she fell back on him for support.

The weakened Latios didn't look at her, instead he remained focused on the incoming wave. His mind raced to find a way they could stop the wave and save their home from being destroyed. For now, the shattered Soul Dew was not his main worry. "We... should..." he began to say in a low, insecure tone. However, he was interrupted by an involuntary wince and his levitation faltering slightly.

Latias let out a short gasp. "Latios! Are you okay?" she cried out in concern as she glanced at him. She could clearly see that he was still very weak from the damage the battle with Annie and Oakley plus the DMA had inflicted on him, patches of burned feathers and painful scrapes tarnished his once pristine blue and gray feathers.

"I'm... fine," Latios responded faintly, doing his best to correct his levitation and be strong. He refused to display weakness in such a dire situation, in front of his sister. He glanced at the wave one last time, and then his eyes widened in fear. "Latias!" he shouted as he glanced at his sister. "Come on, we have to do something. Let's go!" Without saying anything else, the two dragons darted off and headed towards the wave.

The humans gasped when they saw the two dragons rapidly fly overhead, passing them quickly, in the direction of the incoming tsunami. "Latias!" Ash shouted.

"Latios!" Bianca cried out after him, concerned for her dragon friend.

However, neither dragon stopped at the human's calls or seemed to acknowledge them. They both kept charging towards the tsunami as if the human's shouts had fallen on deaf ears. As the two distressed Eon Dragons flew towards the tidal wave, intent on saving their hometown and their friends from destruction, they felt *something* happen. Very deep within them, as deep as their very souls, something they had no knowledge of or knew how to describe or even begin to comprehend was happening. It was as if the intense emotional anguish the twins were experiencing from the current life-threatening situation had snapped something in them. Driven by their need to save their friends and home, strength they didn't know they had in them suddenly burned intensely inside the two dragons. They felt strong and *powerful*, making the task of taking down the wave suddenly less daunting. With new determination shining in the two's eyes, both dragons sped up in their flight towards the devastating wall of water.

Latias and Latios' eyes began to dimly glow as the power they felt began surging through them. The glow in their eyes seemed to start spreading across the entirety of their bodies, glowing brighter and brighter until a prominent blazing shine emanating from the pair of dragons illuminated the dark night. Latias and Latios turned into two shining projectiles of the purest and brightest light, soaring with full determination to oppose the wave. The mighty gleam encasing the two dragons exploded outwards, uniting both of them into a single *massive* sphere of blazing power and ethereal white light fueled by their desire to protect everything they loved and cherished.

The sphere of tremendous energy crashed into the wave, disappearing within the vast wall of water. For a couple of anguished seconds it looked as if nothing had happened, but then, a tiny glow seemed to start resonating inside the dark and murky water. Without warning a single blast of light surged from the tsunami as the sphere of energy Latias and Latios had generated expanded, growing in size to the point it became taller than the raging tidal wave itself. The tsunami was cleanly split in half by the two psychic dragons. With the wave's balance split, the entire thing began to collapse and crash downwards. As the wave was reduced to nothing but a small surge by the two dragon Legendaries, a large sphere of majestic light was left floating in place, almost as if it was an artificial sun floating above the gradually advancing ocean.

The humans watched in pure shock and awe, not knowing what had just unfolded before them. They silently gazed at the alluring sphere of light in the distance, which before their very eyes began to expand into a massive pillar of imposing light that reached upwards past the vast heavens. At least, the danger was gone. The tidal wave was no more...

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Latias was feeling dizzy, very dizzy. It was as if her world was spinning around at impossible speeds and nothing made sense. To the young dragoness, everything had gone by too fast for her to take account of the facts in complete detail. One moment she was flying

towards the wave, waiting for her brother to tell her what they were going to do about it. Then something she couldn't even begin to explain happened to her and suddenly the wave had been taking down and she was filling dizzy. Everything was filled with blanks and holes, making Latias feel as if she had lost consciousness for a few minutes. The red dragoness slowly opened her amber-colored eyes, and then squinted them a little to adjust to the blazing light she found herself completely surrounded in.

'Where am I?' Latias wondered to herself as she looked around, visually exploring the vast whiteness that enveloped her. Latias tilted her head in confusion at the familiar sense she felt, realizing that it must have been the same power she and Latios had used to take down the deadly tidal wave before it reached the city. Oddly, she felt strangely lively when inside the column of light, as if the shining power around her was made of the purest love and life. It made her feel good, happy, as if everything was alright and there was nothing to worry about. She closed her eyes for a few seconds as memories of what she had just done began to fill her mind in greater detail. Her eyes suddenly snapped open and she began to look around rapidly, desperately looking for her dear brother. She felt relieved when she saw him, only to gasp loudly when she saw his condition. Latios was completely transparent, nothing but a faintly glowing bluish outline that was slowly fading away. She felt her eyes tear up as she realized what was happening. Her beloved brother was about to die.

"Latios..." Latias sobbed, shaking her head a couple times. "Why?" Her voice was pained as she begged for an answer.

"I was already weak..." Latios replied with a sad but gentle voice. He sounded strange, his voice echoing oddly, as if the sound was coming from all around them instead of coming from his mouth. "The power to take down the wave was going to kill one of us. I'd never let it be you. Even weak, I decided to take the extra load needed."

Latias felt her heart breaking at the thought of losing the only real family she had ever had in her life. "But, Latios, what will I do? I can't keep on without you, I don't want to be alone. You can't leave!"

Latias protested, tears finally running down her cheeks. Never had she thought such a thing could ever happen, she had never entertained the possibility of losing her brother or what she would do afterwards. Now she was watching it unfold in front of her.

If Latios had a corporeal body, he too would have been on the verge of tears. The idea of leaving his sister alone was agonizing, but it had to happen. He slowly shook his head. "I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can do, Latias. I'm slowly losing what little life I have left in me. It's over. You'll have to go on." The dying dragon gave her a wavering smile. "You have to be strong and keep going on your own."

Latias shook her head, not wanting to believe what was happening. Her mind was filled with over a hundred years of memories of her and her brother, as vivid and clear as if they had all happened just yesterday. She thought of racing with Latios through Alto Mare's seemingly endless canals, with the two of them making sharp turns while trying not to crash as they raced to out-speed each other. She thought of Latios soothing her injuries whenever she was in pain, how he would always be there for her when it mattered the most. She thought of falling asleep each night, cuddled up with her brother, knowing that he would always be there to protect her and that she was safe with him there. She thought of the times she did acts of gratitude for him, like her bringing him the exotic and rare Hondew Berry that she had managed to sneak out from the market as a present for him.

These memories, and hundreds more, raced through her mind in a mere second as she gazed at her translucent brother. Every beat of her heart brought more pain as she watched Latios fade more and more, leaving her behind as his power left him and he went further and further away from his connection to the world, to *her* .

Never again would she be able to turn to him when she was hurt, scared, or in times of need. Never again would he be there to comfort her, or cheer her on, to play with her. He was going to be gone forever. She was going to be alone from now on. "No..." Latias

shook her head, refusing to accept the harsh truth she was being subjected to.

Latios watched her sadly, having a very good idea of what was running through the distraught Latias' mind. "I... I'd wish for this not to happen, I really would. But it's happening..." He lowered his gaze, and extended a claw out to her. "I know I've promised you many times in the past that I'll always be there for you, but I'm afraid that's one promise I just can't keep, Latias. I'm sorry for failing you. I trust that you'll be able to take care of yourself. Please, keep going on. All I want is for you to be happy, don't let my passing burden you forever. Be strong, and continue. You have a long, *long* life ahead of you..."

"Without you..." Latias stared at her brother's outstretched arm quietly, and then gazed up at his face. She held back a sob, floating back slightly. "No... you can't leave..." she whispered, refusing to accept the cruel truth. Her mind now raced to find a way to reverse this. Latios simply couldn't go. "There has to be a way..." the dragoness muttered softly. She felt a quiver run down her body as more tears stained her cheeks.

Suddenly, everything froze for the young dragoness. Like when she had been charging towards the wave, she felt something snap within her, as if something large inside her had awakened to life. "We're Legendary Pokémon. There's got to be *something* we can do about this!" Latias cried out determinedly. "It can't, it *won't* end like this!"

Latios closed his eyes, his form becoming more and more translucent as the life force he had left continued to drain from him. "No, Latias, it-" he began to speak.

"I'm *not* letting you go," Latias said defiantly, interrupting her brother. The female Eon Pokémon's eyes and body began to let out a very faint and soft glow akin to the one that had covered both eon dragons when they had bravely tackled the wave. Her mind worked overtime, searching for ideas even faster than before. Everything that her brother and the few Legendary Pokémon that she'd met up

to that point had mentioned and taught her rushed across her mind in mere seconds. She knew that her brother had only a few instants left in this world, and whatever she decided might be her one and only chance to save him.

"We can use someone's life force to fix yours!" she suddenly blurted out. Latias felt odd afterwards. She couldn't quite pinpoint where the idea came from, but it was *there*. However, even if she had little understanding for what she had said, a huge wave of soothing hope and faith rushed into the dragoness. She just knew, right there and then, that it could work, and that it *would* work.

Latios' slowly fading soul closed his eyes. "There's a chance that whoever does that might perish in my place, Latias. That's simply not right." The dragon wasn't sure if he was supposed to feel relieved or further emotionally hurt that Latias was so adamant about not letting him pass on, it was clear she was not ready for an independent life without his guidance.

"It'll work and you'll both be fine, you'll see!" Latias insisted, pure determination and love for her brother shining in her eyes. "And I know who can help us." With newfound power and resolve, the dragoness suddenly turned to the side and darted away.

To the Eon Dragoness it was as if pure instinct was driving her. She had the idea, she knew it was there. But she didn't know where it came from or how she had the determination and the power to execute it. It was as if the pain and sorrow that had been tearing her heart apart had given her something she had been missing.

Latias' speed was faster than it had ever been. Encased in a sphere of pure and holy light, the distance between where she and her brother had stopped the wave and the museum was crossed in less than a second. It was so fast it would appear as if she had teleported. With this strength, she knew, nothing was impossible, not even saving her beloved Latios.

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Ash, Misty, Brock, Togepi, Pikachu, Lorenzo and Bianca let out a collective sigh of relief as the water returned to Alto Mare, this time in a gentle surge that did nothing more than flood a couple of sidewalks and rock some gondolas. The water began gently spreading out across the city, filling the canals of the city once more. The group that had watched the display were completely mesmerized by the large column of pure light that was visible in the far distance, splitting the night sky in half from its sheer size and radiant shine.

"What... is that?" Ash asked, gazing at the pillar of light stretching to the sky.

"I don't know," Lorenzo answered. "I've never seen them do anything like this. It's so bright..."

"Neither have I." Bianca eyes reflected concern. "Where are Latias and Latios? I hope they're okay."

Before anyone could say anything else the almost eerie silence of the night was abruptly shattered by the arrival of Latias. What sounded like a deafening crash echoed suddenly all around them as what felt like a very potent gust of wind suddenly buffeted everyone, pushing them back harshly to the museum's wall and stunning them. The still-glowing Latias looked at the group, rapidly singling Ash out. "Come with me!" she said urgently, levitating over to Ash. She slipped her arms under him, picking him up. As soon as she had come, the Eon Dragoness was off, turning and flying out a couple feet before disappearing in a flash from the sheer speed at which she flew away.

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"Latios! I'm back!" Latias cried out as she suddenly burst into the pillar of light, letting go of Ash as she did so. She was immensely relieved that Latios was still where she had left him. To the dying dragon it had felt as if only a couple of seconds had passed.

Ash gasped as his senses returned to him, the sudden stun from the boom had simply disappeared as if nothing had happened. "What happened!?" he questioned, surprised, when he noticed that he was floating in the middle of an ample light, which seemed to span vastly across his surroundings. No matter where he looked, all he could see was an infinite pure white extending in every direction. "Latias?" He looked at the dragoness in confusion.

Latias looked at Ash, locking eyes with him. For a second the human was taken aback at the fact that the Eon Pokémon's cheeks were covered in very clear tear tracks. Her arms darted forward, taking Ash's hands into her own. "Ash! You need to help me with something. *Urgently* . Latios used up nearly all his life and power stopping the wave, he's dying because of it!" Latias exclaimed direly.

For a second the Pokémon trainer stared at Latias, surprised and at the same time shocked. Surprised because he had understood every word she had said perfectly, and shocked at what she had said. "I... understood you?" He paused, realizing there was something much more important at hand. "Wait, no. What about Latios?"

"Here..." Latios said in a very faint and weak astral voice.

Ash turned around, and gasped when saw the translucent dragon. "L-Latios..." Ash stuttered in a quiet voice as he gazed at the dying Legend. Memories of the Celebi he had met and befriended several months ago in the forest surrounding Arborville as it lay dying, cradled in his arms, flashed through Ash's mind, and he desperately hoped there would be a way to save this Legendary Pokémon too, as there had been with Celebi. "What do I need to do to help him?" he asked, uncertain.

"Latias... she plans to use... your life force... to stop mine... from dying, but-" Latios began to explain weakly, now barely being able to speak fluently as his time edged closer and closer to its end.

"Yes, that's what I want to do!" Latias interrupted adamantly, worried at how weak her brother looked. "Don't worry Ash, I'll do everything.

You just need to lend a bit of your life force so we can stop Latios from dying... that's all he needs. He'll heal afterwards on his own." She smiled at him. "You'll be fine, Ash. I promise." The human nodded, unsure of what to say, but he found himself placing his trust in Latias, all the same. If she believed that he could help save Latios' life by complying with whatever her plan entailed, then Ash would do it, and if any... consequences arose from it, well... he would deal with them, whatever they may be.

Latios gazed at Latias in concern. "You... sure?" he questioned quietly.

Latias locked eyes with her brother confidently. "I'm completely positive. Let's hurry before it's too late." The red dragoness let go of one of Ash's hands and darted forward, grasping Latios' clawed hand and interlocking her claws with his. The instant the two dragon's claws interlocked, the three of them gasped as they were united and fell completely still.

The shine that had constantly been emitted by Latias the whole time seemed to suddenly blast upwards, enveloping the three of them in a bright red sphere of light. Ash winced as a very strange tugging sensation began to overpower his senses. It felt as if something was being pulled out of him, something he had no idea how to even begin describing. As the seconds went by, he began to feel lethargic and drowsy. The trainer's eyes were now fighting a losing battle to stay open as the sensation became even more and more overpowering.

Latios was surprised as the fresh vitality invaded his dying self, instantly spreading across him and filling him with brimming life. He was surprised that a human was capable of holding so much life force within him. Along with Latias' power, it began to slowly restore him. Latios felt heavy as he found himself become more solid. It was as if his body was miraculously regenerating out of the blinding lights. "It's working..." he whispered, and to his further surprise he found his voice had sounded more physical and less spiritual.

The power around them began to swirl, emitting a buzzing hum as it did so. Latias let out a frightened cry as the power suddenly pushed her back, separating her from Latios and Ash and putting her outside the sphere. As she was pushed back, the glow that had been around her ever since she had felt the resolve to save her brother disappeared, leaving her in a normal condition. She let out a drawn-out moan as an intense wave of exhaustion descended upon her body. She looked up at her brother and Ash, worried.

The sight that greeted her was the best thing she could have ever hoped to see. After such a long and anguished night, it was a sight that brought pure joy to her. Her dear brother was there. *Alive*. His body held no trace of translucence. Now it was as solid and corporeal as her own or Ash's. The two were still floating in place, however, the glow surrounding them was fluctuating between both of them and not just from Ash to the dragon, as if it was sharing something between them. Slowly, it began to recede, going from a bright and imposing radiance to nothing but a dim spark. Seconds later, it completely disappeared.

"Latios?" Latias asked tentatively as she flew a bit closer to her brother. "Are you okay?" she questioned, her voice impatient and hopeful.

Latios said nothing in reply. He remained silent and still for several agonizingly long seconds with his eyes closed. After what seemed like an all too long eternity to the young red dragoness, the Eon Dragon finally moved. It was a deeply awaited moment for her, the ultimate proof that he was in fact alive and well. Latios' slow and smooth change in his levitation from a vertical-angled position to a completely horizontal body posture allowed him to glide under Ash easily, letting the now unconscious human rest on his back, bringing a wave of relief that washed over Latias intensely, finally shoving away all the fears and pain the night had brought. He turned to face Latias and slowly opened his blood red eyes. "Yes... Latias, I'm okay," he replied, his lips curling into a soft and loving smile.

Latias didn't recall when she had last felt so much pure happiness and joy to gaze into her brother's eyes and see his smile. She flew towards him, tackling him into a tight hug. "Latos!" she cried out, tears falling down her cheeks again. This time, tears of joy.

Latos responded by wrapping his arms around her and returning the affectionate hug. "Thank you..." he said gratefully. "I have no idea how you pulled all that off... but you saved me."

"I'll never let you go," she sobbed, her voice muffled from how she was pressing her face against his neck. "Never!" she wept loudly, finally letting out all the pent up emotions and pain the long night had brought.

"And I'll make sure to keep my promise of always being there for you," Latos said back lovingly, reaching down to nuzzle his trembling sister. "I'm sorry for not being strong enough to protect you or the Soul Dew from those thieves..." he apologized guiltily.

"You're always going to be my strong big brother," Latias murmured, hugging him tighter. "No need to apologize for anything."

The two dragons pressed tighter and remained joined in the warm and loving sibling embrace, simply enjoying the most precious thing in the world for them... each other. Both twins were startled when the column of light they had been inside the whole time suddenly exploded outwards, illuminating the night like an artificial sun as thousands upon thousands of streaks and sparks of light flew in every possible direction, errantly sailing across the sky. "I still can't believe we made all that," Latos commented as he watched the display of lights. "All that power... came from us..."

Latias raised her head from where she had been emotionally crying against her brother's neck to glance up at the lights soaring across the darkness of the night's sky. "We... really did that..." she murmured, her eyesight blurry from the tears. "We really took the wave down with that..."

For several moments, the sky above was set ablaze from all the fiery energy shooting in every direction. After several seconds of flight, all the light bolts seemed to flicker out of existence. But within the light display, it was then that Latios noted something strange. "Huh?" Latios questioned in confusion when he noted a particularly large cluster of lights begin to spiral over them, whirling at a pace so fast even his eyes had trouble following it, coalescing into a single almost Latios-like shape. Suddenly, like a shooting star, the spiraling cluster of lights dashed in the direction of Alto Mare like a ray of light, heading straight towards the museum. Latios gasped as he watched, confused, as the light flashed its way into the museum building before disappearing with a last blaze of light.

Darkness filled the area once more as all the lights flickered out, giving way for the black night. "What... was that?" Latias asked.

"I don't know..." Latios answered. "We need to head back to the museum. We still have the Soul Dew problem, which we need to think of a way to fix, and *fast*. I don't know what will happen if the Soul Dew remains broken for long."

"Okay..." Latias said quietly, nodding once as she, despite not wanting to do so, parted from the hug with her brother. She looked at the unconscious Ash on her brother's back, and smiled softly. *'Thank you so much...'* she thought fondly.

Latios began to fly in the direction of Alto Mare, however, before he could accelerate properly, the dragon gasped as his levitation faltered slightly. Latios lost several feet of altitude before he could compose himself and regain his flight stability. Latias rapidly flew to him, only to find herself also almost drop from the sky from pure fatigue. With the power that had been surrounding them gone, all their energy depleted and the emotional rollercoaster the night had brought being over, it was then that the twins realized just how exhausted, both physically and mentally, they were. Never before had they felt so tired and beat.

Latios panted heavily. "I'm going to be surprised if we have enough strength left to make it to the city..." he mumbled tiredly, before starting to fly to the city at a more sedate pace.

"Why do I feel so tired?" Latias asked, her eyes almost falling shut.

Latios looked back at the spot they had been, and then glanced at her. "I don't know... it's been a long night, Latias. Let's get back home. We need to rest..." The two dragons kept flying slowly towards the city, letting a comfortable silence fall on them. Latios glanced at Latias and was glad that she seemed to be doing much better in terms of remaining airborne than he was. "How... did you do that?" he asked curiously. "Save me, I mean. How did you do all that? How did you know Ash would survive?"

Latias looked at him and opened her mouth to answer, but then frowned and closed it. After several seconds, she shook her head. "I don't... know. I have no idea. Everything happened so fast and I was so hurt that I don't know what came over me. I didn't want to lose you... it was as if the ideas just... came to me. And I don't know why... but I just knew it'd all work." Latias smiled gently. "I just had hope. I had *faith*. Something in me told me that it would work, that I could save you. All I had to do was believe..." She shook her head. "I don't think I'm making sense, but that's how I would put it..."

"That's... interesting..." Latios commented, tilting his head as he thought over what his sister was saying.

Latias let out a long, drawn out breath. "Yeah... Honestly, I don't know where the strength to do all that or where the ideas of it came from. I simply don't know... they were just *there*... I just trusted my instincts." Latias looked forward, seeing the city coming closer and closer. "Almost... there."

"We can do it, Latias," Latios said encouragingly. "Just a bit more..." He panted. Never in all his life had the Eon Pokémon felt so tired. "Muster all your strength, Latias. It's just the Soul Dew. That's all we

need to do to make this ordeal be over once and for all. Just that. We can do it, Latias."

Latias nodded once, glad to have her dear brother's support. Together, with moral support from each other, the twins very slowly continued the arduous flight to the museum.

...

"What was that?" Misty asked, wincing slightly as she shook her head to try and clear the lingering headache. The very loud blast of sound that had accompanied Latias when she had arrived to take Ash away had left the entire group stunned and sore. It was only after several minutes of painful confusion and disorientation that they began to return to their senses.

"It looked like Latias... but she was... glowing? It looked almost as if she was evolving..." Brock frowned. "What do you two know of that?" he asked as he turned to look at Bianca and Lorenzo.

"I have no clue, Brock," Lorenzo wheezed. "So much has happened tonight that has left me speechless. Latias... she was acting so strange... the power she was giving off... the way she looked..." He shook his head. "I've never seen anything like it."

"Also, why did she kidnap Ash?" Brock wondered. He sighed unhappily when he looked at Pikachu, who was completely still as he looked out towards the ocean, clearly waiting for something that'd clue him in as to his best friend's wellbeing. Brock reached down and petted the electric-type Pokémon gently. Pikachu didn't react to Brock's touch at all, instead he just remained quiet and thoughtful as he gazed at the distance. "I hope he's okay..."

"I hope Latias and Latios are okay too," Bianca said, her shoulders slumping. "Also, what will happen to Alto Mare without a Soul Dew?" She twisted her head and sadly looked towards the museum's entrance. She cringed slightly at the sight of the restrained and locked DMA. She had always wondered whether the ancient

machine's legendary potential was true or not. Now, the answer was crystal clear. "The Soul Dew has been Alto Mare's heart for over a century. It's what's given this place life. Now it's gone."

Lorenzo's gaze lowered, thoughtful. "I've never faced a situation like this. I'm sorry everyone, but I'm overwhelmed. I know as much as you all do this time." The elderly man flinched when the most dreadful, but very realistic, possibility came to his mind. "I think there might be a good chance the water will retreat again. After all, it was the Soul Dew that kept it bound to Alto Mare in the first place. Even if Latias and Latios stopped the tidal wave, the water will just leave again without the Soul Dew keeping it in place here."

"It'll be a never-ending cycle until the twins fail to stop a wave, and then..." Brock said, alarmed. "We... we need to warn the city or something!"

Bianca suddenly gasped loudly, her gaze completely fixed towards the inside of the museum. Everyone turned to look at her, questioningly. "I-Im-impossible..." she stuttered, completely frozen in place.

"What?" Lorenzo asked in concern, walking towards his granddaughter. He put a hand on her shoulder comfortingly. "Are you okay?"

Bianca didn't answer her grandfather. Instead, she remained completely silent as she began to walk into the museum. Once Bianca had reached the base of the DMA, she crouched down. In front of her rested a complete and intact Soul Dew. The precious orb was as lively as ever and its crystalline texture was perfectly smooth, with not a single crack or imperfection anywhere on it. Bianca reached forward and with utmost care she picked up the orb, cupping it with both her hands. A small tear ran down her cheek as she pressed the orb to her chest. Alto Mare would be fine. Bianca let out a soft exhale of surprise when she felt an odd feeling tingling across her body. She looked down at the Soul Dew and noted how it was glowing very dimly, almost as if it was radiating a pleasing

energy to comfort her. "Thanks..." she whispered. The soul inside the orb responded with a positive and gentle pulse of energy.

"How... did it happen?" Lorenzo questioned as he walked besides Bianca, with Misty and Brock following him. "It... repaired itself?" He was completely dumbfounded. "This night just never runs out of surprises."

"At least that solves the problem about the city being in danger..." Brock muttered as he too looked to the repaired orb. "I wonder if Latios and Latias had something to do with it."

It was at that instant that finally the extremely tired and beat Latios and Latias arrived at the museum's courtyard. Pikachu crouched down on all fours and his cheeks began sparkling viciously with electricity as he assumed a battle-ready stance. "What did you do with Ash?" he asked, his tone dead serious.

Latios sighed exhaustedly. "Not now, Pikachu," he replied with a weary voice. "We'll explain as soon as we can, I promise."

"And Ash is fine," Latias added, as her brother didn't answer Pikachu's original question. "I promise that he is fine and well. Don't worry."

Before Pikachu could say anything else, both dragons flew past him and headed towards the museum, knowing that they had to find a solution to the final task left, the Soul Dew. Pikachu stared at the two dragons, the electricity sparkling from his cheeks subsiding for the time being. Pikachu gasped when he saw the unconscious Ash on Latios' back. "Hey!" he shouted as he ran after the two psychic dragons.

Latias entered the museum, letting out a soft squeal of greeting to everyone as she did so. Everyone turned to look at her, including Bianca. With that, the intact Soul Dew in the young artist's hands became perfectly visible to the arriving dragons. Latias gasped in

shock and froze on the spot. It took her several seconds to regain her composure. *'The Soul Dew! It's fixed!'* Latias thought in joy.

Latios stared at the orb in shock as he entered the museum. *'Just... how was it fixed?'* the dragon thought, just as surprised as his sister.

Bianca, Lorenzo, Misty and Brock stared at Latias and Latios with a dumbfounded expression on their faces. "You... spoke..." Bianca said slowly. "Did you guys... talk?" she asked. Latias and Latios wearily looked at them, surprised expressions on their faces.

"That was telepathy," Brock informed them, nodding once. "It's an ability psychic-type Pokémon or those with psychic powers have of speaking into someone else's minds. Not all psychics have it, though, or sometimes they take a while to develop it."

"But Latias didn't use telepathy when she warned us at the Pokémon Center of Annie and Oakley. That'd have been a great time to use telepathy to explain things much easier," Misty commented. She turned to look at Bianca. "Have they used telepathy in the past?" she questioned curiously.

"N-no," Bianca answered, stuttering slightly from the shock of the revelation. "This is as new to me as it is to you. What... and how?" she asked, directing the question towards the two dragons.

Latias blinked slowly. "We were using telepathy?" she asked, this time with her physical Pokémon voice.

"And that we couldn't understand," Lorenzo said, frowning. "Try thinking what you want to tell us, Latias. Don't actually speak it with your mouth."

"Oh..." Latias mumbled weakly. The red Eon Pokémon opened her mouth to speak again, but then let out a soft cry. Even Latios himself let out a wince of exhaustion. With the absolute last worry and problem they had, which was the condition of the Soul Dew, that had kept them up and fighting back exhaustion in an effort to see to its

solution completely resolved, now there was nothing left to keep them from succumbing to exhaustion. Now more than ever, the draining fatigue the long night had piled upon the two young dragons overwhelmed them. Latias felt her eyelids grow heavy and her mind become hazy, even something as basic and fundamental to her as levitation seemed like an excessively tiring chore. Latias finally gave away to the crushing exhaustion and collapsed on the museum's tiles, completely out cold.

Latios looked at Latias worriedly, but knew that he too was about to collapse from the tiredness. He looked at everyone, and with the knowledge that he too could communicate telepathically now, he gathered what little strength he had left to convey a last message to his old and new friends. He closed his eyes, thinking of what he wanted to tell them. Once he had gathered his thoughts, he spoke.

" I want to sincerely thank all of you for your valuable help tonight," Latios began, opening his bright red eyes to gaze at them. *"I'll be as brief as I can, as I won't be awake much longer. What happened out there is that I almost died stopping the wave. Without Latias and Ash's assistance, my death would have been imminent. However, the process of saving me has left Ash very weak. I don't know where Latias and I got the strength to get through this ordeal, but we did. However, we too are very weak."* Latios winced, his vision becoming blurry and his body beginning to sway in the air as controlling the levitation became increasingly harder and harder. *"Don't worry, we're all fine and will live through this, including Ash. But we're going to require some rest to recover from it. I don't know if it'll be a couple of days or a week... Or even more. See to our wellbeing while we're out, please."* Latios gave them a small, weak smile. *"I know you... will have a lot of questions about tonight... when we're awake... now that... I have... telepathy... I... promise that... I'll explain everything... in as much detail as... I... can..."* Latios was barely able to finish his sentence before the dragon finally dropped, hitting the stony floor a bit harshly as he fell unconscious. Ash, still deep in his own slumber, rested on the dragon's back.

Pikachu, Bianca, Brock, Misty and Lorenzo stared at the two fallen dragons, impossibly still as they processed everything the dragon had said. Hundreds of questions ran through their minds. For the first time they had heard Latias and Latios speak. To them it was an open invitation to ask so many questions, especially for Bianca and Lorenzo as they had known the twins the longest.

It was Bianca who was the first one to move a muscle after the young dragon's speech, she gave a startled cry and jump when the Soul Dew in her hands seemed to let out a saddened broadcast of energy.

"Well... what do we do now?" Misty asked awkwardly, breaking the silence that had fallen after Latios had passed out. Pikachu hopped on top of the unconscious dragon and inspected Ash, looking at his best friend with worry.

"... We get out of here," Lorenzo said, making everyone turn to look at him in surprise. "Dawn is coming. And if that huge light and all the commotion didn't wake any citizens up, then morning definitely will." He looked at the fallen dragons. "We have to hide Latios and Latias."

"Where do we take them, though?" Bianca asked, frowning. "And most importantly, how are we going to move them? Latias shouldn't be a problem, she's big but not *that* big... but Latios... he's huge! Have you ever tried lifting Latios? He's very heavy!"

Brock hummed, examining Latios closely. "He seems at least eleven to thirteen feet long... and since he flies by levitation, he's probably not built to be lightweight like most flying-types..." Brock frowned. "It won't be easy."

"I don't think we should take them back to the garden. They're both knocked out. I don't want to leave them completely alone," Bianca alleged. "They need to be under our watch."

"For tonight... I suggest we take them to our house," Lorenzo spoke up. "We'll think about what to do afterwards once we've gotten Latias

and Latios out of the public eye, that's what's most urgent right now. There are many large tourist gondolas tied near the museum's courtyard. We'll transport them on one." Everyone nodded, accepting the elder's plan. "Bianca, take the Soul Dew to the Secret Garden and place it on its pedestal. That jewel needs to be where it belongs. Afterwards, meet with us at our house."

"Okay," Bianca replied instantly. "I'll see you guys later. Take care of Latias and Latios." Bianca turned and walked to the museum's exit at a very speedy pace, carefully holding the Soul Dew in her hands.

Lorenzo watched Bianca leave. Once the young artist was out of sight, he turned to Misty and Brock. "Do either of you have a Pokémon strong enough to carry Latios?" he inquired. "That's the only way we're going to be able to carry him."

Brock frowned, thoughtful. "I could use my Onix, but he'll break something and damage the floor in doing so..."

Misty lowered her gaze, humming in thought. She snapped her fingers when an idea occurred to her. "What about Ash's Bayleef? We have his Pokéballs," Misty suggested. "She's big and strong, and should have enough strength to lift Latios with her Vine Whip."

"Yeah, that's a good choice," Brock agreed. He reached into his vest pockets, where he had stored Ash's Pokéballs prior to heading to the museum. He reached into them, and after trying to remember which one was which, he picked up the correct Pokéball and threw it forward. The dark interior of the museum was briefly lit up in white as the Leaf Pokémon materialized.

Bayleef blinked and looked around, confused as to where Ash was and why his familiar shout whenever he released her was absent. "Ash!" Bayleef squealed worriedly when she saw him unconscious. She rushed towards him and stood up on her hind legs to reach over Latios' back and then shoved Pikachu out of the way. "Ash!? What happened, are you okay!?" Bayleef asked dramatically, nuzzling Ash's face while squealing.

Pikachu sighed. "Bayleef... Ash is fine," he said drily. *'Or at least I think he is...'* Pikachu thought to himself. He knew that saying that Ash might not be alright might make the grass-type be a drama queen about it. Sadly for the Mouse Pokémon, Bayleef didn't pay attention to him.

Brock walked over to them. "Bayleef, can you help us carry them out of here? We really need to get out of here," he requested. "Your Vine Whip will come in handy."

Bayleef turned to look at him, and then nodded happily. From under the leaf necklace that adorned the lower section of her neck, two large, dark green-colored vines with bulbous tips extended, rapidly enlarging to astounding lengths. The two vines coiled around Ash several times, getting a secure grip on his midsection. She then easily lifted the young human. "Where to?" she asked Brock with a grin.

Brock face-palmed. Even if he couldn't understand what Bayleef had said, her actions spoke more than enough. Pikachu just shook his head in amusement. Brock frowned and kneeled down slightly to be eye-level with Bayleef and then began to speak. "Bayleef... Okay. I know you like Ash a lot, but it's not him who we need help with. He's the easiest to carry out of all of them, in fact." Brock pointed to Latios. "It's him who we need help with. Oh, and Latias too."

Bayleef pouted unhappily. Pikachu sighed and tapped the Leaf Pokémon's leg. "Not now, Bayleef. We're being serious. You can cuddle Ash all you want later. We *really* need your help now, please."

Bayleef sighed sadly, but nodded. "Okay," she said, understanding the seriousness of the situation. She handed the unconscious Ash to Brock, who decided to support him on his back in a piggyback style for easier carrying. Bayleef then turned to Latios and extended even more of her Vine Whips and then began curling them around the dragon, drawing many loops around him with both her vines. She braced herself and with all her strength, lifted the large dragon off the museum's tiled floor.

Lorenzo glanced at Misty. "Please, stay here with Latias while I take them to a nearby gondola. Once we've put Latios and Ash in, we'll have your group's Bayleef come back here to take Latias so we can go to my house," he said. Misty nodded and walked over to Latias. Lorenzo walked out of the museum and looked around, seeing a few gondolas here and there. "We need to hurry. Okay... let's go."

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Bianca smiled softly as she came into the Secret Garden, having come through an illusion hiding an entrance to the garden carefully hidden in a deep alleyway. She walked along the cement pathway towards the shrine in the center, where the Soul Dew's pedestal rested.

It was a rather long distance from the entrance to the very large garden's center. Bianca let out a small breath, the long walk from the museum and then to the garden on a mostly sleepless night was starting to rapidly exhaust the young adult. She climbed the few steps until she stood right in front of the Soul Dew's pedestal and looked at the jewel in her hands for a few seconds before extending her arm. She deposited the orb in the center of the pedestal, submerging it completely in the small pool.

"Whoa!" Bianca cried out in surprise, taking several steps back as the Soul Dew released a potent blast of light in every direction, reaching every corner of the massive lush garden. Bianca relaxed when she saw the fountain of the shrine finally come back to life again. Once again, water flowed from Alto Mare's heart into the garden's main pool.

Bianca took a few steps backwards, admiring the peaceful sight of the lively fountain flowing with water once more. She gave a final smile at the sight before turning to head towards the garden's exit. Sunrise was coming, and with most of the night being hectic and sleepless for her, she felt very tired. This time, Bianca took her time, strolling down the garden's walkways and later the sideways lining

Alto Mare's canals at a slow and sedate pace. There was no hurry or reason to run.

The sun was just creeping over the horizon when Bianca reached her and Lorenzo's house. The sky was slowly turning brighter and brighter and more people began to be seen on the streets as morning arrived. Bianca entered the house, closing the door and locking it after she was in. "Hello everyone," Bianca greeted when she saw Misty, Brock and Lorenzo gathered in the living room. "The Soul Dew is back where it belongs," she informed them.

"That's great," Lorenzo said in relief. "Finally everything's over." He gazed at everyone around him, noting their weary expressions. "Thanks a lot for all your help, we couldn't have done it without you both and Ash," Lorenzo said gratefully to Brock and Misty. "It's been a long night, I suggest you all take a nap. You can sleep on the couches here, Bianca can bring you pillows and covers." The elderly man let out a weary sigh. "I'll need to go to the museum soon to see to the DMA's repairs and the arrest of those two thieves." He stood up and began to head upstairs so he could get ready for the tasks he still had to do.

"He's a tough man," Brock commented as he watched Lorenzo leave. "I'm ready to fall asleep and he still has a day ahead of him, and he's a lot older than me."

"That's my grandpa for you," Bianca replied, suppressing a soft chuckle. "Settle down, guys. I'll bring you a couple of pillows from my room." Bianca followed Lorenzo upstairs and headed for her room.

She opened the door and stopped at the sight. *'Ah, so this is where they put them,'* she thought. Latias and Latios were curled up together in the middle of her room, resting over several spread out blankets. The two dragons were huddled up together, with Latias resting under Latios' wing while his neck arched around hers, almost protectively. *'They're so cute like that,'* the young artist thought with a smile. Inwardly, she hoped they would wake up soon, as many questions still lingered in her mind. Plus, the two dragons now

knowing telepathy opened a broad range of possibilities she had never explored before. Bianca frowned when she noticed Ash sleeping on her bed, with Pikachu curled up beside him. *'Oh well...'* she thought. *'I guess I'm sleeping on the couches too.'* Deciding to leave everyone in peace, she gathered the things she needed quietly and then headed downstairs. All the while thinking of Latias and Latios, her two dear and beloved dragon friends...

Author Notes: I hope the updated version of this chapter is much more appealing and well-done than its first version.

Awakenings

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech."

'Thoughts.'

"Telepathy."

Author Notes: Chapter rewritten. Here's Chapter 2. Like Chapter 1, this chapter was heavily modified and rewritten. Enjoy the new version.

Last Revision: April 16th, 2016.

Chapter 2 - Awakenings

The descending sun in the distant horizon cast a stunningly captivating orange afterglow on the sea surrounding the oceanic city of Alto Mare. The skies slowly began to darken and stars twinkled to life far above as night began to fall upon the city. The day had been relatively uneventful and peaceful for the city's general population. The citizens going about their daily business had absolutely no any idea of the dreadful events that had occurred just five nights ago. Ignorance is bliss, as the popular proverb goes. Every single one of the city's inhabitants had been in grave danger, the chances of suffering a horrifying fate would have been very real if the raging tsunami managed to reach and devastate Alto Mare. However, the wave never made it thanks to the unrelenting, selfless, and valiant efforts of the city's dedicated guardians, Latias and Latios.

Alto Mare's population only learned of a few peculiarities from that night, which served as the only possible clues that something unnatural had happened. Most of the city's gondolas and boats had evidence of being moved or misplaced and the strange series of

modifications and possible signs of activation that the Defense Mechanism of Alto Mare presented in the morning were among the most notable. And, of course, the arrest of two Team Rocket operatives at the city's museum. The mysterious events had drawn a lot of public attention. However, the whole truth of what had really happened was only known to a select few.

Inside Bianca and Lorenzo's home, the still unconscious trio consisting of Latios, Latias and Ash were slumbering peacefully in Bianca's room. After the initial night, Bianca and Lorenzo had accommodated her room better so they could be more comfortable while they slept. Like Latios had told them, they would be unconscious for an indefinite amount of time. Bianca spent the nights in their living room couches while Misty and Brock decided to stay at the Pokémon Center every night.

Taking care of the trio had been much easier than Misty and Brock had originally expected. To their surprise, Lorenzo revealed to them that Alto Mare's Nurse Joy was aware of Latias and Latios and had met them before, but was sworn to secrecy over the matter. She was also informed that Lorenzo and Bianca were close friends with the two psychic dragons. However, the Pokémon nurse didn't know where the Secret Garden was. Nurse Joy, after hearing a summarized version of what happened that night, was more than happy to help them over the course of the five long days, keeping tabs on the medical conditions of Latias and Latios, and even Ash when it was necessary.

Latias yawned softly and stretched slightly, consciousness finally returning to the young red dragoness after five long days of deep slumber. She let out a soft grunt as she raised her head and glanced around dazedly. Everything seemed blurry to her, to the point that it took more than a few seconds for everything to start clearing out and make sense. '*Bianca's... room?*' Latias thought, taking a while to process her surroundings as her mind was still feeling half-numbed. As the world around her took shape and logic, she immediately turned to look at Latios' head almost as if she wanted to double-

check that he was still there and alive. She smiled softly at the peaceful visage on her brother's face as he slept deeply. His chest rose and lowered ever so slowly with every single one of his deep breaths. Latias pressed to him, cuddling to his chest while rubbing her head against his neck affectionately. She then stretched forward and planted a kiss on his cheek. "I love you, Latios," she whispered tenderly to the larger dragon before activating her levitation and rising from the floor she and Latios had been put on. Latias frowned when she gazed out the window and saw the darkening sky, realizing that it was almost nightfall.

Latias blinked once in confusion when all her senses started returning to normal after the extended time of inactivity and then looked at her claws. She frowned and then turned around, looking to where she knew Bianca had a mirror. Latias looked at herself in the mirror, finding herself looking like she always had. The dragoness tilted her head in curiosity at all the new sensations she was feeling from all around her and even from within her. She felt... *strange* . That's the best way she could put it. Like something had permanently changed within her in the aftermath of the events that happened in the museum. Just like everything that happened on that night she had no explanation or idea on how to describe what she was feeling, but she was positively sure that it was *there* . The distinct sensation made her feel a lot stronger and more capable now in many ways. The world around her now seemed different, like she could envision and comprehend more of it.

' *Does it... have anything to do with that power we released when stopping the wave?*' Latias wondered in her mind, gazing at the sleeping Latios questioningly. Latias turned around once more and levitated over to the window in Bianca's room, which held a rather good view of the canal below. Latias closed her eyes for a few seconds and took a deep breath, trying to understand all the changes that she had apparently undergone, which made her feel so much different now. She could tell all her senses, especially those of hearing, sight, and smell had improved and that her physical strength felt greater now. However, the biggest change she could

perceive was in her mental senses and prowess. While she knew she was a psychic, in the past she had always experienced great difficulty in using even the most basic of psychic skills. Her psychic perception of the world around her and her empathy were diminutive and weak at best. Now, all of that had changed for the better. Latias could tell that her psychic powers had become much stronger, and more importantly, now she could actually connect to them and use them whenever she wanted to instead of just when she felt scared or in distress.

Latias looked at the people walking along the sidewalk or riding on gondolas across the canal. No doubt they were going back to their homes after their work hours ended or their businesses closed for the night. The dragoness felt bizarre, as if now she wasn't just looking with her eyes but also with her mind. She couldn't just see them with her eyes. She could *feel* they were there. Sense their presences all around her, their thoughts and feelings. And Latias found that her mind could feel those that weren't within her eyesight, like within buildings or on sidewalks nearby that were on the other side of the block. Latias turned around, glancing at the room she was in. *'I wonder, is this why I could suddenly speak telepathically back at the museum?'* she pondered, intrigued by each discovery she was making with every moment. Latias narrowed her eyes, concentrating on a notepad that was on an end-table beside Bianca's bed.

The notepad was surrounded by a faint blue outline and slowly rose into the air, making Latias gasp softly. She exerted more of her newfound mental powers, willing the pages of the notepad to flip. Latias barely suppressed a second gasp of disbelief when the notepad did what her mind willed; flipping through the pages every time she wanted it to happen. "Wow..." Latias whispered, putting the notepad down. "This is so awesome!" she squealed happily, and then put her claws on her mouth when she remembered that everyone else in the room was asleep.

Latias tilted her head as an almost compelling urge to try something new hit her. Almost instinctually, she put her claws together and channeled her psychic strength to them. Latias let out a panicked squeak when a large orb of concentrated psychic powers appeared between her claws. The glowing orb was rapidly coated in reddish-tinted mists and began to grow in size alarmingly. *'Mist Ball!'* Latias thought in fright, the name of the move seeming to pop almost instinctively into her mind. However, deciding it wasn't really the best time to dwell on this particular oddity, she began looking around in a panicked way as to what to do with the attack she had just made. Blowing up Bianca's room accidentally was certainly not in her waking up plans. She paused, trying to calm down. *'Relax, Latias. You made it... you can dissipate it.'* She knew the orb's origin was psychic, so she tried willing it to dispel mentally. To her relief, she found it did exactly what she psychically wanted it to, and began to dispel into nothingness. She let out a breath, the panic leaving her. "That was close," she muttered.

"Not really, you woke me up," Pikachu said, crossing his arms. Latias let out a squeal of surprise and turned to look at the electric-type apprehensively. "If you're done... messing around, if that's what it can be called, care to explain what happened to Ash?" Pikachu asked Latias in a demanding way.

"To be honest, I'd like to know myself," Latias replied, sighing. "I'm as empty of answers as you are, Pikachu." Latias turned to look at her brother. "If you want answers, you'll have to wait until Latios wakes up. He's bound to know more than I do."

Pikachu sighed, not wanting to wait more to know about what had happened to his best friend. "Alright, I guess..." Pikachu mumbled, admitting defeat and that he wouldn't be getting answers out of Latias. "But he's okay, isn't he?" the electric-type asked, concerned. He hoped that Latias could at least answer that.

Latias nodded once. "He's fine, don't worry. Call it faith or instinct, but all the time I knew that he'd be fine, even if I didn't know how or why. Anyway, what matters is that he'll be okay." Latias hummed.

"Did Latios say something about it last night? When I fainted, he was still up."

Pikachu suppressed a chuckle. "Last night?" he asked, shaking his head in amusement.

Latias blinked, gazing out the window to the darkening sky. "Well it's nightfall, so I guess that we slept for the entire day after the ordeal at the museum."

"Latias, you three have been asleep for five days," Pikachu deadpanned. "Everyone was starting to get worried."

Latias winced. "That long, huh?" She frowned as she crossed her arms. "To be fair, it was a very exhausting night for us."

Pikachu nodded. "Yeah, yeah, I get it. You should go and talk to the humans. They've been worried sick about Ash and you two. You should go down and let them know you're up," Pikachu suggested. "I'll stay here with Ash," he added as he turned to look at his sleeping friend.

Latias smiled and flew towards Ash and Pikachu. Lowering herself she gave the sleeping boy a quick hug. "Take care of him," Latias said to Pikachu as she turned and levitated in the direction of the door. Latias paused, and glanced at the closed door. She knew how to open doors physically, but she wanted to try something new. Her eyes glowed a faint shade of blue as she exerted her newfound mental powers, psychically willing the knob to turn and the door to open. Latias grinned in delight when exactly what she wanted happened, the door opened while surrounded in a faint blue outline. "I could definitely get used to this," Latias commented as she flew out the door. Inside the room, Pikachu just shook his head in amusement.

Latias flew across the hallway and then down the stairs. She was glad that Lorenzo's home had been modified decades ago with very wide doors and hallways so she and Latios could fly through them

comfortably, though Latios needed to angle his wings slightly as he was considerably larger than she was. *"Hello!"* Latias greeted cheerfully as she entered the living room, where Lorenzo and Bianca were.

"Oh, Latias!" Bianca cried out joyously. She stood up and walked to the dragoness at a fast pace, wrapping her arms around her neck in a tight hug when she reached the Pokémon. "About time one of you guys woke up, we were worried sick!"

Latias let out a squeal and pressed into Bianca's hug, nuzzling the artist as she did so. *"I'm sorry, nothing I could do about it,"* Latias apologized, smiling slightly.

"You have a cute mental voice," Lorenzo remarked, chuckling slightly. "It sounds a lot like your Pokémon speech, just calmer and less high-pitched. Well, at least we can understand it."

" Thanks," Latias replied, beaming. *"I'm glad to finally be able to talk properly to you guys, instead of scribbling down stuff on notepads."*

"Want some tea, Latias?" Bianca offered, parting from the hug with her best friend. "I made some. I'm sure you must be thirsty," Bianca offered, petting her head softly.

" I'd like the tea," Latias answered gratefully. *"And a big bowl of water 'cause I'm seriously thirsty... and hungry..."* Latias blushed in embarrassment as Lorenzo and Bianca laughed.

"You were unconscious for five days," Lorenzo began, standing up from the couch. "So don't worry. It's expected that you'd feel like this." He walked towards the kitchen.

"How is it that you can speak telepathically now?" Bianca asked curiously. "It seems like you gained it overnight. Literally."

" I don't know," Latias replied, frowning. *"I'm sure you'll probably want explanations out of me right now, but I'm sorry, I'm very*

clueless on everything that happened. I really am." Latias looked down, sighing. *"You'll have to wait for Latios to wake up."*

"Don't worry, Latias," Lorenzo said gently as he came out of the kitchen, holding a large bowl in his hands filled with water. He set the water on the table, which Latias gleefully began to drink from. "We won't ask if you don't feel confident in answering."

"What happened to Annie and Oakley?" Latias asked telepathically as she guzzled down the water, not needing to pause between gulps to speak thanks to her now using her mind to speak.

"They were arrested as soon as we managed to open up the DMA's control center. I had to keep you and Latios, as well as the fact I know you two, a secret from the police and press. But we were able to cook up enough charges to have them spend several long decades in prison. Not the most honest thing, but they deserve every bit of it."

"I wish their fate was up to Latios," Latias said in an almost quiet telepathic tone as she pulled her head out of the now almost empty bowl, water dripping down the corners of her mouth. *"He'd make sure real justice is delivered."*

Lorenzo and Bianca just stared at each other, knowing how harsh Latios could be when dealing with those he perceived as threats or those who wronged him. "I think I'll agree on this one..." Bianca muttered. "Anyway," she said, going over to the dragoness. She wrapped an arm around her neck. "Annie and Oakley aren't our concerns anymore, and will probably rot in jail for a long time. What matters is that you're safe and up." Latias nodded and nuzzled Bianca affectionately. "Hey, that tickles," Bianca said, laughing softly as she playfully pushed Latias away. The dragoness took the initiative and pressed more against Bianca, making the artist laugh.

Lorenzo smiled softly, watching the two girls fondly. "I'm rather curious on why Latios and you can now talk telepathically," he

commented. "But I guess we'll have to wait until Latios gets up to find out."

" *I'm curious about it too,*" Latias admitted, making Lorenzo and Bianca frown. "*I don't know why I can either. Also, I learned some other nice stuff. Like this!*" Her eyes began to glow a dim shade of blue. The teapot on the center of the table, as well as Bianca's cup, were both surrounded in a faint blue outline. Latias then mentally lifted the teapot, refilled Bianca's cup with tea, set the teapot down, and finally lifted the cup up to her face and drank its contents. She winked at the two flabbergasted humans as she set the cup back down on the table. "*Well?*"

"Now *that* was impressive," Bianca said, clapping a few times.

Lorenzo clapped a couple times as well. "Now I'm even more curious," Lorenzo commented, chuckling. "Congratulations, Latias."

" *Thanks,*" Latias responded cheerfully.

Before Lorenzo could say anything else, he yawned. "Well, it's getting late already, and the last few days have been really exhausting for me. I'm going to bed." He stood up and headed for his room, but before going upstairs Lorenzo turned to the Eon Pokémon. "Latias, I'm sorry to ask this of you since you just woke up, but can you go and check the Secret Garden and the Soul Dew?" he requested her.

Latias nodded enthusiastically. "*Sure, no problem.*" She really didn't feel very tired at all, having just woken up from a lengthy slumber.

"So, there's a chance Latios will wake up tomorrow? Then I'll be going to bed myself. I want to wake up fresh and early," Bianca said as she gave Latias a last pet on her head, lightly scratching behind the dragoness' ears tenderly. "Take care and be careful, Latias."

Latias nuzzled her best friend, purring softly as she did so. "*I will.*" She licked Bianca's cheek affectionately and then pulled back.

Bianca gave her a last smile and then began to rearrange the couches for her to sleep on.

Latias looked at Bianca once last time before turning around and flying towards one of the house's frontal windows. She opened it psychically and flew out through it while using her feathers to refract the light around her in unique ways, rendering her invisible to the naked eye. Using her psychic powers she closed the windows behind her and then darted off rapidly, flying at a brisk pace to the nearest entrance to the garden, which was located inside a small canal that she promptly dove into. After a few turns and passing through some illusion-protected waterways, she entered a small tunnel and came out of the sacred garden's central pool.

Latias paused, tilting her neck to the side to look at her wet feathers. She grinned, deciding to try out something else with her newfound psychic powers. Latias created a small pulse of psychic energy and then ran it through her feathers, pushing all the water out of them instantly. In a moment, her feathers had gone from matted wet to almost completely dry with just tiny hints of leftover moisture clinging to certain parts of them. The dragoness laughed merrily. "This rocks," she commented to herself as she hovered over to the shrine. She circled around it and lowered herself to the small stone pedestal submerged in a small pool of water at the center of it, smiling at the Soul Dew resting on it.

"Oh, wow," Latias muttered when she noticed how the Soul Dew felt to her new senses. The orb's power felt incredible. She tilted her head, her empathic feelings picking up small hints of the emotions within the orb. To her, it felt as if the orb was positively responding to her presence. Latias smiled softly and flew a few feet backwards, turning around as she did so. The Eon Dragoness then began flying around the garden to make sure everything was okay and that nothing was out of place, occasionally greeting some of the other Pokémon that frequented the garden, who were rather ecstatic to find the dragoness was okay after five days of absence.

Finding everything was all right, she flew out of the garden through another exit, turning herself invisible as she left the hidden sanctuary. *'It's a little late, but I'm not sleepy...'* Latias frowned, having nothing left to do. She pondered the idea of perhaps testing her newfound powers some more, but figured after a moment's thought that it'd be better to do it once Latios woke up rather than alone. *'I'll just go back home I guess...'* she thought to herself.

Latias flew towards Bianca's home, her speed easily making the flight very fast for the dragoness. As soon as she reached the house, her eyes glowed dimly, psychically manipulating the front window's internal lock to open it easily. She flew into the house and mentally closed and locked the window behind her. Finding the entire place dark and silent, meaning that everyone had gone to bed, Latias looked towards the stairs that lead towards the house's upper floor.

Latias tilted her head curiously, suddenly noticing that the entire house was completely dark. All the lights were off, yet she found she could actually see pretty well inside. She knew she and Latios had good night vision, but it had never been *this* good. In the past, she'd have had some trouble navigating in such darkness, but now, everything seemed rather clear. *'More to attribute to that weird night I guess,'* Latias thought to herself. Still feeling very hungry from the time she was unconscious, she first flew to the house's kitchen to find a quick dinner to ease her hunger. After she had eaten, she flew upstairs, towards Bianca's room.

Latias entered the room silently, finding that Pikachu was also asleep now. The electric-type was curled up, pressed to Ash's side as he peacefully slept. Latias smiled fondly as she gazed at her still sleeping brother. Latias looked at the blankets and sheets he was on, and used her newfound powers to neatly straighten them before laying down on them, curling under her brother's wing. She reached up to his face and licked his cheek affectionately before closing her eyes and resting her head beside his own. Latias didn't feel exhausted, but she had nothing else to do other than try to force

herself to sleep some, and only hoped that she didn't take too long to fall asleep...

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The early chirps of the numerous Pidgey and Murkrow that flocked around the streets made Latias fidget a little, stifling a small yawn as her amber-colored eyes slowly opened up. The night hadn't been the best for her, after her lengthy time unconscious she found it hard to sleep comfortably. Despite the rough night, she didn't feel too tired aside from the morning drowsiness.

Latias' eyes widened when she registered the distinct lack of the familiar touch of her brother's body against her. She raised her neck abruptly and looks around, finding that she was the bed's sole occupant at the moment. She let out a sharp breath when she saw her older brother. "Latios..." she whispered in a drawn out way, as if it was a big revelation to her. The dragon was clearly awake, calmly hovering as he gazed at the city outside the window of Bianca's room.

Latios turned to look at her and smiled softly. "Hello, Latias," he greeted, flying over to her. To Latias, seeing his smile and hearing his voice again felt like a huge wave of comfort wash through her. Latios wrapped his arms around her, pressing his much larger body against her in a tight hug. "I'm back, sis," he crooned gently.

"I'm so glad to have you back..." Latias responded, purring as she rubbed her head against his long neck. "I'm so happy, everything's okay now."

"Yes..." Latios answered, letting out a soft hum as he too pressed against his sister tenderly. "I love you, sis, thank you... for everything."

"You don't need to thank me," Latias whispered, closing her eyes as she enjoyed her brother's affections. "I love you too, Latios. I'd do anything for you," she stated.

Latios let out a long exhale, joyous at the company of the one that mattered to him the most. "And I for you," Latios responded with a loving voice.

"I know you would," Latias replied. "Are you okay?" she questioned, opening one eye to glance up at his face.

Latios parted, hovering back up while maintaining eye contact with her. "I'm okay... I think. I felt..." He frowned, trying to put to words what he was feeling. "I woke up two hours ago, in fact. I was going to wake you up. But I felt so... *strange*... I..."

"Let me guess, you felt all tingly and funny, and could suddenly know lots of stuff all around you and do cool psychic stuff?" Latias said, grinning.

"... That's one way to put it," Latios muttered, rolling his eyes in amusement. "Though, it's much more than just that." He paused. "Wait, how do you know how I feel?"

"I felt the same way when I woke up yesterday night," Latias answered. "And yes, I know it's more, but that's all that I could find a way to explain," she added, shrugging. She levitated off the bed and flew to the window. "I don't know... but, why do we feel like this?" she asked.

"I have some ideas and theories," Latios answered. "But sadly, I don't have a way to prove them or know if they're right or wrong," he said, frowning slightly.

Latias smirked as her eyes glowed, taking hold of one of the pillows on the bed with her mental powers. She hurled the pillow at Latios' head, hitting him with it. "Then hurry up and find a way to prove them," Latias said teasingly. "You're the big, smart and wise one here."

Latios rolled his eyes, chuckling slightly. "Thank you," he said sarcastically, making Latias giggle in amusement.

"Could you two keep it down, I'm trying to sleep," Pikachu grumbled from under a pillow, making both Eon Dragons turn to look at the bed. Suddenly, Pikachu's eyes snapped open. He stood up so fast the pillow he had been under was hurled up a couple of feet. "Hey! Latios!" he shouted, jumping off the bed. "You're awake!" he exclaimed, the drowsiness of just waking up seemingly completely gone from the electric-type. "Good... because you have a lot of explaining to do!" Pikachu glared at him. "Start talking."

Latios chuckled in amusement at Pikachu's tone. "Calm down, Pikachu. Ash is going to be just fine," he said reassuringly. "I can tell you what happened, but I'd have to repeat myself when Bianca, Lorenzo and your friends inevitably ask the same question. So, it'll have to wait until then, alright?" Latios smiled slightly. "The only thing that should matter to you right now is that Ash will be okay."

"Thanks, I guess... Latios," Pikachu said uneasily. "When's Ash waking up?" he asked, concern for his best friend still lingering.

"I don't know," Latios answered. "However, since both Latias and I have now regained consciousness, I'm willing to bet that it won't be much longer before Ash follows suit."

Pikachu smiled slightly and was about to speak again, but before he could do so, he was suddenly interrupted by the door of the room opening and Lorenzo entering the room. "What's all the noise in here? Latias, Pikachu, can you keep it down? It's early," Lorenzo said in annoyance, only to blink when he noticed Latios hovering next to Latias. "Latios, you're awake!" he exclaimed in surprise.

" *Yes, I'm awake,*" Latios said telepathically to Lorenzo. Latios immediately noted how much easier using telepathy was now that he was fully recovered and rested in comparison to the night at the museum. "*And I think I'm fully healed now. At least, I feel perfectly okay.*"

Lorenzo nodded. "That's great, Latios," he commented, his voice clearly showing his relief that both dragons were awake now.

" *It... is,*" Latias mentally crooned happily, nuzzling against her brother's side affectionately.

Lorenzo smiled slightly at the dragoness' affectionate display. "I'll wait for Bianca to wake up and for the kid's friends to arrive before asking things. We're all very curious as to what exactly happened. Anyway, I'll be in my room in the meantime, I still have a long day ahead of me once it's time to leave for work," Lorenzo announced, turning around and exiting the room.

Latos smiled slightly. "I'll go and greet Bianca," he said to his sister as he too made his way out of the room.

"But she's asleep," Latias protested, tilting her head. "I can sense it. And I'm pretty sure you do as well."

"So? I doubt Bianca will care she was asleep when she sees me," Latios answered, chuckling slightly as he wiggled his way through the doorway. It was rather awkward for the slightly older dragon to be indoors. Lorenzo had rebuilt the house decades ago to have larger hallways and doors to better accommodate the two dragon's sizes when they needed to move through the household. But as the years passed and he kept growing larger and larger, it became increasingly difficult to move. Now with a body over twelve feet long and a very large wingspan, he had to angle in uncomfortable positions to fit. Latias giggled in amusement at his moving difficulties as she followed him. With her much smaller size, it wasn't as complicated.

Latos let out a sigh as he pulled out of the hallway and flew out of it, reaching the larger open space of the living room. He smiled when he saw the sleeping Bianca. Latios flew over to the couch she was resting on, arching his neck down to nudge Bianca's face slightly. She twitched slightly, mumbling random things in discomfort. Latios chuckled in amusement and nudged her face again, this time the press of his head was a bit stronger. Bianca turned suddenly, her arm coming up to slap slightly against Latios' face. "Go... away..." Bianca muttered, slightly waking up. One of her eyes opened slightly to see who was harassing her and interrupting her sleep. The only

thing she could see was Latios' head occupying all of her vision. "Latios!" Bianca suddenly shouted, bolting up and wrapping her arms around the dragon's slender neck. "You're awake!"

Latios laughed, pressing his head to Bianca's chest as he did so. "*Yes, I'm awake, Bianca,*" he said. "*And so are you,*" he joked.

"I missed you so much, you really scared me, Latios," Bianca murmured, closing her eyes to try and hold back a stray tear as she lifted the dragon's face with her arms and pressed her face to Latios' cheek. "I'm so happy you're back."

"*I'm happy too,*" Latios said, smiling at his very trusted human friend. He gave her cheek an affectionate lick and then pulled back, slipping out of Bianca's arms. "*Good morning.*" Bianca smiled back, grabbed her pillow, and then smacked Latios' head with it. "*Hey !*" Latios cried out, pulling back. Latias snorted, barely containing a set of giggles.

"That's for waking me up," Bianca informed, lowering herself back to the couch while trying to suppress a yawn.

Latios rolled his eyes. "*I thought someone would be happy to see me up.*"

Bianca chuckled, reaching forward with her arm. She gently began rubbing and scratching along the back of Latios' head, near the base of his ears. The dragon let out a soft purr and pressed to the enjoyable touch. Bianca looked at Latios fondly. "You have no idea how glad I am you're back, you had me worried. I've had nightmares from what you said that night at the museum... was it true?" she asked, letting out a soft sigh as she finished her speech.

"*Sadly... yeah...*" Latios replied slowly. "*Latias and Ash saved me. Had it not been for them I would have perished that night,*" he added, glancing appreciatively to his sister. "But," he began, seeing Bianca's saddened look. "*That's behind us now. I'm fine and that's what matters.*"

Bianca nodded. "Yeah," she agreed.

" *That reminds me, what happened to Annie and Oakley? I have a score to settle with them,*" Latios questioned, his eyes narrowing.

"They were arrested on the morning after the tidal wave, and were sent to mainland Johto for trial and imprisonment two days ago," Bianca informed him.

Latios groaned, shaking his head a couple times. "*Lucky them,*" he murmured mentally . "*I had better ideas than human prisons, but I guess I can't do much about it now.*" He shrugged. "*Anyway, what did we miss?*"

"Other than us suffering to take care of you two and Ash for five days, nothing really," Bianca answered casually. "There's been lots of activity down at the museum due to the big news of the DMA suffering changes overnight and two Team Rocket agents being captured there. It's been keeping Lorenzo very busy lately, but other than that, not much." She looked him at him. "Give me some room, please?"

Latios nodded. "*Okay,*" Latios replied telepathically, increasing his levitation to float back slightly to let the human stand up from the couch.

"I'll go to my room to get some clothes for today. Ash's friends should be arriving in one or two hours," Bianca said, stretching slightly as she pulled the covers off her so she could head over to her room. She was wearing her usual sleeping clothes, a simple shirt and shorts.

Meanwhile, up in Bianca's room, the sleeping boy began to fidget slightly as his mind very slowly regained consciousness. He yawned as his eyes opened, squinting to adjust slightly to the light in the room before curiously looking around. He seemed to be in a mid-sized room with two beds. "Where... am I?" he questioned slowly,

cringing slightly at the sluggish feeling in his body the instant he tried to stand up.

"Ash! You're awake!" Pikachu cried out, hopping on top of the bed as he did so. He jumped on top of Ash's chest and hugged his friend as best as he could with his diminutive body. "You're *finally* awake! You have no idea how much you had me worried! Don't do that again!" Pikachu shouted.

"Pikachu!" Ash exclaimed in joy, glad to be greeted by his best friend. He hugged the Mouse Pokémon back. "Don't do what again? I can't remember anything." Ash blinked in confusion. "What are you talking about?"

Pikachu stood up on his chest and crossed his arms. "You ran off with a Legendary Pokémon and, if what Latios said is true, almost got yourself killed *again* ." Pikachu glared down at him. "That's what I don't want you to do again."

"I almost got myself killed again? How did it happen?" Ash asked, frowning. "I don't remember doing so... I feel like I'm missing something."

"You're always missing it, Ash," Pikachu deadpanned.

"Hey! I don't always miss stuff!" Ash protested.

Pikachu froze when he noted something was *very* off. Ash looked at Pikachu in confusion, and suddenly, it clicked. He too froze. They were talking to each other... with Ash having full understanding of Pikachu's Pokéspeech. "Wait... you... did you just understand me?" Pikachu asked as his eyes widened in shock.

"... I think so," Ash answered slowly, tilting his head in curiosity. "Say something."

"My trainer is clueless on everything but Pokémon battles," Pikachu stated, his eyes narrowing skeptically.

"Hey! I'm not clueless on everything!" Ash snapped.

"Yep, you can understand me now," Pikachu confirmed while nodding. "But... why... or how?" he questioned. Pikachu stared at Ash incredulously. After they'd traveled for a year, Ash had begun to develop a sense of being able to vaguely tell what Pikachu was trying to say, and understand a few select words or speech patterns, but *never* on the level of understanding he was displaying now.

"I have no clue..." Ash answered, deeply intrigued. He could still hear Pikachu's Pokéspeech the same way he had always heard it; a shrill series of vocalizations patterned around his species name. However, unlike before where they made no sense to him other than him repeating his name, now, he could understand and make out the words and sentences from the patterns perfectly. "But this is amazing..." he whispered. Slowly, the joy began to build up inside him. "This is awesome!" he shouted, scooping Pikachu up in his arms, hugging the Mouse Pokémon tightly.

"Yeah, it is!" Pikachu agreed, pressing into his trainer's hug. "Now we can really talk to each other! And not play what are basically very repetitive guessing games."

"This is amazing! I can get to *really* know all my Pokémon now!" Ash grinned. "I can't wait to try this out with the others." The trainer paused, looking around in confusion as he recalled the other matters at hand. "Where am I, by the way?" he asked.

"You're in Bianca's bedroom," Pikachu answered. "It's been five days since we stopped Annie and Oakley. We've all been extremely worried about what happened. Latios' message to us that night was rather disturbing. Latias woke up last night while Latios woke up a few minutes ago."

Ash gasped. "It's been five days!? How!?... and I'm in Bianca's bedroom?" he questioned.

"Yes, you are in my bedroom," Bianca said flatly as she entered the room. "Good morning," she added as she walked over to her closet. "Good to see you're up, too."

"Um, thanks?" Ash said uncertainly.

"You're welcome," Bianca replied after taking out a fresh pair of clothes for herself. She then walked over to a drawer and took out Ash's clothes. "Your friends washed these for you. Take a bath and get ready. They'll get here soon," she informed him as she walked out of the room so she could change in the bathroom.

Ash frowned slightly. It was then that he noticed he was unfamiliar with the plain shirt he was wearing. He took the covers off and again found unfamiliar clothing. "Misty and Brock bought those from Alto Mare's supermarket," Pikachu informed him, sitting down besides Ash on the bed. "Nurse Joy's been helping keep tabs on you too."

Ash sighed. "Ah..." was the only thing he could say. For the next several minutes he tried recalling what happened that night at the museum, and now that he was more awake, he found his memories from that day returning. "How are Latios and Latias?" Ash asked, turning to glance at Pikachu.

"They're fine. Both woke up earlier than you," Pikachu answered. "Hurry, wash up and get dressed. I heard Bianca exiting the bathroom, so go now."

"Okay." Ash sighed and sluggishly began to stand up. After so much time inactive, he felt rather clumsy.

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Ash walked down the main stairs of the house, arriving at the living room. He definitely felt better after a nice bath and putting on his usual clothes. The sluggish and lethargic feelings from the exaggeratedly long time he had spent asleep were now mostly gone. He stopped several steps before reaching the floor and glanced

around, seeing those that were gathered there. "Hello, everyone," he greeted Bianca and the two dragons, smiling afterwards. The boy felt oddly eager when he saw Latias and Latios, both because he was glad to see the dragons were fine and because he was curious as to how their Pokéspeech would sound to him.

" *Hello, Ash,*" Latios greeted, his telepathic voice formal.

"Ash!" Latias received him energetically, quickly flying over to the human. She leaned over the railing and nuzzled him affectionately, making Ash let out a laugh as he petted her back. "I'm happy you're fine too. How are you feeling?" the dragoness questioned him, pulling back slightly to look at the human appraisingly.

"You should use telepathy, Latias. Otherwise he won't understand you," Latios reminded his sister.

"Oh, right," Latias said, letting out a nervous chuckle afterwards as she had completely forgotten about that.

"It won't be needed," Ash interrupted them, before Latias could begin to repeat herself telepathically. "I can understand you too," he stated. It was the same way he felt when he heard Pikachu talking. He still heard the two dragon's squeal-like Pokéspeech, however, he could make coherent words and sentences perfectly out of it.

Latios blinked and looked at him. "Huh? Really?" he asked, perplexed.

"Yeah, really. Latias asked how I was and you told her to use telepathy," Ash said, repeating what the two had said to prove his claims.

Bianca raised an eyebrow, turning from her spot on one of the couches of the living room. Unlike Ash, she hadn't understood what Latias and Latios had said. "That's weird. Can you really understand what they're saying without telepathy?" she questioned.

"Yeah, I can. And it's not just them, I can understand Pikachu too!" Ash answered. "It's pretty cool."

"Really? I don't think you mentioned that ability earlier." Bianca frowned. "Or, did you have it and I missed it?"

Ash shook his head. "No, I didn't have anything like it. I just..." He shrugged. "I just woke up and could suddenly talk Pokémon."

Latios hummed, thoughtful. "That's intriguing..." he commented, inspecting Ash closely. "I wonder if it had anything to do with what happened that night..."

Latias tilted her head when she noticed something peculiar. "Ash, look at me," she requested.

Ash blinked in confusion as he looked at Latias' face. "What for?" he asked, and then fidgeted slightly in discomfort when Latias leaned in, looking directly into his eyes.

"Your eyes have changed," Latias stated. "I know their color well. They were chocolate brown." She leaned in closer, her face very close to Ash's.

Ash pulled back slightly, slightly embarrassed and a little disturbed by her claim. "Uh, what?" he questioned, completely confused.

Pikachu glanced at Ash. "What are you talking about, Latias?"

Latias' eyes glowed, lifting Pikachu from Ash's shoulder. The Electric-type squirmed in discomfort as Latias held him in front of Ash's face, so he could see his face at an even angle. Pikachu stopped struggling when he noticed Ash's eyes. "Huh... true. They're now reddish. Odd." He glared at Latios. "What did you do to him?" he questioned brusquely.

Latios rolled his eyes. "Pikachu, he's *fine*. You can see it as well as I can. I don't have all the answers. And really, isn't this good for you?"

You can talk to him now," the dragon responded, slightly annoyed.

Bianca frowned, looking at the three Pokémon. "Guys, I have no clue what you're all saying," she said.

Latias laughed in amusement. *"Whoops, sorry,"* she apologized. *"We're discussing how Ash has red eyes now. Pretty cool, huh?"* she added, turning her head to smile at Bianca.

Bianca blinked, stood up from the couch, and walked over to Ash. She leaned over the railing of the stairs and looked him in the eyes. "Wow, that's odd. I don't remember paying attention to your eye color before, but I'd think red eyes would be attention-grabbing."

"To be fair, it's a very, very dark red. So from angles and a distance, it almost looks like a normal black color. When you look closely and pay attention, then it looks red," Latias said telepathically.

Ash shifted uncomfortably from all the attention that was being centered on his eyes. Then he blushed in embarrassment when his stomach let out a very loud rumble. "... When's breakfast?" he asked, making everyone laugh.

"Brock and Misty should be here in about half an hour. So, let's make breakfast, Latias," Bianca said, turning around and heading towards the kitchen.

Ash blinked, looking at Latias in surprise. "You know how to cook?" he questioned.

"Yep, I know. I'm not the best, but I can make decent stuff. Now that I have psychic powers, it should be a lot easier than awkwardly using my claws... I'm actually eager to test it out," Latias answered as she turned around and flew towards the kitchen to join Bianca in an excited way.

"I hope food's ready soon... I'm starving!" Ash commented, rubbing his stomach. Pikachu rolled his eyes in amusement as the trainer

finished his walk down the stairs and headed to the table. Latios simply rested on the floor, with his neck and head lying comfortably on the couch, as he patiently waited for his sister and friend to finish making breakfast.

A dozen minutes later, which Ash spent testing out his new powers of understanding Pokéspeech with his best friend Pikachu, Lorenzo came down the stairs. "Oh, hello there, Ash, it's good to see you," the elderly man greeted warmly, smiling slightly.

Ash smiled back. "Thanks, it's good to be up, too," he responded.

Before Lorenzo could reply, a couple of knocks got his attention. "That must be your friends," Lorenzo commented as he walked over to the door. He opened it. Brock and Misty said their greetings as they stepped in.

"Ash!" Misty called out once she noticed the boy. "You're up!" she exclaimed, running up to him to give him a quick hug, only to awkwardly part rapidly. "Don't do that again!" she shouted, hands on her hips. "You really had us worried. Can't we ever meet a Legendary Pokémon without some of us being in mortal danger?"

"Hey, it wasn't my fault," Ash protested, crossing his arms. "Latios needed help."

Brock chuckled in amusement as he stepped in. "Come on, guys, he *just* got up and you're arguing already?" he questioned, voice filled with mirth.

Misty rolled her eyes and stepped back, huffing. "Well, I *am* happy to see he's fine and up."

Brock hummed. "And his eyes changed. That's odd," he commented, inspecting closer.

Ash groaned. "Why is everyone talking about it!" he whined. "It gets annoying."

Misty looked closely, making Ash fidget nervously. "Huh, it's true. They're dark red now. Why are they dark red?" she wondered.

"I don't know," Ash answered. He turned to look at Latios, who was still resting on the floor while idly gazing in the direction of the kitchen. "Do you know, Latios?" he questioned.

"Hmm?" Latios said, turning to look at them. "Sorry, I was spacing out. What did you ask?"

"If you know why my eyes are red," Ash repeated. "And why I can understand Pokémon now."

Brock and Misty looked at him in surprise. "You can understand Pokémon?" Both of them asked at the same time, prompting them to look at each other uneasily.

Ash sweatdropped and scratched the back of his head Mareepishly. "Yeah, I guess I can," he answered.

"*I'm starting to have a good idea as to why,*" Latios replied telepathically so that all humans could understand him. "*It's nothing entirely proven, but they're acceptable theories.*"

"Oh, Latios, good to see you're up as well," Brock said, nodding once.

"*And breakfast is ready!*" Latias called out, her voice sugary sweet as she flew out the kitchen.

Bianca laughed slightly as she followed her friend out. "We have to set the table first, Latias."

Latias grinned. "Oh, let me take care of that." The young dragoness' eyes glowed brightly as she psychically grabbed all the kitchen utensils and plates needed and carried them to the table, setting everything down neatly. She then used her psychic powers to carry the food bowls and trays over to the table, and also a separate set

for her and Latios to the coffee table, where the sofas were. She knew that she and Latios were perhaps too big to be hovering near the table where the humans would be eating.

"Oh, wow! All this stuff looks delicious!" Ash exclaimed happily.
"Thanks, Latias!"

Latias smiled, lightly blushing. "You're welcome." Bianca snickered and shook her head in amusement, making Latias glare at her.

Ash blinked. "Huh, I just remembered. Where are all my Pokémon aside from Pikachu?" he asked curiously, turning to look at Brock and Misty.

"They've been under the care of the Pokémon Center, Ash," Brock answered. "They're fine. We can go pick them up later."

Ash took a seat on the table. Lorenzo, Bianca, Brock and Misty followed his example. Pikachu ate on the floor beside Ash's chair, where Brock had served him a bowl of his favorite Pokéfood. As for Latias and Latios, they used the couches in the living room to rest on while they ate at the coffee table. Since the dining table was close to the couches, they were still within the group's proximity.

Everyone then proceeded to eat. They didn't chat much, instead preferring to eat in peace and silence, though Ash got constant stares for how much and how *fast* he was eating. For more than a couple of instants, everyone wondered if he had woken up with the mindset of a Snorlax.

"Ah, this was amazing," Ash commented, leaning back against his chair while rubbing his stomach after he was finally done. "Latias, Bianca, you two cook amazingly well," he complimented the chefs.

Bianca chuckled and shook her head, slightly amused. "Thanks."

"*I think that Ash's eating capacity is more impressive than their cooking,*" Latios joked, laughing slightly. Bianca nodded in

agreement while Brock and Misty chuckled.

"Want us to help clean the table?" Misty offered, motioning to herself and Brock.

"Nah, it's fine," Bianca said, waving her hand. "You've helped a lot picking up groceries and watching over the twins, so it's okay."

"*No, wait, let me do it!*" Latias cried out excitedly, making everyone turn to look at her just as she rapidly levitated up from the couch she had been resting on. The young dragoness' eyes glowed brightly as she prepared another psychic display for her friends. All of the dirty dishes, pots, and utensils were surrounded in a faint blue outline and then began to levitate off the table. Quickly, the kitchenware flew into the kitchen just as the sound of the sink's faucet opening was heard. At the same time, a washcloth came out of the kitchen and began wiping the table clean. Everyone watched the concentrating dragoness with wonder and awe as she did the chores in a very fast and efficient manner. Before two or three minutes had passed, everyone heard the kitchen's faucet close, signaling she had finished washing the dishes. The washcloth she had used to wipe the table flew on its own back to the kitchen, where she had taken it from. Latias grinned as her eyes stopped glowing. "*Ta-da!*" she said, bowing slightly as if she had just performed for an audience. Everyone couldn't help but clap a few times in response to her cheerful last line.

Bianca laughed. "Show off," she said teasingly. "Leave it to you to flaunt your new powers to us."

Latias pouted, crossing her claws over her chest. "*Well, I'm excited about them.*"

Lorenzo chuckled, petting the dragoness as he passed by. "We know you are, Latias. And it's good you're happy about it."

Bianca also reached forward to lightly pet her, making the delighted Legendary Pokémon giggle softly. "And this is really useful. It'd have

taken me at least twenty minutes to clean the table and do the dishes, and she did it in what? Three minutes? I could get used to that," Bianca commented.

"Just be careful with those powers," Brock warned them. "I've seen over the years how scary psychics can be if one doesn't have a way to defend from them." He shuddered, remembering Sabrina and how badly she had treated them with her psychic might.

" *I'll be careful,*" Latias promised cheerfully. *"Plus, I'm nice."*

Lorenzo glanced at Latios. "Latias has been having fun with her psychic powers. What about you, do you have them too? You haven't said or done anything about it."

" *I have them too. It's just that I don't really have a reason or motive to use them. I'm not a show off like she is, to be using them every other minute,*" Latios responded, glancing slyly at his sister. She rolled her eyes at him.

"So," Bianca began, changing the topic. "Can we get our explanation about what happened that night now, Latios?" she requested, glancing at the blue dragon, who was currently still resting most of his body on the couch.

Latios shrugged, not getting up nor feeling thrilled at the prospect. However, the dragon seemed very thoughtful. *"I don't know..."* he answered.

Bianca rolled her eyes at his unenthusiastic answer and walked over the couch. "Cheer up, Latios. You're up and okay now," she chided, playfully sitting on top of the dragon's neck. "It's all over."

Latios couldn't help but chuckle slightly in amusement and then pulled back, making Bianca slide down onto the couch. *"Yes, I know I'm okay now."* He let out an almost weary-sounding sigh. *"It's just that it was not a pleasant night by any means, and I'm not entirely sure I'll have answers for everything."* He closed his eyes for a few

seconds, taking a deep breath while he gathered his thoughts. *"But I'll definitely try to do my best when I eventually explain it."*

Bianca frowned, gently wrapping her arms around the dragon's neck. "Why do you not want to explain now?" she asked.

"I'll explain later," Latios said kindly, glad for the human girl's presence. He leaned forward and nuzzled her face with his own affectionately, making Bianca let out a soft giggle. He pulled back and levitated. *"The extra time will allow me to gather my thoughts better. Also, I really want to check up on the garden and the Soul Dew. See it for myself again. I feel drawn to it."*

Bianca nodded. "Very well. You and Latias can go to the Secret Garden for a while. In the meantime, I can take Ash and his friends on a tour around Alto Mare. They've been wanting one. And schedule their leave from the city."

Latias frowned. *"They're leaving so soon?"* The dragoness almost sounded sad.

"Well, we're late for the league. And Ash still has one more badge to go," Brock answered. "Now that he's awake, we can leave tomorrow. Or perhaps in two days so we don't rush it. But we're not saying for long," he answered.

"Aw," Latias murmured sadly, making Bianca look at her sympathetically.

Latios tilted his head, observing her very critically for a few seconds. He shook his head once and turned to the group. *"We'll leave now. We'll join you at noon once Lorenzo gets out of work. Then I will explain,"* he said as he levitated towards the door. He gave the group one last glance. *"Thanks a lot, everyone."* He turned invisible, as did Latias. Everyone saw the door open for several seconds and then close again, signaling both dragons had left.

Lorenzo smiled. "Fantastic pair, aren't they?" he questioned.

"Definitely one of a kind," Misty agreed. "So, when are we leaving for our tour?"

"Now," Lorenzo said. "I'm leaving for work, Bianca will take you all." Everyone nodded in agreement and followed the elder's instruction. With that, they all went about with their daily plans while the twins headed to the garden...

Author Note: Chapter ends here. I hope you liked it!

Leaving Home Behind

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech."

'Thoughts.'

"Telepathy."

Author Notes: Chapter rewritten. Here's Chapter 3. Like the previous two chapters, this chapter was heavily modified and rewritten. Enjoy the new version!

Last Revision: April 16th, 2016.

Chapter 3 - Leaving Home Behind

Latias and Latios arrived at the secret garden within the minute of leaving Bianca's house. Having astoundingly fast flight speed, they covered the distance between the two places swiftly while hidden under the cloak of their invisibility. They emerged from the garden's central pool and dried themselves with a small psychic pulse. "Hmm, drying ourselves like this is much more efficient than just waiting until we naturally dried out, that's for sure," Latias commented, turning her long neck sideways to look at her body and inspect her completely dry feathers. She grinned. "And more awesome. I'm loving our new psychic powers, they're so handy!"

"Well, our feathers are water-proof to begin with," Latios pointed out, glancing at her and finding her enthusiasm contagious. "They don't absorb water so they dry quickly, there wasn't *that* much waiting in the first place. But yeah, this is much faster than waiting until the leftover moisture dries up." The male Eon Pokémon hovered towards the Soul Dew's resting place on the pedestal in the garden's shrine, his blood-red eyes darting all over the place as if carefully

inspecting to make sure everything was perfect. The blue dragon stared at the jewel intently for several seconds once he had reached it, almost as if double-checking to make sure it was indeed repaired and in perfect condition. "I'm glad to be here again, it makes me feel at ease," Latios commented, clearly content to be in the secret garden once more.

"Yeah," Latias agreed, floating over to his side. She gave the Soul Dew a quick look before pressing to her brother's side and nuzzling her head on his upper neck, close to his head. "And I'm glad that *you* are okay and everything's over."

Latios smiled softly at her, enjoying the close contact with her. "Seems like I'm not breaking my promise to always be there for you, after all," the dragon whispered, pressing an affectionate kiss to Latias' forehead. "I love you, Latias."

"I know you do, brother. And so do I," Latias replied, letting out a soft, content purr. The two dragons remained like that for several minutes, pressed against each other and enjoying the natural comfort they mutually brought to themselves. After what felt like an eternity to both dragons, Latias pulled back and looked at him. She then fidgeted a little in anxiety. The dragoness was currently having a mental dilemma with herself. What Brock had said about Ash and his friends leaving soon had bothered her greatly, more than she would have expected. She admitted to herself that she was smitten with the young trainer, and now that her brother was okay and she could stop worrying for him, Latias had allowed herself to think more about Ash and what she felt for him. She realized that she didn't want to part ways with him. If Ash couldn't stay because his journey couldn't allow it, then she could leave with him. But she couldn't find the correct way to ask Latios for permission to leave Alto Mare, nor did she actually *want* to leave her brother or her duties behind either. The ideal solution was for both of them to leave with Ash, but that faced the problem of convincing Latios. To the young dragoness, it seemed like an unsolvable dilemma, one she didn't want to face.

Latios easily noticed her unease. He had grown to be very good at telling what his sister was feeling. Due to being orphans since birth, Latios had always taken it upon himself to become a mentor for Latias. Even if some Legendary Pokémon had aided them in their growth, Latios had matured much faster than normal to rapidly become not just Latias' older brother, but at times her parental figure as well. He could tell that something was bothering his sister, but she had trouble finding the way to tell him. "Something bothering you, Latias?" he asked her kindly, a fond smile on his face. "You've looked upset since we left the house."

Latias squealed in surprise, floating a few feet backwards. "Well... I..." Latias paused and left the sentence hanging, clearly telling Latios she was incapable of finishing it.

"Go ahead and tell me. I won't get mad at you for expressing your feelings or your desires to me," Latios said kindly.

Latias gathered all her courage, taking a deep breath to steady herself. "Well, Latios, I wanted to tell you... that..." She paused again, trying to figure out how to word it. "That... I'd like to..." She stopped again and then let out a frustrated groan after several very long seconds had passed, getting second thoughts of what her brother's reaction might be.

Latios shook his head in amusement, he already had a good idea as to what was troubling Latias. "Let me take a wild guess, you don't want to part ways with Ash, and want to go with him and his friends when he leaves the city," the dragon said idly, then smiled at her. "Am I right?"

Latias froze in place, her jaw dropping slightly. *'How... did he... do that...'* she thought to herself, frowned and looked at Latios. "How did you know? I can't be that easy to read..."

"I've raised you since we were children. Every time you have problems, desires, needs, insecurities, fears... you always go to me. I *know* you at heart," Latios replied. "I saw your reaction when Brock

said they had to go, your thoughtful expression all the way here, your hesitation... I can see and read it all."

Latias frowned and lowered her gaze. "I guess I should have known..." she muttered. She waited several seconds before raising her head to look at him in the eye. "I... really do want to leave with him. But, there's a problem. I don't want to leave you alone either..."

"Then we do have a problem. I don't think I want to leave Alto Mare with a bunch of humans we just met a week ago. Mind you, we spent five days of that week asleep," Latios said matter-of-factly. "We have duties to protect the Soul Dew and Alto Mare, and you know that very well, Latias."

"I know, you've *never* trusted humans right away," Latias responded, letting out a weary sigh afterwards. "But, I can feel it. I *know* it. We can trust them. They, especially Ash, saved your life."

"No, *you* saved my life, Latias. Ash was only a means to an end," Latios interjected sharply, narrowing his eyes. "Don't take credit off of you and give it to them, credit you earned and deserve. You were the one who did everything."

"But Ash was a crucial part of it, even if I did most of it. He helped just by being *there*. If he hadn't been there the entire thing could have failed. He feels special to my senses, and I'm sure he does to yours as well. He was vital in saving you. And even so, when has my judge of character ever failed us?" Latias questioned sharply, narrowing her eyes at him and matching his strong gaze. "I've befriended many humans and Pokémon in the past, and not a single time have I been wrong about if they can or can't be trusted. You, in turn, have gotten some friends that caused us problems and were not worth any trust."

Latios nodded slowly. "Yes, I recognize that. As far back as I can remember, you always had a talent for empathy, for being able to sense the intentions and will of others. Indeed, it almost seems natural. However, that doesn't mean you have to leave Alto Mare."

He tilted his head. It was very rare that Latias became so intent on something that she defended it so adamantly, especially if it involved confronting him.

"I'm not taking any rushed decisions on this. This is one of those chances that can't be wasted. I want to go with him, but I don't want to leave you alone either. However, I think I have a solution that can work. Namely, can we go with him?" Latias asked, putting special emphasis on the 'we' part of her question, denoting clearly that she wanted him to come too. "Think about it, Latios. I've never left Alto Mare before, only you have. And every time you come back, you always have all these awesome stories and memories you share to me about how amazing the outside world is. Then there's all the places we've seen on television while we're at Bianca's home. We could explore them, see everywhere with our own eyes. Finally learn what the outside is like with the safety of a group of friends. We can do all of that, *together*."

"What about the Soul Dew and Alto Mare? You're forgetting about that," Latios pointed out. "We're here for a reason, we're protecting this city and that jewel," the dragon added, pointing with a claw to the shining orb.

Latias scoffed. "Alto Mare is extremely peaceful! We both at times have questioned why it needs guardians in the first place," she said drily.

"A few nights ago we got proof that it wasn't a granted safety and that it needs guardians," Latios replied. The larger blue dragon shook his head a couple times as Latias lowered her gaze, acknowledging he had a point. "Do you even understand all that you are suggesting with that simple question?" he asked her in a very serious voice.

"Yes, I do," Latias answered, her voice once again matching Latios' seriousness to the point it surprised her brother. "The Soul Dew and Alto Mare were in danger, yes. But that was the first time in, like, over a decade."

Latios let out a long sigh. "Latias, we can't go. We've been here for over a century. We were assigned to guard this place by other Legendaries. We can't just turn our back on their decision and abandon this place." Latios frowned. "If you *really* want to go... if you *really* feel they can be trusted... I can let you go with them..."

"No," Latias said adamantly, making the male dragon bristle in surprise at her sharp answer. "You could have died a few days ago. I don't want to leave you. I want this for both of us. We have to do this together, as a team. Like we've always done everything."

Latios frowned before heaving a sigh that was equal parts frustration and weariness. "Latias, I'm still not convinced that you fully grasp the implications of what your plan entails-"

"Yes I do!" Latias interjected hotly. "I just told you that I-"

"Don't interrupt me, Latias." Although he didn't raise his voice, Latios' stern admonition, along with the heavy stare he gave, halted Latias' words in their tracks, although her face maintained a look of indignant anger. After waiting a few moments to make sure he wouldn't be interrupted again, Latios continued. "Even if Ash is a really good trainer and person, there are a lot of dangers outside of Alto Mare. You should know, as an empath, not all humans are as pure-hearted and trustworthy as Ash and his friends are. Many humans and trainers will look upon us with greed in their eyes. We are Legendary Pokémon, after all. Besides, remember that Ash is a trainer. Going with him also means Pokéballs and battles, things that we aren't ready for. Yes, going with him has the positive side of exploring the outside world. But it also has the negative side of exposing us to many dangers that living in Alto Mare shields us from." The blue dragon's mind was almost completely made up. He had to say no, but he knew that'd hurt Latias greatly. That was one of the things he hated the most about being her parental figure, at times it also forced him to distress her by saying no.

"We're not cowards," Latias replied firmly. Her brother blinked in disbelief at her, not expecting that reply. It wasn't failing to surprise

him just how adamant Latias was being over the matter, it had been a very long time since she had been so fierce in an argument against him. "Are you really planning to remain in Alto Mare forever? That we'll always have to rely on secrecy and hiding to shield us from the world and danger? Do you believe we're never going to be capable of living in the outside world? We're not like that, Latios. We're not that weak. Maybe in skill or power, but not in spirit." She narrowed her eyes defiantly. "We can move out. Enjoy ourselves. We're Legendary Pokémon, and we recently got some new powers. That's *something* . Plus, traveling with a trainer will allow us to grow stronger and better defend ourselves. And that same trainer can help protect us while we're learning. In time, we'll be strong enough to be the ones doing the protecting. Especially you."

Latios took several seconds to ponder what Latias had just said. "Okay, I admit all you said is true," Latios began to speak, making Latias smirk. "But, there's still the same problem." Latias' face fell. "What about Alto Mare and the Soul Dew? We can't leave the city unprotected and alone."

Latias looked at her brother pleadingly. "Is there anything you can do to leave Alto Mare safe in our absence? Remember, Alto Mare is very peaceful. We have only been needed a few times in the long time we have been living here."

"If I knew how to do that, I would have done it already, Latias," Latios answered drily. "I'm very sorry, Latias, but that's the harsh reality. We can't just go and leave everything here alone."

Latias lowered her gaze, already feeling tears building up in her eyes. She knew that convincing him was impossible. "I..." Before she could finish her sentence, the dragoness was interrupted by a sudden blast of light that emanated from the Soul Dew. The illuminating discharge of radiant light rapidly spread out across the garden, making both dragons warily fly back a few feet and turn to look at the pedestal. Latios' stance was defensive. Latias wiped her tears and looked at Latios. "What was that?" she asked him.

"I don't know..." Latios answered, gazing at the Soul Dew cautiously. He noted that the power the Soul Dew had spread seemed to block out his psychic senses, overloading them completely and making him unable to perceive anything in his surroundings. "The Soul Dew has never done that before." He frowned, confused. The bushes beside them rustled, prompting both dragons to turn to look at them. Out of the rustling bushes an Oddish came out, walking in a rather strange and monotonous way in the direction of the Soul Dew's pedestal. "... An Oddish?" Latios questioned, tilting his head in confusion.

"No, duh," Latias said sarcastically, rolling her eyes.

Latios glared at her. "I know he's an Oddish, I'm curious as to what's he doing. And why he's being so strange." The dragon turned to look at the grass-type. "Hello? Could you please leave us alone, we're in the middle of an important discussion here." The Oddish ignored Latios and kept calmly walking towards the Soul Dew's pedestal. The Dragon growled in annoyance.

The Weed Pokémon reached the edge of the shrine and hopped on top of the Soul Dew's pedestal, making both Latias and Latios stare at it in complete confusion. Slowly, it began to turn around to look at the twins. "Latios, Latios, Latios... you never change, do you?" the grass-type spoke in a very far out and ghostly voice, as if it was carrying a foreign power in it, as if he was possessed. The Oddish's eyes were glowing a faint shade of blue and seemed to stare into the distance in a detached and unconfused manner, a monotone expression on his features. Latias and Latios gasped in shock at the sight. When the power the Soul Dew had blasted began to fade away, both dragons could feel a distinct psychic connection between the jewel and the Oddish.

The psychic connection made both twins stare at the Oddish with disbelief in their eyes as soon as it became apparent to them. "Y-you're..." Latios stuttered, shocked, as realization began to hit him. He shook his head, dumbfounded. "You... are..." His eyes widened. "F-father?"

The Oddish simply nodded once. "Yes... It's me. I'm speaking by mentally controlling this Oddish," the elder Latios spoke calmly.

"Dad!" Latias cried out, darting forward with her arms spread out for a hug.

The Oddish let out a short gasp and jumped sideways to evade Latias' rapid tackle-hug. He landed at the other side of the Soul Dew's pool rather neatly. "I'm very sorry, Latias. I would love to hug you right now, but I can't do that with this body. I only borrowed it. Please don't touch me, any contact might make my already weak mental connection to this Oddish fail."

Latios rapidly flew forward and gently wrapped his arms around Latias' neck and pulled her back, restraining her to prevent her from touching the mind-controlled Oddish, giving him the much needed space. "But... you're here! You're talking to us! After all these years!" Latias was clearly on the verge of breaking down in tears, overjoyed to finally speak to one of her parents.

The Oddish met the gaze of the two young dragons, and reflected in the grass-types small, red and round eyes the twins could see *him*, their father. "As sad as it is, our talk will have to be very brief. The shattering and reforming of the Soul Dew made my power go into disarray for a while, allowing me to break through with it to speak to you two through the mind and body of a local, albeit only once. But that strength will fade fast and settle down within the Jewel again soon. When that happens I'll be left sealed in the Soul Dew, speechless, once more," father Latios spoke softly. "I know you two will have questions you want answered. Questions about your past, about your life story, about who you two are and why you are tasked to be here... explanations that are long overdue, but I can't answer or speak about any of that now. They are things you two are not ready to know just yet, and things like that take too long to explain. In time, truths will be told... but now is not that time. I ask that you trust me until then."

The two young dragons stared at the Oddish, speechless. Latias' gaze was more emotional and upset than Latios' own. Finally, after several seconds of silence while the two dragons absorbed what was spoken, it was the younger dragoness who broke the silence. "But... we want... we *need* to know," Latias whimpered, pained. Her teary eyes reflected the sadness and pain in her voice. Latios frowned and held the distraught dragoness tighter to his chest in a hug. He too felt saddened, but he knew he had to be strong for Latias.

"I'm sorry, Latias. I truly, truly am, but there is just not enough time," the father Latios said unhappily. "All I can offer you and your brother is the assurance that, in due time, you will receive the answers you seek. You will know *everything* . But for now I must tell you what I feel you need to hear before my ability to speak disappears. Please, listen." The mind-controlled Oddish let out a sigh. "I was listening to your argument earlier. Which is why I decided to gather my power to speak up now that I had the brief chance. To put it simply, I want you two to leave with that young trainer you just met."

Latias froze, her eyes widened at what she had just heard. Latios' jaw dropped, flabbergasted. "Bu-what!? What about Alto Mare!? The Soul Dew!?" he questioned, completely stunned. He also found that opposing his father's word was much harder than opposing Latias' word.

The Oddish's neutral expression changed to a gentle smile. "Alto Mare and I will be safe. You don't need to know how, just trust me, my son. The city and I will be okay. Latias... Latios... you have spent far too much time confined to this garden and this city. I feel the time has come for you two to explore the outside world, and this trainer brings the perfect opportunity to do so. Latias is right, Latios. He can be trusted. I can't ask you to instantly trust him like she does, but I ask that you give him a chance. After all, a part of your power resides in him now."

"O-okay," Latios whispered, completely shaken and not knowing what else to say. He was aware that part of his power was still within

Ash from the events of that night, but he hadn't thought about or given it much importance yet.

The Oddish gave a curt nod to him. "Take good care of each other. Have fun and be responsible. Enjoy the outside world that both of you have been denied until today. And use your powers wisely. I trust you'll make sure you two don't get in trouble, Latios." At this, the Oddish looked fixatedly at Latios.

"Our powers..." Latios frowned, curiously glancing down at Latias and remembering all she did to save him. Memories of other events of that night also swept into his mind, like the strange feelings that had spread through him while charging the tidal wave or when he awoke from his slumber.

The Oddish took a deep breath, the father Latios worryingly noting that his time of mentally controlling him was coming to an end. "Yes, your powers. That is the other thing I wanted to tell you two, so that you know what's going on in your bodies and what to think of it. I know you are wondering what exactly happened that night." Through the Oddish, father Latios frowned. "My time talking is almost up, so I'll be brief. You two, as children of Legendaries, are great and powerful beings. Never doubt yourselves. You two have a great heritage, vast power that right now sleeps deep within your souls. Power that in your distress will let you do all that you did and much more. Right now, it's off limits almost completely because neither of you are ready to control nor harness it. But one day you will be able to claim it and become the grand Legendaries you two are meant to be, as well as know the truth behind everything. But now is not the time yet. Please be patient. The day nears, but it's not quite here yet."

"Is that why we can suddenly talk telepathically? Or why we can use our psychic powers or the new attacks? Sense everything around us?" Latios questioned, realization hitting him. "Is that how we stopped the wave? Is that... how Latias and Ash saved me?"

The Oddish smiled, projecting the gesture the elder Latios wanted to express to his children. "Yes. The distress you felt while stopping the wave made that power deep in your soul awaken, slip into your body and let you do everything. That small slip made part of that power now fill you two permanently and be at your disposal. Use it wisely and don't overestimate it, as it's still very small in comparison to what is dormant. In time you will obtain all that is yours. As for where the inspiration to do everything came, all I did that night was project within Latias' mind the idea of how to use Ash to save you, Latios. The rest? It was done all by her. Her instincts, her faith and her love."

Latias eyes widened slowly. "So... that was it..."

The elder Latios, through the Oddish, nodded. "But don't give me all the credit, sweetheart. All I did was give you the idea. The rest of it was all you and your power. Thankfully, Ash was there. His soul is a powerful one, the amount of Aura it has in it is vast. It was strong enough to save Latios' weakened soul. As to why he now bears a part of Latios' power in his own soul, it's because he needed it to stabilize himself. Souls of Legendaries can heal on their own, mortals cannot. Saving Latios would have killed Ash, but by giving him a small part of Latios' power, he was able to gain enough strength to survive the process."

Latios and Latias nodded slowly, understanding everything so far. "And, what-" Latias began, but she was sharply interrupted by her father.

"My mind control on the Oddish is slipping. I can't keep this up much longer." Father Latios smiled once more. "That's all I wanted to say. To tell you what happened that night so you weren't frightened of yourselves and your new powers, and instead embraced them. And to tell you that you were allowed to leave the City, and... one last thing..."

"What?" Latios asked, frowning.

"I want you two to know that I love you. I never intended to abandon you or die. I wish I could have raised you and shown you both my love instead of being trapped here." Slowly, the Oddish began to glow, as father Latios' mental grip began to fade. "I love you, my children. Leave Alto Mare and enjoy life. I am immensely proud of both of you, for being so strong to endure what you had to endure. One day, soon, you will be rewarded for your strength and patience." He glanced at Latios. "You're powerful, Latios. Never doubt your strength. You've done so much more than any Legendary, including myself, could have ever asked for, and for that I'm proud."

"Okay..." Latios said quietly, finally allowing a small tear to run down his cheek. He wished this moment could last longer, he wished he could get all the answers to the questions that had plagued him all his life. He understood, though, why that could not happen. For now, he decided to trust his father's word.

The elder Latios glanced at Latias. "Latias, sweetheart, keep trusting your empathy and your instincts, and most importantly, yourself. You're a lot stronger than you think. I'm very proud of you."

"Thank you, dad," Latias replied, tears slowly trickling down her eyes.

"I love both of you." With those final words the glow around the Oddish stopped and the power that the Soul Dew had been emanating disappeared.

The Oddish looked around, utterly confused as to what was going on. He had been walking through some bushes when he blacked out, and now he found himself strangely standing on the Soul Dew's pedestal with no memories of what had happened or how he got there. He saw the two crying dragons and panicked, thinking he had done something to them. "I didn't do anything! I'm sorry, guardians!" He jumped off the shrine and ran off into the bushes, disappearing.

Latias and Latios, too shaken by their encounter with their father, didn't bother to look or react to the Oddish. They instead preferred to

hold each other in a tight sibling embrace. Comforting each other and slowly going through everything their father spoke of.

It wasn't until what felt like a very long time that they decided to part, looking at each other's faces for mutual comfort. "So... we're leaving?" Latias asked, hopeful.

"Yes, it looks like we are," Latios replied, yielding at last.

Latias slowly grinned. "Awesome. Let's go find our friends to tell them the good news." She frowned. "... There won't be good news for Bianca and Lorenzo, though."

"You go, I'll stay here." Latios glanced at the Soul Dew. "I still owe them an explanation. I need to think of what I have to say, and there's some details I need to take care of before we can leave. I'll meet up with everyone at Bianca's house tonight. Be sure they'll be there because Ash and his friends are leaving tomorrow morning, I imagine."

Latias nodded at him, flew forward and then planted a soft kiss on his cheek. "Love you. You'll see, this is the right decision." She pulled back as Latios smiled and nodded at her. She gave him one last look and then rocketed out of the garden, leaving the blue Dragon alone.

Rapidly, Latias turned herself invisible and flew a couple dozen feet over the rooftops of Alto Mare until she realized there was a problem. Reaching to her brother over their bond, she frowned. "*How am I going to find them again?*" she asked telepathically. "*They could be anywhere.*"

"*This is good practice for our new powers. Try to sense where they are and find them on your own, Father mentioned our powers and so did you. Put them to good use,*" Latios replied in her mind.

Latias sighed. "*I guess I'll have to do it that way then...*" she muttered. Latias closed her eyes and tried to sense where her

friends were. Immediately she cried out in fright and opened her eyes at how overwhelmed her young, immature and untrained senses ached at receiving so much sensory information due to the sheer amount of people nearby. *"What was that?"* she wondered, telepathically reaching out for her brother.

"... I guess I should have expected that," Latios admitted. *"There are too many people in the city. Way too much for us to filter through with our minds without getting a headache. Well, I can feel where Ash is because of the bit of my power that he has. They're going to the south of the city, near the cultural and tourism district, or at least Ash is,"* he telepathically said to her.

"Wow, telepathy is awesome! Now we can talk to each other over long distances," Latias commented, grinning slightly.

"Yeah, it is," Latios responded. *"Just don't push it. We're still fairly new at this,"* he advised.

Latias smiled and nodded. *"Thanks!"* She took off in the direction of the cultural district of the city while being hidden by her invisibility. Less than a minute later thanks to her flight speed she arrived at her destination. Latias hummed, looking around for her human friends. The district was large, with several streets, canals and blocks encompassing it. Her friends could be anywhere. However, sideways by a canal a couple of streets to her left, she could distinctively feel something that very much made her new senses tingle, a power that clearly stood out among all the surrounding humans. Instantly, she knew it was Ash. Instead of going there directly, she glided into an alley down the street and shifted from her invisibility into her illusionary human appearance, taking the form of Bianca, minus the beret. She calmly walked out of the alley, trying not to draw any attention to herself as she casually made her way to her friends.

"And that's how the city became one of the world's most famous tourism hotspots," Bianca finished her story, motioning to a series of murals on the walls of the shops facing the canal.

"I had heard a lot about Alto Mare before," Misty commented. "But I didn't know it'd be this intriguing up close."

" *What's more intriguing? Alto Mare or us ?*" Latias asked merrily, suddenly walking up behind the group.

The group gave a startled leap and turned around to find another Bianca, without a beret, gazing playfully at them. "Oh, it's you... Latias," Bianca said, being sure to whisper out the name to make sure no one near them heard her.

"I'd totally vote for you," Brock commented. "Legendary Pokémon have always been intriguing."

Latias smiled. "*Thank you!*" she replied cheerfully.

"... They're intriguing as long as they're not trying to kill us," Pikachu deadpanned. "First Mew and Mewtwo, who actually succeeded in killing Ash, at least temporarily. Then Articuno, Zapdos and Moltres. Then an illusionary Entei. Then a brainwashed Celebi. Then Latios." The electric-type sighed.

Latias rolled her eyes. "*We had a good cause to put Ash in danger, though,*" she pointed out. "*A very good cause.*"

"I'll agree to that," Ash said instantly.

Pikachu stared at her. "I was talking about the time Latios tried to kill us for following you into the garden. Ash was unarmed and I was half-unconscious. That tackle you stopped was clearly aiming to do serious damage."

"... *Oh. Right. Well, Latios can be, shall we say, overzealous in his protective instincts towards me at times. He tends to attack first and ask questions later whenever he thinks my safety's at risk. I'm sorry that had to happen to you both, but please don't fault him for his actions. It's just the way he is,* " Latias explained haltingly, her eyes downcast.

A moment of awkward silence ensued before Bianca broke it by asking, "So, Latias, may I ask, what you're doing here? And where's Latios?"

Relieved to be free of the previous subject, Latias smiled and said, "*I just figured I'd come and join you guys walking around. And Latios is still back at the Secret Garden. He said he still had some things to think about and take care of.*" She paused and looked at each member of the group. "*How's the tour so far ?*"

"Very good," Misty answered instantly. "I'm loving this city."

Brock nodded in agreement. "Me too. Not only is it gorgeous, it's also rich in history and folklore. We've seen a lot and we haven't even gotten halfway through the tour."

"Yep, which is why we have to continue," Bianca interrupted, turning and walking down the street. "Follow me, there's lots of souvenir shops a few blocks away that have interesting stuff we can window shop."

After passing several blocks, they began to near their destination. As they were walking down the street, Latias noticed something that perked her interest. She paused and looked at the shop. "*Hey, wait guys,*" she said to the group telepathically, tugging Bianca's sleeve.

Bianca turned to look at her. "What's up?" She followed Latias' gaze to the shop and frowned. "It's a small souvenir shop, Latias. There's better ones down the street."

"*Yep, I know. But I'm familiar with this one and I know something they sell that isn't common in other stores, come on!*" Latias grabbed Bianca's arm and pulled her to the store.

Bianca frowned, but allowed the disguised Dragoness to pull her into the store. "Okay, okay, you win, Latias."

Ash and his friends took a step forward, but the instant they did Latias turned around and held out a finger to them. "*Nope! You guys stay here,*" she said telepathically. Latias turned around and dragged Bianca into the store, leaving a bewildered Ash, Misty, Brock and Pikachu to stare at the two apparent twins.

"I wonder what got into Latias," Brock marveled. "It's hard to predict her, especially when she's chipper."

"But she's fun," Misty commented. "Can't deny that."

Ash nodded. "I'm curious as to what she's doing."

"Considering her, it's probably something..." Pikachu paused, then frowned. "No wait, I can't suggest anything." He shrugged.

Ash looked at him for a few seconds, making the electric-type blink back at him. "It's really weird to suddenly go from not understanding you to being able to talk to Pokémon perfectly... all over the course of one day."

"One conscious day. Because technically it was five days for everyone else," Pikachu pointed out, making Ash roll his eyes at him.

Togepi let out a playful trill, wagging her stubby arms energetically. Misty looked down at her and smiled softly at the Pokémon she considered her baby. "What did Togepi say, Ash?" she asked curiously.

"She said she's hungry," Ash replied. "... Or I think she did. Her speech is odd. Maybe because she's a baby Pokémon."

"Yes, it's because of that," Pikachu confirmed. "And yes, you're right on what she said. Mostly."

"Thanks" Misty replied while pulling a small Poke-treat out of her bag, which she fed to the baby Pokémon.

"Great, now I'm a Pokémon translator," Ash grunted. Misty, Brock and Pikachu laughed.

"You can't complain that's a bad thing," Pikachu pointed out. "It's one of the most awesome things there can be."

"Yeah, it is." Ash grinned at the prospect, suddenly remembering he still had yet to try his new powers with the rest of his Pokémon.

It was at that moment that Bianca and Latias came out of the store. Latias was holding on to something that looked like a small box about the size of her hands. "What's that?" Ash asked the disguised Latias, staring at the box she was holding.

" *Not telling!*" Latias replied playfully, winking at him and sticking her tongue out. She then hid the box behind her.

"Aw, come on! Tell me!" Ash demanded eagerly.

" *Nope.*" Latias grinned. "*You'll find out later.*"

"Come, let's continue the trip," Bianca spoke up, walking down the street with Latias besides her, not leaving the group or Ash any more chances to ask what Latias was up to.

As they left, Bianca leaned close to Latias' head. "That's coming out of your savings," she whispered to the illusion-cloaked Dragoness.

Latias just smiled and quietly nodded at her best friend. Latias had a small amount of money that Bianca and Lorenzo recognized as her own, completely generated from the artwork she painted that Bianca and Lorenzo sold to souvenir stores along with Bianca's paintings. Latias didn't entirely care about that, since she didn't really have much use for the money other than situations in which she wanted stuff she saw on markets. Stealing it with the aid of her invisibility was an easy solution, but Latias pointedly stopped that practice. Latias and Bianca had frequent painting and drawing competitions to see who made the best paintings. Bianca was always the winner, but

Latias had gotten really good at art over time, even if Bianca was still vastly superior.

The group continued the tour with Bianca and Latias' guidance. Both of them did their absolute best in explaining and pointing out all the sights, places and landmarks of Alto Mare that they took the group to see. They also made a point to stop at Alto Mare's harbor to book a return trip to Johto mainland for the next day. As hours went by and the morning sun shifted to midday and then to noon, the group decided to end the tour around the city. The sightseeing was indeed great, with Ash's group enjoying every second of it.

However, as they were talking about heading back to the Pokémon Center so Ash and his friends could spend the night, Latias spoke up in their minds. *"Wait, not yet,"* she interrupted them. *"I want you guys to come to Bianca's house."*

"It's late noon, Latias," Brock said, glancing at the Dragoness' illusionary form. "We should head to the Pokémon Center."

"I know, but you can spare a couple more hours. You see, Latios said he wanted you there tonight. He has to explain stuff, remember?" Latias smiled. *"Plus we have some announcements to make."*

"Announcements? About what?" Bianca asked, surprised.

"You'll see, but please come to the house." Latias turned and began walking towards Bianca's home. Bianca frowned, slightly confused. She decided to trust her best friend and trailed after her. Ash and his friends followed both of them.

The walk towards the house was relatively short and uneventful, with a quiet atmosphere predominating around the group. Bianca reached the house and noticed the lights were on, indicating Lorenzo had already gotten home. Bianca opened the door and entered, with everyone following her in.

" *Hello,*" Latios greeted them as they entered, resting his large body on top of one of the large couches in the living room. Lorenzo, who was sitting on another of the couches, nodded at them.

Bianca smiled and petted the large Dragon as she walked by and took a seat on another couch. "Hey, Latios. About time you showed yourself. Why didn't you come on the tour?" she asked.

" *I was busy thinking.*" Latios glanced at everyone else, just as Latias dropped her illusionary form and revealed her real body. "*Grab some chairs and have a seat. We should get this over with before it gets any later. As I promised before fading out, I owe you all an explanation. Please remember I don't know everything, so don't expect perfect answers for all your questions.*"

Everyone nodded, listening intently. Latias smiled at her brother as she flew beside Bianca. "*We're your audience, Latios.*"

Latios looked around at the group, waiting patiently until they settled all around him. Once they were seated, he gazed at all of them, stopping to look at each person seated around him for a couple instants. "*Okay, here we go...*" he muttered. His face turned to Ash, Pikachu, Misty and Brock, who were seated close to each other. "*I'm not sure if all of you are aware, but do you know what the Soul Dew is?*"

Brock nodded once. "Yeah, over the last few days we asked Bianca and Lorenzo to explain some stuff to us, which included them telling us about what the Soul Dew is in detail and what it was for."

Misty grimaced. "And what happens if it's removed from the pedestal."

Pikachu sighed sadly. "And who it contains..." he mumbled.

" *Okay,*" Latios said telepathically. "*Well, all of that is completely true. It does contain our father's soul. It's him who keeps Alto Mare alive,*

while Latias and I protect it. Sadly..." He grimaced sadly, lowering his gaze. "We failed. Annie and Oakley defeated us."

Brock frowned. "But how? You two are Legendary Pokémon. Shouldn't you be... kind of capable of defending yourself from those two women?" he questioned.

Latios shook his head once. *"Not... entirely. You see, we've been orphans ever since we were born. We never knew who our mother was, and our father has been the Soul Dew ever since we were babies."* Latios looked at Latias unhappily, who seemed to be crestfallen at the topic. He decided to continue his tale, knowing she could handle the topic better than before. *"We've never received any kind of training from anyone, really. We're... pretty much blank in terms of combat skill."*

Pikachu grimaced pitifully when he realized what that meant. "Wait, I lost to a newbie? Bleh!" he grunted, crossing his arms in annoyance.

Latios couldn't help but chuckle slightly. *"Yes, you did. Usually, my sister and I rely on our invisibility to throw most opponents off, and then use our great speed to make really powerful and painful Tackles. If things get worse, I would use my claws to increase damage but... that can only get us so far."* The Eon Dragon shook his head slightly. *"It works most of the time, but Annie and Oakley were prepared for us. None of our tricks and abilities surprised them. Also, something that works against Latias and myself in terms of combat capability is the fact that... we're not adults. We're children, or maybe young teens. We're somewhere around that age group."*

At that revelation, everyone except Lorenzo and Bianca seemed extremely surprised. "Huh... I thought you were adults," Misty commented, taken off guard.

Ash blinked, also astonished. "You two are quite big for being so young."

"Yeah, I thought so too. I meant... you are large, very large," Brock said, inspecting the dragon's body with a fixed stare. "Though, your physical voices *do* sound child-like. Very shrill."

" *But anyway,*" Latios began to get everyone's attention again. "*We lost to Annie and Oakley, and you know the rest. They used me and the Soul Dew to activate the DMA. The activation of the DMA hurt me greatly, it felt as if I was being torn apart from the inside out. I did my best to fight it, to resist it, but it was just too hard. Thankfully, my sister freed me. But, even freed, being in the DMA left me very hurt and very weak. I was at the border of collapse,*" he explained, his telepathic voice sour at the still fresh memories of being inside the machine.

"... *And then came the wave,*" Latias said grimly.

" *Yeah, at the worst possible time. Due to Annie breaking the Soul Dew,*" Latios sadly added. "*Once the wave came... that's... where everything gets complicated to explain.*"

" *Very complicated,*" Latias agreed.

"What do you mean by that?" Bianca asked, confused.

"You guys did all that... why is it hard to explain?" Lorenzo asked.

" *Because I don't know how we did it,*" Latios responded. He lowered his gaze, his face reflecting a thoughtful expression. "*Everything happened so fast, like a blur... the distress of knowing the wave would destroy our home and kill everyone... it... it... it made something happen... to me, and to Latias. Like... it made something come to life inside us...*"

Latias nodded, deciding to help Latios out. "*I'm not sure either. But it felt like suddenly we were powerful, like... something had snapped inside us. Something big.*"

" I guess that's one way to put it," Latios said, glancing briefly at Latias. "The thing is... unlike Latias, I was too weak. I had already been vastly weakened and injured by the DMA, so when this happened, it drew out so much power... that it killed me."

"So... what you said before you passed out, it was true," Bianca muttered, looking unhappy.

" Yeah, sadly, it was," Latios confirmed, his face reflecting a dark expression. "But thankfully, Latias was able to use Ash to save me. I'm not sure what happened during then, it all went by so fast. All I can say is that she somehow used his life force to save mine, and the process left a part of my power in him. Which is why his eyes are red and he can understand Pokémon. It's a derivative of my power inside him."

"Well, I'm happy with it," Ash said, grinning. "Talking to my pals is awesome!"

"How did the Soul Dew fix itself?" Lorenzo asked, humming.

" I don't know," Latios replied. "Like I said, I can tell you what happened. But there's many things I don't have an explanation to. We just have to be thankful it fixed itself."

' I wonder if dad had something to do with it...' Latias thought to herself, humming slightly.

"Well, at least it's okay," Brock commented. "That's the important thing. Even if it's a mystery how it fixed itself."

"One more mystery to add to Alto Mare's charm." Bianca smiled.

"One last question, why is it that you can suddenly use telepathy? And psychically move stuff? You two are psychics but I've never seen you do any of that in the past," Lorenzo questioned.

Latios frowned. *"Another thing I don't have an explanation to."* He gave Latias a brief look, making her look at him in a puzzled manner. Both of them knew a more certain answer to that question, thanks to talking with their father. Latias noted Latios wasn't bringing up the fact they talked to their father, but since it was him who was handling the talk, she decided not to speak up. *"If I had to guess, the power we used to take down the wave, that power that... seemingly came out of nowhere, had side-effects on us. I can't give you anything more than that, sorry."*

"Don't worry, Latios," Bianca said soothingly, walking up to the Dragon and gently running her hand down his neck. "We're not going to demand answers you don't have. Even if you can't explain everything, at least we now know what happened."

"And ultimately," Lorenzo began, smiling. "What's important is that you two are fine, the Soul Dew is okay, and Alto Mare is alive. That's what matters."

Ash, Pikachu, Misty and Brock nodded, not having anything to say to the Eon Pokémon, but acknowledging they accepted his explanations. "Well, anything else?" Brock asked.

"*Yeah, there's something else,*" Latias spoke up, flashing the group a cheerful smile.

Latios looked at Lorenzo and Bianca. *"Well, this is going to be a bit hard for both of you. But, the second thing we want to speak of in this little meeting is about a decision both Latias and I have decided to take, after spending a while discussing it,"* he said telepathically to everyone in the room. *"Primarily it was Latias' idea, but in the end we both agreed to it."*

"Huh? What is it?" Bianca asked, frowning. Both she and Lorenzo turned to look at the Dragoness who was floating in the air next to the chair Ash was seated on. She blushed a little at the gazes thrown her way, and was hoping that Bianca and Lorenzo would take her and Latios' choice well.

Latios, knowing that Latias would be too nervous to tell something like that to her friends, decided to speak up and make the announcement. *"Latias and I have decided that we are leaving Alto Mare with Ash and his friends. Both of us,"* Latios told them telepathically. Everyone in the room gasped at this, exchanging looks between the two Dragons and Ash.

'... *They... both... want to come with me?*' Ash thought to himself, utterly shocked by this. Several seconds of silence afterwards, a part of him began dancing in joy when he grasped completely what was going on. Two Legendary Pokémon wanted to go with him on his journey! He was going to be able to realize one of his ultimate dreams and actually train a Legendary Pokémon! Two Legendary Pokémon he had developed a very special connection with in less than a week! Brock and Misty both looked at the dragons in shock. Pikachu exchanged worried glances between Ash and Latios.

Bianca and Lorenzo seemed like they were frozen on the spot and clearly struggling to accept what had just been mentally spoken by Latios. They both clearly seemed like they didn't know what to think, deep confusion and surprise was written all over their shocked expressions. Finally, it was Lorenzo who broke the silence. "Why do you two want to leave the city you've *always* lived in?" he questioned. He had known Latios for a long time. The dragon's trust was hard to earn and his decisions were never surprising, always remaining methodical, precise and logical. How a group of trainers could in such a short time gain enough trust out of him to accept leaving with them left him baffled. To the elder, it was almost inconceivable that he would make such a decision that vastly fell out of what he knew of Latios, even if Latias backed it up. However, the potential lack of guardians brought another concern to his mind. "Who is going to keep the city safe in your absence?" The elderly man frowned at the idea. "Annie and Oakley proved less than a week ago that Alto Mare's safety is not granted."

Bianca's trail of thoughts was very similar to Lorenzo's, although she didn't know Latios from as far back as Lorenzo. She knew he was

never one for drastically large changes. She nodded in agreement to her grandfather's questions. "Alto Mare needs our guardians."

Latios looked at them, an almost saddened expression on him as he gazed at their clearly pained reactions. *"I can't explain how, but trust me. Alto Mare will be safe. Latias and I are already sure of it."*

Lorenzo frowned, still unsure and skeptical. Bianca looked visibly shaken. Never had she imagined something like this could happen. "But, Latias, *why* do you want to leave us?" Bianca asked her best friend, unhappily glancing at her.

Latias felt rather guilty as leaving Alto Mare was still her idea, but she knew she had to be strong and abide by it. She gently flew to Bianca and wrapped her arms around her in a hug, before pulling back to gently nuzzle her. *"It's time we leave, Bianca. We've been here since we were born. That's a long time. It's time we tried something new with our lives,"* Latias responded. *"Ash and his friends are the most trustworthy trainers we have ever met. We'll be safe with them."* Latias smiled lovingly, licking Bianca's cheek affectionately. *"Plus, we'll visit. It's not like it'll take long to get here from wherever we are. We're really fast."*

Bianca frowned slightly. "I'll take your word for it. I expect to hear every now and then from you two." She glared at Ash, Brock and Misty, making the three gulp at the intensity of her glare. "And you three better take *good* care of them." The three trainers in question nodded.

Lorenzo sighed, making Latias and Latios turn to look at him. "Latios, while I respect the decision you and your sister have reached... I'm still worried about Alto Mare's safety. Whatever you said will keep the Soul Dew safe, will it be enough?"

Latios nodded slightly, giving the elder a reassuring gaze. *"It will be enough, trust me. Plus, the Secret Garden is still secret. Only you two know of its exact location, and it's practically impossible to just stumble on it. Also, while I was at the garden earlier today I asked all*

the local Pokémon to help take care of it. They look up to Latias and myself, they'll help."

Lorenzo took a few seconds to consider the dragon's words, some lingering doubts still plaguing his worried mind, but eventually he decided to give in and trust the Eon Pokémon's words. Latios had never done anything that could endanger Alto Mare before, he had no reason to start now. "I just hope that you know what you are doing."

"I know what I'm doing," Latios said comfortingly, giving Lorenzo a gentle smile. *"Is there anything else any of you would like to ask?"* he asked telepathically. *"I hope my explanation, while lacking, sufficed."*

"Not that I have in mind," Lorenzo replied. "Just that I wish you two the best on your new journey."

"So do I," Bianca said kindly.

Misty smiled. "It'll certainly be very interesting to have you and Latias join us on our trip." She paused. "How are you fitting both in your party, Ash?" she asked.

"Actually, I already thought of that," Latios interrupted before Ash could reply. *"Latias will be traveling with no Pokéball. I don't want her captured. Plus, she doesn't like to battle, there's no need. Only I will be captured, so it'll just be me who'll battle."*

Misty frowned, confused. "You don't like to battle, Latias?"

Latias sighed. *"No, I don't. Battling doesn't really interest me. It's a long story, and I'd prefer not to talk about it. All you need to know is that I don't want to battle."*

"Don't worry, we won't push if you don't want to talk about it." Brock hummed, thinking about Latios' for a second. "Yeah, that sounds like a good plan. Latias should be able to easily pass off with our group

without a problem with her invisibility and illusions, so she'll be safe even without a Pokéball. Latios will be the only one we'll openly reveal in battles, then."

"I can't wait to start training and battling with Legendary Pokémon," Ash commented happily.

"First time you get around to getting one. About time after all the ones we've met in the past," Pikachu mused. Ash grinned and lightly rubbed Pikachu's head.

"We'll make sure Ash is a good caretaker, don't worry," Brock said, flashing Lorenzo and Bianca a smile.

Ash rolled his eyes at that comment. "I could handle the task on my own!" he protested.

"No, you can't," Pikachu deadpanned. "Now don't argue, you know it's true."

Bianca looked at the clock hanging from the wall. "It's getting late, you guys should get to the Pokémon Center to sleep. Your ship to the mainland leaves a little past midday tomorrow."

"Yeah, we should get going," Brock agreed. "Thank you both for your hospitality," he said gratefully to Bianca and Lorenzo.

"The stay in Alto Mare was very nice, except for the ordeal with Annie and Oakley... but other than that, this place is very pleasant. Thank you for the tour, Bianca," Misty said gratefully.

"You're welcome," Bianca replied.

"Yeah, Alto Mare is awesome," Ash agreed. "And Latias and Latios are even more awesome, and they're coming with us!" he said excitedly.

"Yes, but don't make too much noise about it," Latios said flatly. *"It'll get annoying."*

Misty laughed. "Don't make them change their minds, Ash," she warned. "Come on, let's go. We have a big day ahead tomorrow."

After exchanging their good byes, everyone parted ways. Bianca and Lorenzo stayed at their home. Ash, Brock and Misty headed towards the Pokémon Center. Latias and Latios flew out and headed towards the garden.

...

Latias and Latios arrived at the Secret Garden after a quick flight. As soon as they were inside, Latias finally decided to let out a loud squeak of joy as she began flying random loops across the garden excitedly, doing happy twirls and hoops every now and then. "We're leaving Alto Mare! And it's with Ash!" She flew towards the Soul Dew's pedestal, stopping right by it to gaze into the pool. "Thanks, dad!" She exclaimed gratefully.

Latios smiled gently at Latias' antics, greatly overjoyed that his sister was so happy. He tilted his head when he felt the Soul Dew emit a small positive pulse of energy. "Yeah," Latios began. "We're leaving Alto Mare. And with your crush," he added teasingly.

Latias immediately blushed hard. "That's not the main reason I want to leave with him and you know it," she said defensively, turning around to face his smug grin.

"I know," Latios replied. "They're trustworthy and all that."

"You're not mad about that... are you?" Latias asked slowly, gazing at him nervously.

"No, I'm not," Latios replied, much to Latias' relief. "Why would I be mad you're crushing on a human? You're free to love whoever you want. However, remember that both of you are young, and he isn't exactly aware of that kind of stuff. So, take it easy, okay?"

Latias nodded. "I will," she promised. "Also, you didn't mention our father talking to us to them."

"There's no need for them to know." Latios turned around and flew over to the branch he and Latias always slept on. "That stays between us."

Latias frowned. "Alright, I thought it'd be cool if they knew..." She flew after him and laid beside him, cuddling up against him.

"Good night, Latias." Latios kissed her on the forehead lovingly. "A big day awaits us tomorrow."

"Good night to you too..." Latias closed her eyes and pressed into him. With the day behind them, both twins drifted off to sleep very fast.

...

The next day...

Ash walked down to the Pokémon Center's lobby, greeted Nurse Joy as he passed by, and then walked to one of the telephones. "I wonder how Professor Oak will take me catching a Legendary Pokémon," Ash commented, sitting down in the phone's chair.

"The league is very close, I imagine he'll be wondering what you're doing with a new Pokémon in these late stages of the competition. I think he'll be pretty excited. It's not every day someone goes and catches a Legendary Pokémon," Misty said. "We'll go ahead and check in to get our travel back to mainland ready, while you call Professor Oak and then go and get Latias and Latios."

Ash nodded at them. "Okay, I'll meet up with you guys at the dock."

"Don't get lost," Brock recommended as he walked after Misty, exiting the Pokémon Center with her.

Ash grumbled in annoyance. "I'm not going to get lost..." he muttered. The phone rang a few times as it dialed the lab. Several seconds later the Professor's image appeared on the screen. "Hi, Professor Oak," Ash greeted enthusiastically.

"Well, hello there, Ash. It's been a while since I last got a call from you. How close are you to the Silver Conference?" Professor Oak asked. He could swear something was different about Ash, maybe the eyes... He shrugged, passing it off as a problem with the video-call.

Ash gave a wide grin, smugly opening his jacket to show the seven badges pinned to the inside. "I'm just one badge short," he answered proudly.

Professor Oak chuckled at the boy's enthusiasm. "You were beaten yet again, Ash. Gary already has all eight badges and is currently training in Mount Silver. I'm warning you, Ash, he's tougher than ever." Oak frowned. "Also, why are you so late? The Silver Conference will start very soon. You need to hurry and get that last badge fast or else you'll fail to qualify."

Ash fumed, clearly more worried about the fact Gary had beaten him than potentially being too late to register for the tournament. "I'll beat Gary in the tournament!" he proclaimed angrily. "What's the point of beating me so many times if he'll fall to me when it matters the most?"

Professor Oak chuckled again. "Well, other than serving as a reminder that you need to hurry up, what's the motive for the call?" he asked.

Ash smirked slowly, perking up at the Pokémon Professor's curiosity. "I want to send a Pokémon back to the lab, since I'm gonna capture a new one soon," the young trainer answered. *'Take that, Gary! I'll have a Legendary Pokémon and you won't have one! I'm so beating you in the Silver Conference!'* he thought to himself.

Professor Oak frowned, surprised by Ash's response. "Ash, you could just capture the new Pokémon and it would be sent here safely. There's no need to open a spot in your party beforehand."

Ash grinned, bursting with joy and overconfidence. "Sorry, Professor, but this is a Pokémon I can't afford to send to the lab. He's staying with me at all times."

Professor Oak blinked, deeply surprised. "... Why? Just what are you capturing, Ash?"

"That's a surprise! You'll have to wait until he shows up in my records to see what I got. Plus, if I told you, you wouldn't believe me anyways," Ash replied. Pikachu nodded in agreement.

"Alright, who are you sending?" Professor Oak asked, still curious on what Ash was going to capture, but he realized it was pointless to try and get the information out of him.

"I'll send Phanpy there for a while. He's still young, I'm sure he'll love your lab's backyard," Ash told him while placing Phanpy's Pokéball in the teleporting device. It buzzed to life and in a few seconds the Pokéball was teleported back to Oak's lab and an empty Pokéball appeared in its place. Ash grabbed and pocketed it. He smiled at the Professor. "Thanks a lot! Take care of Phanpy, have my Pokémon watch out for him. I gotta go now, bye!"

Professor Oak smiled back. "Goodbye to you too, Ash. I'm very much looking forward to seeing what Pokémon you're going to capture. It certainly must be a rare one if you don't want to send it here."

Ash grinned. "Just you wait and see." The young Pokémon trainer then hung up the phone and looked at Pikachu.

"You were mean," Pikachu said, laughing. "You could have just told him instead of leaving him hanging."

Ash laughed softly. "I figured it'd be fun. So, let's go, buddy, time to have a new pair of teammates with us."

"Technically one, but yeah," Pikachu said.

Ash shrugged and left the Pokémon Center, heading out towards the garden to see if Latias and Latios were ready. He didn't remember the way there, but could somehow *feel* where the garden was, like something was guiding him. Ever since saving Latios' life, he had been feeling a lot of strange things, more than just having different-colored eyes or being able to talk to Pokémon. Ash walked to the nearest entrance, being extremely careful to make sure no one was looking at him or following him. After a few minutes of wandering around down seemingly endless alleys, Ash found himself face to face with a dead end. Alto Mare seemed to have a lot of those. He checked to see if there was someone nearby again. Finding no one, Ash confidently walked into the wall... and bumped face first into it. "Aaahh!" He let out a short scream, grabbing his aching head.

Pikachu laughed raucously. "It'd be way too predictable if it was *exactly* on the dead end, Ash. Whoever made the garden knew better than that. Try looking on the walls, but not near the end. The entrance should be somewhere."

"Yeah, that's a good point." Ash took some steps back and began feeling his way through all the walls near the end of the alley. Eventually, he suddenly found himself going through one of them partially. "Gotcha." This time, he walked through the wall easily, disappearing through it.

Ash entered the garden, letting out a short gasp as he marveled at the delightful beauty of the landscape that was immediately presented to him. He started looking around for either of the Eon dragons. "Latias! Latios! Are you here?" he called out lightly. Pikachu saw something out of the corner of his eye and jumped off Ash's shoulder at the perfect instant because Ash was tackled by a rapid red blur not a second later.

"Ash!" Latias squealed happily, wrapping her arms around Ash. The human let out a short scream as the Dragoness' tackle sent both of them crashing into the grass. Latios and Pikachu, who were looking on, exchanged a couple of glances and then laughed slightly. Latias flew backwards a little, letting Ash stand up. She giggled softly. "Hello."

"That was a painful greeting," Ash commented with a grimace, rubbing his back from the crash. "But it was nice, I guess. Hello, by the way."

Latias grinned. "I can't believe we're finally leaving! I've been thinking all morning about all sorts of stuff we'll see on the journey."

"Oh, trust me, our adventures are always filled with interesting stuff," Ash promised.

"... Or really weird stuff, depending on the perspective," Pikachu added. Latias and Latios exchanged awkward glances.

"Anyway," Ash said, waving a hand at Pikachu to brush his comment off. "Are you two ready?" he asked them.

Latias and Latios turned to look at Ash and gave him a nod. "Bianca and Lorenzo should be here in a few minutes to say their goodbyes," Latios informed them.

Latias looked at Ash. "Hey, there's something I want to give you." She turned and flew to a tree, finding a particular hollow within the tree bark. She pushed her arm into it and pulled a small box out.

Latias hovered down until she was in front of Ash and gently handed the box to the young trainer. "That's for you," she stated.

"For me? Hey! I remember this little thing, you bought it yesterday but didn't show us." Ash opened the small ornamented box and let out a surprised gasp when he saw what was inside. It was a necklace with a pair of crystal figurines resembling Latias and Latios

in amazing detail dangling from it. "Wow, thanks a lot, Latias!" Ash exclaimed happily as he grabbed the necklace and hung it around his neck. "It's really pretty."

Pikachu nodded in agreement. "Yeah, it's quite lovely. It'll be a good reminder of our little adventure here in Alto Mare."

Latias gave him a sweet smile. "That's my thank-you gift for everything. Saving my brother's life, saving Alto Mare, being a good friend and allowing us to come with you. All that. Thank you." Latias hovered closer to Ash, smiled tenderly, and leaned forward to his face. She gave him a kiss on the cheek, startling Ash slightly. Pikachu's eyes widened in astonishment, though Latias didn't seem to react or be surprised at all. Latias pulled back and giggled a little at Ash's surprised expression. "That was another thank-you gift. I hope you liked it."

Ash stared at her, having no idea what to reply. He just stood there, looking a little stunned. "Thanks... Latias," he said at last. That was the second time a girl had kissed him, the first being Melody from the Orange Islands.

Pikachu tilted his head. "Adorable," he commented, putting a paw on his chin.

Ash's hand traveled to his new necklace. He blushed a little, making Latias giggle softly. "That was unexpected," he muttered. "But it was nice."

"Thank you," Latias said. "Also, Bianca and Lorenzo are coming." She turned, facing the incoming humans. "*Hello!*" she greeted telepathically, as she knew they couldn't understand her physical speech.

"Hello," Lorenzo said in greeting, just walking into view. "Eager to leave, I see?" he asked.

" Yeah," Latios replied while Latias nodded energetically in agreement *"Not long now,"* he added.

Bianca slowly walked up to Latias and Latios. "Promise that you'll visit every once in a while, okay?"

Latias nodded, grinning. *"Of course we will!"* She hovered forward and wrapped her arms around Bianca, hugging her best friend tightly.

Once Latias had parted, Latios flew forward and gently nuzzled Bianca. *"Don't worry, we'll be okay. I'll make sure of that."* He licked her cheek affectionately. *"We'll miss you a lot."*

"I'll miss you two." Bianca let out a sigh. "I never thought you two would actually leave the city one day. Take care of each other."

"Come to visit soon," Lorenzo reminded the dragons. "And your group too, Ash. You're always welcome here."

"I know I am," Ash said.

" Well, good bye, Bianca. You too, Lorenzo," Latios said telepathically. *"We'll be seeing each other later."*

" Bye, both of you," Latias said, going forward and giving Lorenzo a quick hug as well. *"Keep the garden nice."*

"We will," Bianca said, giving both dragons a sad smile. She was torn between happy and sad. She was sad her friends were leaving, but happy they were finally going to explore and see other places. They were finally going to be free.

Latios turned to Ash. *"Let's get the capturing part over with, are you ready?"*

Ash nodded once. "Yeah, I'm ready." He held the spare Pokéball he had obtained earlier and gently hurled it at Latios. The Pokéball touched him on the neck, making it burst open and envelop the

dragon in a bright red flash, sucking Latios inside the Pokéball. The sphere landed in the grass and shook a couple of times but stayed closed, signaling that Latios had allowed himself to be captured without fighting back or resisting the device.

Ash smiled and picked up Latios' Pokéball. "I can't believe it..." He took a couple of steps back and then did a full spin that ended in an overly dramatic pose while holding the spherical device above him. "Yes! I caught a Latios!" he exclaimed happily.

Latias, Lorenzo and Bianca stared at Ash quietly for several very long and very awkward seconds. "Was that necessary?" Bianca questioned slowly.

Ash nodded adamantly. "Yes, I do it every time I capture a new Pokémon."

"Not sure if Latios can actually be considered a capture, though," Pikachu commented. "He beat me with a tackle, even if he doesn't know how to battle. I don't think we could actually take him down."

"Details," Ash said, shrugging.

Lorenzo checked his watch. "Anyway... you should get going Ash. Your ship leaves soon. Latias will guide you to the docks."

Latias' eyes glowed as she assumed a human illusionary appearance. ' *Goodbye father... thank you,*' she thought happily, sparing the Soul Dew one last glance before turning around and beginning to walk in the direction of the exit. "*Follow me, Ash.*"

Lorenzo and Bianca watched with saddened gazes as Ash, along with their beloved Pokémon friends, departed. Deep down they were happy, they knew the twins would greatly benefit from this. "They'll be okay, you'll see," Lorenzo said quietly. Bianca just nodded.

After walking for a while Ash and Latias arrived at the docks. There were many boats and ships there, the harbor bursting with activity.

They looked for their ship and quickly found it, a medium-sized motorboat. Misty and Brock were already seated inside it. Ash greeted them and hopped in, with Latias and Pikachu following behind him.

Once the scheduled time to depart arrived, the boat's engines roared to life and the vessel darted forward, heading for the Johto mainland. Misty smiled and raised a hand to keep her hair down, feeling the cool ocean breeze caress her face until something caught her gaze. "Ash, what's that?" Misty asked, pointing at Ash's necklace.

Ash took several moments to react, having been too distracted watching the city they had just departed shrink in the distance. "Huh, what?" He followed her gaze and realized what she meant. He gently touched it and smiled fondly, glancing at the disguised Latias. "It's a thank-you gift from her." He remembered the *other* thank-you gift, blushed and quickly looked away towards the ocean. Latias giggled quietly.

Misty and Brock exchanged curious glances, wondering what was going on. "What's up?" Misty asked, oddly suspicious at the two's behavior.

"Nothing!" Ash replied quickly, conveniently glancing away at the beautiful oceanic horizon.

"We-" Misty began to speak, but she was suddenly quieted by a large splash of psychically thrown water right at her face. The water completely avoided Togepi, who was cradled in her arms. "Hey!" Misty exclaimed, glaring at Latias.

Latias' playful eyes stopped glowing. "*Oops,*" she said, pouting cutely at Misty. The former Cerulean City Gym Leader gave a frustrated sigh and just looked away, letting the wind dry her head and hair.

With that, the group kept looking ahead, awaiting their next adventure in Johto, and Ash's next Gym challenge, the last badge

needed to enter the Silver Conference.

Author Notes: Chapter's done!

Journey To Blackthorn City

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech."

'Thoughts.'

"Telepathy."

Author Notes: Chapter rewritten. Here's Chapter 4.

Last Revision: April 16th, 2016.

Chapter 4 - Journey To Blackthorn City

Professor Oak was currently sitting at his desk, impatiently looking at the trainer records on his computer. Every single person that obtained a Pokémon Trainer license was kept record of in a global database which certain Pokémon researchers, professors and league personnel had access to. Professor Oak had such permission by the Pokémon League, along with his qualification to periodically hand out Starter Pokémon to aspiring trainers all across the Kanto region. The call Ash had made to him a few hours ago had kept him deeply intrigued.

'Just what did you catch this time, Ash?' Professor Oak wondered. Ash was extremely different to many of the trainers Professor Oak supervised. While most trainers tended to capture dozens upon dozens of Pokémon, Ash always caught only a very select few that he closely befriended. All of Ash's captures tended to be regular Pokémon which had a special value to him. However, Oak was aware of Ash's tendency to meet up with some of the rarest and most unique Pokémon out there on an extraordinary basis. *'Or, maybe he's just warning me because he's catching something bad or dangerous...'* Professor Oak thought, shuddering as he recalled

Muk. He glanced around warily, hoping the Sludge Pokémon was nowhere nearby. He swore that ever since Ash sent that Pokémon, his clothing expenses had gone through the roof. Putting aside the thoughts of Ash's clingy poison-type, the Pokémon professor signed impatiently. *'Whatever he captured, it must be very rare if he doesn't want it to be sent here,'* he thought to himself.

It had been a few hours since Ash had called him, so even if the registry was having latency in updating itself, he knew the information of his new capture should be appearing on it anytime now. The anxiousness kept Professor Oak on the edge. He stared at Ash's personal record for a few seconds before moving the computer's cursor to select a tab labeled 'Captured Pokémon' at the top of the screen. After clicking on it, the screen went white for a second before loading the new application. The screen now displayed a series of square pictures in rows, each with an image of a Pokémon Ash had captured on it. When Professor Oak moved the cursor on top of any of the images, an info tab at the side displayed various information about the Pokémon, such as its unique registry ID, date and location captured, among many things. They were also ordered from oldest to newest. The last image was of Ash's most recent Pokémon capture, a recently hatched Phanpy which Ash had sent back in place of the new Pokémon he had most definitely captured by now.

Professor Oak couldn't help but smile slightly. Phanpy had greatly enjoyed all the open space suddenly presented to him. His first action on the lab's massive gardens was to curl up and use Rollout to simply roll around to his heart's content. Eventually, the little child had gotten tired and promptly settled down to rest and spend time with Ash's other Pokémon.

Snapping out of his sudden thoughts about Ash's Phanpy, Professor Oak exited the 'Captured Pokémon' tab and then opened it again to refresh it. To his absolute delight, he noticed there was one more square image than the last time he had opened it. Finally it had

updated. ' *Please, don't disappoint me, Ash!*' he thought excitedly to himself.

Professor Oak's eyes focused on the square image, only to widen in amazement for a second due to not recognizing the icon as a Pokémon that was native or common in Kanto or Johto. He moved the computer's cursor over the image, displaying its info tab. With a click, the Pokémon's data was moved to occupy the whole screen. "Oh... my..." Professor Oak whispered in awe, his eyes fixed on the enlarged image of the Pokémon Ash had just captured.

The image of Ash's most recent capture depicted a Pokémon Professor Oak had never seen before, but he had surely heard of it. Its coloration was mainly blue and light grey, with the grey spreading along the neck and upper chest, while the rest of the Pokémon's elegant body was bright blue colored. The Pokémon had solid-looking wings, two small forepaws with three claws on each of them, a red triangle on the chest, and a long and slender neck. On its head the Pokémon had a light grey raindrop-shaped pattern with the rest of it being blue, except for the underside of the head, which was grey. It had pointy ears and bright red eyes. As hard as it was for Professor Oak to believe, he was staring at the image of the Legendary Eon Pokémon, Latios. "How... just... how..." He shook his head once, clearing his thoughts. "How did you get a Latios? That's impossible!" he exclaimed.

Tracey came up from downstairs to check on him, having heard Professor Oak's outburst. "What's wrong, Professor?" he asked, walking up to the startled man.

"More like, what's too *right* to be true," Professor Oak replied, shaking his head a couple times. "This..." He pointed at the screen. "Is what Ash just captured."

Tracey walked beside him, staring intently at the screen. "What is that?" he asked, glancing at Oak after being unable to identify the Pokémon on the screen. Tracey frowned, seeing the surprised look on his mentor's face. "Something tells me you don't know."

"I know what it is," Professor Oak said defensively. "It's just that I can barely believe it. It's almost too good to be true. That, my assistant, is a Latios. A Legendary Pokémon."

Tracey was immediately amazed, his eyes widening slightly. "Ash caught it? Ash caught a Legendary? Not just seen it, but captured it?!"

Oak nodded slowly. "Yes, he did. I know he has a lot of luck for running into Legendary Pokémon all the time, but I never expected he'd actually *capture* one."

Tracey let out a sigh, his eyes reflecting pure awe. "I still remember our time traveling through the Orange Islands. Those few months of traveling with him were more than enough to have us see four Legendary Pokémon. Articuno, Zapdos, Moltres and Lugia. What a wacky adventure that was. I'm kinda jealous Ash got to ride on Lugia, though. I'd have loved to do that. Or maybe ride on Articuno, it was a really beautiful Pokémon," he said, spacing out slightly as he remembered that day's adventure.

Professor Oak chuckled, recalling his own Legendary Pokémon adventure with Ash. One that for Ash had been just a year ago, but for him it had been almost forty years ago, due to Celebi's time traveling powers. "I have my own memories, however, Ash blew it this time... he *captured* it. That's on a whole new level!" Professor Oak focused on the Pokémon's information and stats only to find that most of them were blank, except for types, gender, weight and length.

Tracey followed Oak's stare, rapidly developing the same thoughts as him. "Why is his information so... empty?" Tracey asked curiously. "Shouldn't the Pokémon database be more updated?"

"Nearly no trainers have ever captured a Legendary Pokémon, Tracey. And even less Pokémon Professors have ever gotten to do a detailed study of any of them. Information about them is scarce, like water in a desert," he answered. "And, what tiny information

Pokémon professors have, it's rarely updated in the global database because there is no real need for it. It's not like much people have a Latios or any other Legendary in their teams. At least, even if very blank, we do have some information of him."

"That makes sense, I guess," Tracy said with a frown. He kept scanning the page until something caught his interest. "Look at that type combination," he said, pointing at it on the screen. "That thing's a Psychic and Dragon. That's an odd combination that I don't think I've ever seen before," he commented.

"Yes. This Pokémon has two of the strongest Pokémon Types there are. This Legendary Pokémon could be really strong if trained well," Professor Oak replied while thinking of all the things such a powerful type combo could do. He sighed in exasperation as he looked at all the empty stat and information areas. "I do wish we had more information on it, I'd love to know more," he commented in frustration.

"You said so earlier, maybe another Pokémon Professor has more information about it?" Tracey suggested.

Professor Oak hummed, thinking about Tracey's suggestion. He nodded. "I think I've seen stories of Latios being around both Johto and Hoenn. Since Ash's capture must have been in Johto, I'll call Professor Elm." He walked to the phone and dialed Professor Elm's number. After several seconds, the voice of Professor Elm emanated from the console. "Hello, Johto Regional Pokémon Lab, Professor Elm speaking. May I ask who is calling?"

"Elm, it's Oak. Do you have a minute? I have something rather important I'd like to discuss with you," Oak answered.

"Ah, Professor Oak! Of course, of course, just gimme a sec!" A moment later, the face of Professor Elm flashed up on the console's screen. "It's good to hear from you, sir. It's been quite a while. What's up?" Elm inquired, smiling.

Professor Oak nodded once to acknowledge the greeting and then got straight to the point, knowing that the other professor was probably busy and didn't want to waste time on mundane chit chatting. "Do you remember Ash Ketchum?" he asked. Professor Elm gave a curt nod in reply. "Well, he just captured a Pokémon I have no information on. I need to know more. It's a Latios."

Professor Elm's eyes widened and his jaw dropped in disbelief. Even his glasses fell slightly to the side. He shook his head to regain his composure and quickly fixed his glasses. "Are you serious?" he asked, his voice dubious.

"When have I ever joked on matters like this?" Professor Oak asked flatly.

"Yeah, good point. Well, Oak, if what Ash captured is a Latios, then he's got a very rare Pokémon on his hands now. I admit I don't have much information on it either, to be honest. I do know there's an island city south of Azalea Town called Alto Mare that is rumored to be protected by a Latios and Latias. If you want more information about Latios, I suggest you try calling Alto Mare's main museum or research center. You can also ask Professor Birch, since some of the sightings of Latios outside of Alto Mare have been in the Hoenn region."

"Thank you, Elm, I'll be sure to follow those leads," Professor Oak said.

"Sorry I can't help more, but that's all I can do. Is that all you needed?" Elm asked in a polite tone to make sure everything was clear.

Professor Oak smiled and nodded back at his fellow Pokémon professor. "Yes, Good bye." With that said Oak hung up the phone to let the other professor work. He sighed and glanced back at his personal computer, which was still displaying Ash's new acquisition. It had been a very long time since he had felt this impressed. *'Ash has done it. He has captured a Legendary Pokémon! He has good*

luck finding Legendary Pokémon, but to actually capture one? That's just a whole other story!' Professor Oak paused as he realized something. The Johto League Silver Conference was just around the corner. *'I wonder if Ash will use it in the upcoming Silver Conference. It's a good thing I already have plans to go there and watch my grandson in the tournament. I hope Gary is ready, I feel Latios will be Ash's ace up his sleeve for the tournament.'* Oak reached forward and turned the computer off for now. "I'm going to tend to the Pokémon, Tracey. I'll make those phone calls later. Come."

"Alright." Tracey nodded, barely recovered from the revelation that Ash now had a Legendary on his team. He followed Oak to the backyard.

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Latias looked around as the group arrived at a small port town in the coasts of Johto. Her eyes reflected great interest and curiosity and seemed to dart around to glance at every little thing that moved or caught her interest. The curious dragoness was still disguised as Bianca.

"This is your first time leaving Alto Mare, isn't it?" Brock asked, noting the almost overzealous interest the dragon girl was displaying to everything.

" Yes, *it is,*" Latias replied, never turning to glance at him, instead preferring to look at all the sights as the boat they were on slowly neared the dock. *"Latios has left Alto Mare before a couple times on brief occasions, though. But, I never did."*

Once the boat had docked safely into the town's harbor, they got off and started walking into town. "What do you think?" Ash asked, using his arms to motion at the town all around them.

" *Pretty cool,*" Latias replied, paying odd interest to the dirt roads that divided the streets and houses. *"I'm way too used to Alto Mare's water canals and paved walkways."* She glanced at the distance,

where she could see the forest spanning out beyond the city. *"Can't wait to get to the forest."*

Misty stopped, seeing a Pokémon Center in the distance. "Do we have all the stuff we need before heading out into the forest?" she questioned.

Brock nodded. "Yes, I stocked up on supplies at Alto Mare's Pokémon Center before leaving. We're good to get going if we want to use as much daytime as possible," he responded. Misty nodded back at him and resumed walking. "There's nothing of interesting in this town for us anyways. Plus, we're a bit delayed for the league," Brock added, walking down the town's main road, which lead to the path that went through the forest. The rest of the group followed him.

After walking some considerable distance, the group exited the town and entered the forest. Ash stretched his arms outwards and looked around, enjoying the fact that they were back to traveling through nature. "Ah, lovely green once more," he delightedly commented.

Latias glanced around to make sure they were alone. Once she made sure no other humans were nearby, she decided to drop the illusions hiding her. In a shower of bright blue sparkling lights, Latias' illusion suddenly disappeared and revealed her real body. Latias slowly ascended several feet in the air to get a better glance at the nature surrounding her. She looked around, her improved senses taking in the world around her without missing a single detail. Her eyes slowly glanced all around, looking intently at all the new species of trees and plants she hadn't ever seen before. She took a deep breath, closing her eyes and letting out a soft thrill at the rich, fresh mixture of different scents that she could perceive. Even her ears twitched every so often, listening intently for all the new sounds she could make out. "Wow..." she finally spoke out, opening her eyes.

"I guess she's happy, and curious," Misty commented, slightly amused by the dragoness' reaction to the forest. "Hey, maybe you

should let Latios out, Ash," she suggested to the younger trainer while looking at the bewildered Latias.

"Yeah, he'd probably like the area," Brock agreed. "And watching Latias' first time outside of Alto Mare."

Ash nodded in agreement. "Yeah, sure." He grabbed the corresponding Pokéball from his belt and held it forward. He activated it so that with a flash of light Latios was released from the confines of the mechanical sphere, hovering a few feet in front of the group.

" *Hello,*" Latios greeted everyone before glancing at his sister. "I see you're enjoying yourself," he commented, smiling softly.

Latias snapped out of her trance and squealed happily, playfully tackling Latios with a hug. "Very much so," she replied while pressing to him. "This is much better than what you showed me through sight-sharing." She grinned. "Come!" Before Latios could react, one of Latias paws grabbed his own, interlocking their claws. With a powerful burst of her levitation, she dragged the male dragon into the woods.

The group laughed heartily at the dragoness' action. "She's excited alright," Brock said between chuckles.

Latias giggled merrily as she dragged Latios, who was now levitating mostly on his own, throughout the myriad of trees and bushes, elusively darting across the plant life. While Latias was having no problem, Latios was having issues dodging due to his much larger size. That caused the dragon to occasionally run into bushes or tree branches. "Hey, Latias, wait!" he exclaimed, smashing through a particularly large mesh of vegetation which coated him in leaves.

"Oooh!" Latias cried out in interest, not listening to her brother at all. She released his paw and glided over a grotto she had spotted out the corner of her eye. She looked around as she entered it, marveling at the fresh and natural scent almost reminiscent of the

Secret Garden's, but much different at the same time. She looked at the couple Pokémon that were in the place, species she hadn't seen before. She glanced at all the distinct flower and tree species that she couldn't recognize, marveling at them. "So pretty!" she squealed happily.

"I'm glad you like it this much," Latios said, joining her side while psychically brushing leaves and twigs off his body.

"Yep," Latias said. She spotted a small creek running through the grotto and flew over to it. She dipped her head in it and drank several sips of water. "Hmm, fresh water right from a forest. It tastes *almost* as good as the one in the Secret Garden's pools, and definitely much better than human's potable water. It's like spring water."

Latios chuckled in amusement at Latias' excitement about little details, but understood her feelings as it was her first time out of their hometown. Latios watched as Latias spent several minutes analyzing everything inside the grotto. After a while, Latias began to fly upwards, rapidly flying past the forest's canopy. Latios promptly followed her. With ease, she ascended up to a couple thousand feet, looking at the vast landscape bellow her. "What a view..." she whispered, breathless.

Latios smiled, always close behind her. "Yeah. I felt the same way the first time I left Alto Mare. Though, that time my muse was in an underwater environment. A big coral reef, if I remember."

Latias grinned at him. "And now we're going to have so much time to explore all around while traveling with Ash and his friends." She smirked at him teasingly. "See? This is awesome. And all it took was Dad to knock some sense into you."

Latios chuckled nervously, knowing she was completely right. "So, let's get back to the group, we've done enough sightseeing." He turned and flew in direction of the group, with Latias following after him.

A couple instants later, the dragon twins caught up the group. They had been walking along the road, advancing while both dragons went away. *"Hey, we're back,"* Latios announced, turning invisible. Latias followed his cue and turned invisible as well.

Misty smiled. "Enjoying yourselves?" she questioned.

" *Yeah, we are,*" Latias responded. She looked at the road ahead, noticing it stretching forwards until it disappeared into the trees. *"So, where are we doing?"* she asked curiously.

In an instant, Brock had his Pokémon League book open. "The next Gym is the Blackthorn City Gym, located in, as you guessed, Blackthorn City. I think it's the best gym we can go for at the moment. We're about a nine to ten day walk from there."

Misty peeked into Brock's book. "I've heard of that city, it's the place from where the Johto League champion, Lance, is from."

Brock read on a little further. "Yeah. Well, it's near the Dragon's Den, the entrance to Dragon's Holy Land, and the Gym is known for using powerful Dragon-type Pokémon. The gym leader is Clair, Lance's cousin."

"Dragon-type Gym? That sounds *awesome* !" Ash grinned. "Latios, you're totally fighting there, you're my dragon-type." It was official, Ash was now *really* looking forward to that Gym, since Dragons always promised a good and difficult challenge.

Latios looked nervous, not that anyone could see it. *"Are you sure? I don't have any battle experience other than Annie and Oakley beating me up."*

"Brock said we have more than a week before reaching Blackthorn City. So, we can use that to train you in the basics. We can battle every trainer we run into. Maybe you'll get the needed experience and power to beat her dragons. Or at least put up a good fight. Plus, the gym battle is probably a three versus three, so two of my other

Pokémon will help out in the battle," Ash answered, his tone indicating he was completely set on using Latios to battle Clair.

Latios frowned, not sure about fighting in a gym battle so freshly out of Alto Mare. *"I guess..."*

"Will Ash be on time for the League?" Misty asked, glancing to peek at Brock's book.

Brock hummed, reading the time schedules in the book while doing a quick calculation about it in his mind. "If Ash beats Clair and gets the badge within the next ten days, I think we should be good in terms of time to register for the Silver Conference. Ash will probably be among the very last trainers to register."

"What do you mean with being late for the league?" Ash asked, feeling a bit worried. He had heard Brock mention they were delayed when they arrived at the town, but didn't pay it much attention. Now, he felt the need to question further.

Brock frowned. "The League is going to start very soon, and the registrations will close even sooner. And, you only have seven badges so far. Which means we need to hurry, get the last badge, and race off to register for the League. You need to beat Clair on your first try so we get as much time as possible. If you can't beat her, then we're going to have serious problems. I imagine that most trainers already got their eight badges and are in some part of the process to inscribe for the Silver Conference."

Ash winced, feeling slightly pressured at the prospect of not having any second chances against his first dragon-type gym. *'So, that's why Professor Oak said Gary was done already and had time to train in Mount Silver...'* he thought to himself. "Wait, why are we so late for the league this time? If I recall, after I gathered the Kanto league badges, we had time to travel to difference places and do a few adventures while waiting for the league to start."

Brock hummed. "Probably because we started late. Remember, every league gives nearly a one year time period for trainers to gather the eight badges needed to qualify for it. You started the Kanto region not long after registrations opened. But, after finishing the Kanto League, we didn't start on Johto's tournament right away. You went to the Orange Islands and spent a couple months there doing the Orange League. So, by the time we started the Johto League badge gathering, we were already late. Plus, we also had a lot more distracting adventures between your badge battles than we did at Kanto." Brock tapped his chin with a finger. "From the ones I remember that made us lose a lot of time, there's the trip to Mount Quena, the Whirl Islands, our numerous detours while dealing with the GS Ball, our second trip to Ecruteak City, the week-long travel to Alto Mare, among others."

"I hope we're not *too* late..." Ash mumbled, dreading on the idea of missing the league because they were late for it. It'd feel like a huge downfall on his career as a Pokémon trainer.

Latias, however, perked up and looked at Brock. "*Did you just mention the Whirl Islands?*" she asked, double-checking as she had been distracted with her sightseeing of the passing forest.

"Yeah," Brock responded, wondering why the dragoness was suddenly displaying such interest towards that particular location out of all the ones he mentioned. "We spent a while over there. There was a big water-type Pokémon tournament which Ash and Misty took part in. By the way, Misty eliminated Ash in it." He chuckled slightly, particularly at the glare Ash threw his way. "And, also, we had a really troublesome adventure involving Team Rocket over there."

"*Did you guys happen to meet a young Lugia there? Named Silver?*" Latias asked, the entire group instantly noting a strong interest dripping every psychically spoken word. Latias hummed. "*And other members of his family, too.*" Ash, Brock and Misty nodded once, making Latias grin.

Latios frowned, rippling with anger at the mention of the villainous organization. Connecting the dots, he figured that the troublesome adventure against Team Rocket Brock had mentioned also involved the Lugia. *"They're okay, right?"* he asked, his telepathic voice very concerned.

Ash nodded once. "Yeah, they're okay. We helped save both Lugia from a bunch of Team Rocket bad guys. After we freed them both, they swam off into the ocean."

Latios let out a sigh of relieve. *"That's really good to hear."*

"How did you know about the Lugia there?" Misty asked. "Is that their home or something?"

"No, it's not their home. But, it's like a vacation spot they spend a lot of time in," Latias replied. *"I was just wondering if you also happened to meet them."*

"Yeah, we've met them. We're rather lucky in terms of meeting Legendaries. You two are not the first ones we've run into by a long shot. Anyways, how do you two know about Silver and his mom?" Ash asked curiously. Latias and Latios paused and remained silent, making Ash frown. "Guys?"

"You only saw a couple Lugia, right? No one else?" Latios asked, just to confirm. Ash nodded slowly, clearly confused. *"Out of which one was an older female, and the other was Silver?"* Ash nodded again, further confused. *"Did you say, Silver and his mom?"* Latios asked slowly, just to be sure. *"His mom?"* His telepathic voice sounded funny.

"... Yeah?" Ash scratched his head in confusion. Brock and Misty looked at each other, wondering if the other knew what was going on with Latias and Latios.

The two dragons looked at each other for a few seconds, and then startled the entire group by bursting out laughing loudly. Their

laughter was so hard they lost all concentration over their invisibility, causing them to become visible. Everyone else looked at them awkwardly, as if they had been told a joke only they understood. Both dragons were leaning against each other for support, still laughing away. "What's wrong?" Brock asked, increasingly irritated.

" *Oh, nothing,*" Latios said while wiping a tear with his claw, slowly regaining his senses. *"It's just that the Lugia you met that you apparently think is Silver's mom isn't his mom."*

"She's not?" Ash and Pikachu asked at the same time, causing them to glance at each other awkwardly.

" *Nope. The older, female Lugia is Silver's older sister,*" Latias answered. The entire group let out a gasp. *"Her name is Phaedra."*

"How? We were told she was his mom!" Misty protested, gawking in disbelief. "Luka and Oliver said they were mother and child."

" *You were told wrong, then.*" Latias giggled in amusement. *"Silver and Phaedra are some of our friends,"* she added, grinning.

Brock frowned. "Well, it's not like they protested at us thinking she was his mom. Or told us what the correct family relationship was. I wonder, shouldn't they know telepathy? The Lugia we met before them had telepathy. Despite us being with them for a lengthy amount of time, they never displayed telepathy towards us. And, from what I saw, it must have been the same towards Luka and Oliver."

" *Other Lugia? Was he a really, really large male Lugia?*" Latias asked, just to be sure they hadn't just seen Phaedra again. Brock nodded. She smiled. *"Yeah, that was Phaedra and Silver's father."*

Latios hummed. *"That'd odd. They know telepathy. I'm sure they do. They've used it around us before. Even Silver does. But, if they didn't use it to talk to you or didn't object to you thinking Phaedra was his mom... I don't know why they wouldn't say anything. If we see them again you can ask them."*

"It seems like it's a thing among Legendaries to avoid telepathically talking to humans, then," Brock assumed. "Lugia did, but we've met other psychic-type Legendaries that didn't bother to talk telepathically either." He glanced at Latios for confirmation.

" *I don't know,*" Latios replied, shrugging.

"So, you two know Silver and his sister... How did that happen?" Misty asked curiously.

" *Eh, rather long story,*" Latios answered offhandedly. *"Sorry, we aren't going to start talking all about our life stories, we kind of need to build some trust for that. Let's just say, some parts can get really complicated and personal."*

"Huh? What do you mean, Latios? You don't trust us?" Ash asked, with a hurt expression on his face. "I thought that after Alto Mare, you would know you could trust us."

"We trust you. But, the Legendaries we've met never wanted us to really talk to humans about them. It'd increase risk to them, and to ourselves. They made us promise not to talk extensively about them unless it was for important reasons. Talking about them just to ease idle curiosity, I can't do that. Many Legendary Pokémon have been around all our lives, visiting us at Alto Mare and being there for us when we needed them. Some are precious friends and loved ones for us. I can't break one of the only promises they ever had us make. Once we've become better friends with you all and they are more comfortable with it, I could talk," Latios explained.

Ash nodded slowly. "I guess that's fair enough."

Latias nodded once. *"Yeah, sorry about that, but I'm with him on that one. Until then, we can cope with talking smaller things about then, but understand us if we have to withhold some things. Anyways, yes, we know Silver's entire family. They occasionally dropped by Alto Mare to check up on us, and let Silver play with us,"* Latias said

telepathically. " *Even Phaedra took to play with us sometimes. They are both very fun.*"

"That sounds really cool," Ash said. "And, unlike you two, I'm actually eager to share stories of all my adventures with you. Especially the ones involving other Legendary Pokémon."

"... And near deaths," Pikachu added sourly, making Ash wince slightly.

"I wouldn't mind," Brock admitted. "It would be a fantastic way to warm up to each other."

" *And, I'm eager to hear them,*" Latias replied, grinning.

Brock chuckled. "Now... where to begin..."

The group kept walking along the road, chatting amongst themselves as they recounted some of their adventures to Latias and Latios. After several tales, the group fell silent, not wanting to overload the twins with too much tales on a single day. They figured it would be better to gradually space the telling of their adventures so they always had something to talk about on their lengthy journey.

Everything was peaceful and quiet, so much that Latias frowned in discomfort, feeling bored. Being rather hyperactive at times, she found the silence almost annoying. Latias looked around, seeing if she could find something she could perform a decent prank on. In her looking around she spotted a Spinarak hanging from a tree branch that was several dozen feet down the road. Latias smirked and flew to the small bug-type Pokémon. Latios blinked as he looked up at her, being the only one of the group capable of sensing the invisible dragoness' move. When Misty was passing just underneath the branch, Latias cut the web string that held the Spinarak to it, resulting in the Pokémon falling right into Misty's face.

She gave the most terrified screech anyone had ever heard and took off running down the road so fast that it only took her moments to

disappear down the road. After several seconds passed, Latias burst out laughing, causing her to become visible again from the loss of concentration to hold up her illusion. Pikachu, Ash and Brock sweat-dropped at the scene. Latios rolled his eyes. Latias was getting scolded again, and no cute look would save her this time.

It took the group an awkwardly long time to catch up to Misty. The second they reached her she started sulking, muttering incoherently about how bug-type Pokémon were out to get her. After calming the desperate girl down, the group were able to resume their lengthy travel. A few more hours of walking later, during which Misty had been staring at the trees watching out for any troublesome bugs, they decided to stop and eat at a small clearing to the side of the road.

"Ash, this is a great time to introduce Latias and Latios to everyone," Brock commented. "You can do that while I prepare our meals."

Ash nodded in agreement. "I like that." He grabbed his Pokéballs and flung them forward to release all his Pokémon. Misty and Brock did the same thing. Once all Pokémon were out, Ash stepped forward. "Well, everyone, I'd like-" Before Ash could speak any further, he got the wind knocked out of him courtesy of a tackle from his overzealous Bayleef.

All of the assortment of Pokémon nearby snickered slightly at Bayleef's clingy shows of affection. She pinned Ash to the grass, licking his face tenderly. Ash, however, didn't take her action in any negative light, as he only laughed in response, reaching with his arms to hug the large Pokémon. "You should let him speak, Bayleef," Pikachu reprimanded her. "He has an announcement to make. And it's important."

Bayleef glanced at him and frowned slightly. After a few seconds, she nodded and lowered her neck to give Ash a final affectionately lick before slowly walking off him, letting the human boy stand up. "Thanks, Bayleef. Anyway, to continue what I was saying. We have two new additions to our family!" Ash exclaimed excitedly, motioning

with his arms to Latias and Latios. "Some of you have seen them already, some not. But they're here to stay as our new friends. I introduce you guys to Latias and Latios. Go over and say hello."

All the Pokémon shouted a varying chorus of greetings towards the two legendary dragons, going over to them and rapidly crowding all around the two. Brock and Misty looked at them with amusement. "They'll certainly help the two fit in," Brock said, stopping his cooking for a second to look at all their Pokémon.

Several minutes later, during which Misty spent her time playing with Togepi, Brock cooking and Ash simply looking how the Pokémon socialized and talked with each other, the excitement of the arrival of Latias and Latios died down, making all the Pokémon go back to a normal routine while they were allowed out of their Pokéball. Ash found it exciting to listen to all the things the Pokémon had to talk about now that he could fully understand what they were saying. Once Brock was done cooking, he served the food for both the humans and the Pokémon, and the entire group then proceeded to eat their food.

After some time, the group had finished eating and was just resting. After a long train of vague thoughts, Ash realized that he hadn't tried checking either of his new dragons with the Pokédex. He took out the useful and informative machine and pointed it directly at Latias, who looked in mild curiosity at the small device. It beeped once and spoke up in a robotic voice. "Pokémon unknown. No information available." It promptly displayed a blank screen. Ash frowned, dismayed. He pointed it at Latios, and unsurprisingly, the Pokédex was also blank about him.

Misty chuckled slightly. "It's not your lucky day, it seems. It's the first time I ever hear a Pokédex say it has no information."

"Second time for me," Ash responded, looking at the Pokédex as if it was broken. "Why doesn't it say anything?" he wondered. Misty just shrugged.

Latios floated closer to Ash, looking at the red machine in Ash's hands curiously. "What's that?" he asked, never having seen one of them before.

"It's called a Pokédex. When I point it to a Pokémon it immediately tells me its species and lots of very useful stuff, but for some reason it can't recognize you two," Ash answered.

"You already know what species I am and I've told you a lot about me, so, why bother with the Pokédex?" Latios questioned, tilting his head.

Misty groaned in frustration. "Can you use telepathy, please? I'm feeling left out." She was now officially jealous of Ash's ability to understand Pokémon as if he was talking to any normal human being. Latios chuckled a little in amusement and replayed the question mentally to Misty.

"Well, it can also tell me the attacks a Pokémon knows. I know you're a dragon and psychic-type, but I don't know what attacks you have," Ash responded. "Plus, I was just curious about what it had to say about you."

"... Why didn't you ask me?" Latios deadpanned telepathically. "If you want to know things about me, I'll just tell you what I feel is okay to tell you."

"Because... uh... it never crossed my mind," Ash admitted mareepishly while scratching the back of his head in embarrassment. Misty face-palmed. "What? It's a valid excuse," Ash argued, crossing his arms. "I'm still not used to the fact that I can talk to my Pokémon now." He glared at her. Misty shook her head in amusement but didn't respond.

" Well, to put it bluntly... I don't really know how to battle. I know a couple of my natural abilities like invisibility, sight-sharing, telepathy, creating basic illusions like the ones Latias and I use to shapeshift into humans... but there's not much to look for after that. And, it's not

like most of them are actually useful in a battle," Latios explained dejectedly, clearly disappointed in himself that he really didn't know anything useful when it came to battles.

" We have psychic powers," Latias added, trying to cheer her brother up. "But, we only obtained that after we crashed the wave down. So, it's not something we're entirely sure how to use to fight yet. Also, we have our signature moves! We learned them... kind of like on instinct after we woke up."

Brock looked up from where he sitting down. "Psychic powers can be extremely powerful in battle. We know from experience."

"Yeah," Ash agreed, shuddering at the memories of his battle against Sabrina.

" Well, this is one of the greatest benefits Latios and I saw in leaving Alto Mare. Especially benefiting for Latios," Latias spoke up. "You guys can help us train to become stronger and better protect ourselves. Annie and Oakley could have killed us..."

" But, anyway, other than that, we only have our invisibility and tackles for fighting," Latios finished, letting out a mareepish chuckle afterwards.

"Dude, that's useless, you don't know anything!" Pikachu started laughing while pointing at Latios. "Pathetic!"

Latios glared at him, clearly annoyed. Latias gave Pikachu a devilish smile that made him cringe and stop laughing. *"Oh, Pikachu, may I remind you that it took Latios one small tackle to defeat you?"* she said in a sweet singsong telepathic voice. Pikachu winced, he'd completely forgotten about his first meeting with Latios and how bad it had been. Now it was Latios' turn to laugh. Latias grinned even wider. *"He defeated you fast without knowing how to battle. I had to stop him from pretty much killing you. Imagine what he could do when he has the same experience as you. He'll beat you up anytime,*

any day." Both dragons started snickering at Pikachu, who just flushed in embarrassment.

Latios grinned at Pikachu, very happy that his sister had brought up that particular moment. *"Make sure to stay on my good side, Pikachu."*

"So, anyway," Brock interrupted, making all Pokémon look at him. "I believe Latias mentioned signature moves? I'm curious, what's that about?" he questioned.

"Oh, right!" Ash exclaimed, grinning. "I wonder what kind of awesome attack you two might have as a signature move. I remember Lugia's Aeroblast, it was *awesome* ."

Latios laughed slightly at Ash's reaction. *"One of my few Legendary Pokémon friends once mentioned to me a long time ago that Latias and I, as a species, have a powerful signature move each. And that one day we'd learn them. After waking up from our very long sleep, both of us found out that we knew it already. I guess whatever snapped in us that day made us learn it on instinct,"* he explained. *"So, I guess we could show them. You first, Latias."*

Latias grinned, excited at showing off her personal attack to her friends. *"So, who do I practice it on?"* she asked.

Brock hummed. "I know. Let's see you try it on... my Onix," he said, glancing at his rock-type Pokémon. As soon as Brock mentioned his name, the gigantic rock serpent, who had been just resting on the side of the clearing, lifted his head and moved towards the center of the clearing while turning to face Latias.

" Alright guys, here's my Mist Ball!" Latias cried out, placing both of her clawed paws in front of her. She narrowed her eyes as they began to glow. As she concentrated, a white orb of bright psychic power began to form between her claws. Slowly, it began to be coated in what looked like red-tinted mist. The spherical construct of telekinetic power was quickly growing in size, letting out a soft hum

of power. Once she was ready, she reared her claws back and then hurled it towards Onix with all her might.

"Onix, swat it away with Slam!" Brock ordered in response. Onix roared and lifted his massive stone tail and swung it at the incoming psychic-type attack. As soon as the misty orb collided with the Rock Snake Pokémon's tail, it exploded into a huge flurry of red mist that quickly enveloped even the massive Onix. He let out a hiss of hurt as the mist painfully damaged his rocky skin. The Rock Snake Pokémon then let out a defiant growl at Latias, but his eyes widened as he felt all his strength being zapped away by the stinging mist ripping at his rocky hide.

Latias grinned proudly. *"So, that's what it does. It's the first time I get to use it fully."*

"Really?" Ash asked, surprised.

"Yeah. I almost used it accidentally after waking up. Been giddy to try it fully ever since," Latias answered, watching as a very exhausted and panting Onix collapsed on the grassy terrain. *"I'm not disappointed."*

"Well, that's powerful," Misty commented in amazement. "Onix is Brock's strongest Pokémon, and that Mist Ball is clearly causing a ton of damage. More impressive if we think of Latias' lack of any battle experience or expertise in using her power."

Latias nodded in agreement. *"Mist Ball is a very powerful move. It covers a very wide area, and I can sense the mist is very heavily loaded with my sister's psychic power. Once she masters her psychic powers more, she could be able to manipulate the mist's movements or intensity, and maybe even control it to the point she can will it to not harm someone, like an ally, if they too are trapped in the mist,"* he explained.

"That sounds awesome," Latias said excitedly. *"I can't wait to be able to do all that. I like my stuff."* She frowned, realizing that she

had no idea what Latios' exclusive move was. *"What's your personal attack, Latios?"*

"It's called Luster Purge," Latios replied, smirking slightly.

"Luster Purge? That sounds kinda weird," Ash commented, making Latios growl at him. "It's true!" Ash said defensively, putting his hands up.

"I'll be the test dummy," Pikachu offered, surprising all the Pokémon present. He smirked at Latios as he walked to the center of the clearing. "Try to make your attack strong enough to actually damage me."

Latios laughed, smirking toothily. "Oh, I intend to." The blue dragon flew upwards, his body beginning to shine in a hue of white light as he ascended a couple dozen feet into the air.

"Bring it," Pikachu dared, his cheeks sparking violently as he began to muster up a huge amount of his electrical energy.

Latios smirked, suppressing a small chuckle. "Okay. You asked for it." The white glow surrounding Latios began to mass in front of his mouth, shaping itself up to a sphere of white light with a faint blue aura surrounding it. With a roar, Latios thrust his head forward and unleashed a powerful white and blue beam towards Pikachu. At the same time that Latios fired his attack, Pikachu let out a war cry and fired his own attack, using Thunder to launch a potent pillar of blistering yellow electricity upwards. The two attacks collided midair with a potent boom and a blinding flash, holding out in a stalemate for a few seconds. It was then that Latios used the trick to Luster Purge. *'Gotcha,'* he thought to himself. His eyes flashed in a bluish glow for an instant. At that same moment, many streaks of light broke off from the main beam and blazed past the Thunder attack.

Pikachu's eyes widened, seeing the smaller beams circle around his attack while heading towards him. *'So, he can actually control the attack!'* he thought urgently. In a quick reaction from a seasoned

battler like him, Pikachu reacted and defended against the surprising revelation to Latios' move instantly. He increased the power output to his Thunder attack, and focused it all around him. The result was a blast of electricity emanating from his body in all directions, which had the desired effect of shielding him from Latios' secondary attacks, all of which collided and exploded against the electrical barrier.

Both Pokémon, seeing the test was over, ended their attacks. They glared at each other, panting slightly. "You're... very good," Latios admitted grudgingly, having thought that his Luster Purge would knock out Pikachu in a single hit. The dragon had not expected that the smaller electric-type would match and defend against it so well.

"You're powerful, but you're not good," Pikachu shot back, smirking. "I only lost to you at the Secret Garden because you sneaked up on us while invisible. If it had been a proper battle and had known what I was up against to begin with, I'd have kicked your tail feathers."

"Okay, that's pretty cool," Ash commented, grinning.

Brock hummed, running over the attack in his head while analyzing it. "And from what I gather, it's mostly impossible to dodge. The best way to defend against it is with a shield, like Pikachu did." He looked at Latios. "You can control the attack even after it's been used, including altering its shape and composition, right?"

Latios nodded once. *"Correct. I got to test it once at the Secret Garden while Latias was asleep, and I found out that I could. Since Luster Purge is composed of pure psychic energy, even after it's been fired, I can alter its shape and redirect it at will,"* he explained.

"This is a very useful move, alongside Latias' Mist Ball," Misty commented. "At least they're not *completely* blank. We can assume each of them know three attacks, basically. Tackle, Psychic and their personal signature move. We've got something to work with."

"So, how are we going to train them?" Ash asked. "I don't have a clue on how to train dragons... or psychics... or Legendaries. Never had any of those before."

"Don't worry, Brock and I will help you," Misty said, smiling. "As usual."

"So," Brock began, drawing everyone's attention to him. He was scribbling something in a notebook, no doubt preparing a training schedule for them. "With training, we'll focus mainly on Latios as he's the one that will actually battle. Latias, on the other hand, we'll train her so she's good enough and can defend herself if she needs it, but it won't be anything heavy unless she wants it. The intensity will be all piled up on Latios," Brock spoke up, making Latios wonder if he should be excited or cringing in despair. He closed the notebook, nodding to himself in satisfaction. "We'll need to work hard, Latios. You need to be ready for the league, which is very soon. And, should Ash use you in his upcoming Gym battle, you need to be strong within this week. First things first, we're sure Tackle and your signature moves are good to go. I'm concerned about Psychic."

"Why are you concerned with Psychic? I've got pretty decent control of my psychic powers," Latios questioned, tilting his head.

"Yes, you do," Brock answered, but then shook his head once. "But, so far, you've only used them for everyday activities and mundane things. We don't know how they'll perform in an actual battle. I imagine your range, mental strength, stamina and capacity, focus and finesse regarding psychic powers in battle are all bad. We need to train your mental powers so they grow. You were panting after using a single Luster Purge, which speaks badly of your psychic stamina."

Latios winced, but admitted that everything the former Gym Leader was saying was most likely true. *"Yeah, I guess,"* he grudgingly admitted.

"Training you in your psychic powers will have the double benefit of making both Psychic and Luster Purge better," Misty added. "Before trying to teach you more attacks, we need to make sure your critical abilities, which are your psychic powers, are in a good level."

"Luckily for you, I am aware of many methods to train psychic Pokémon in that regard," Brock spoke up.

Ash blinked, wondering if there was a Pokémon type that Brock didn't have ideas on how to train. "How do you know that?"

"I'm aiming to become a Pokémon Breeder, remember? I need to know how to raise all kinds of types of Pokémon effectively," Brock explained. "Anyway, Latios, pluck a leaf from a tree."

Latios tilted his head in confusion. "*What's the leaf for?*" he asked. Nonetheless, his eyes glowed as he carefully grabbed a leaf from a nearby tree.

"You'll see," Brock answered vaguely. "Latios, hold the leaf without snapping it. Ash, tell Noctowl to blow a small gust at Latios."

Ash turned and nodded towards his shiny Pokémon, who was calmly roosting on a branch in a small tree, to indicate him to follow Brock's command. He flapped his wings, flying close to the group. As he neared, he stopped and flapped his wings while aiming at Latios, sending a small gust his way. Latios didn't flinch in the slightest as the breeze hit him, however, the leaf he was holding slipped from his psychic hold and was blown away. He tried to grab it by increasing his psychic power over it, but the increase in force snapped the leaf in several pieces. "... *Oops,*" Latios said Mareepishly, flushing.

"Not as easy as it looked, wasn't it?" Brock asked, chuckling.

Latios frowned and shook his head. "*I guess not.*"

Brock smiled, lightly amused by the dragon's embarrassment. "On the following days, while we walk towards our next Gym, you and

Latias are going to be holding several dozen leaves along the way while making sure the breezes don't blow them away, and of course, being careful not to snap them. The point of this exercise is to let you practice your control, focus, concentration, finesse and ability to exert psychic powers on many directions."

Latios nodded. *"That sounds good. I imagine I'll be holding onto more leaves than Latias ?"* he asked.

"Yes. We'll make it as many leaves as you can. You'll find that this exercise can get exhausting and will start pushing you eventually. Once your control in general has gotten good enough, we'll move onto the heavy training. That will help you train your range, stamina, capacity and mental strength. We'll have you two lift and carry along the way some rocks. Some very large, and very heavy rocks," Brock said, explaining his training plan to the two horrified dragons.

"Plus, we'll see if we can battle any trainer we run into so you have some battle experience before fighting Clair," Misty added. She hummed. "Maybe we can teach them Dragon Breath too, it's a pretty basic move for Dragons that shouldn't take too long to master..." She glanced at Brock, who immediately pulled out one of his books.

Latios and Latias worriedly glanced at each other as Misty and Brock discussed all the potential ways to train them on the way to Blackthorn City, making the twins wonder for a second if getting into this was the right decision. Pikachu laughed at Latias and Latios' horrified faces. "No one said getting strong was easy!"

After Misty and Brock finished explaining the basics of their training regime to Ash and the Dragon twins, the group packed up and continued on their way to Blackthorn City. Latias and Latios continued training as the group walked, carrying many, many leaves with them. At first, every single light breeze caused both dragons to lose most of their leaves, either because they snapped them with their psychic powers due to trying to hold on to them or because they tried to be too delicate and the wind ended blowing the leaf away. The group also made point in including the two dragons on their

conversations as much as they could, forcing them their already struggling minds to multitask further in an attempt to push them harder.

The group kept walking to Blackthorn City as the days went by. They focused on training Latias and Latios, *hard*. Particularly the older male. After a couple days, they swapped the leaves with large and heavy rocks, making the twins carry them mentally as they flew alongside the humans. For both dragons, it was a very painful and arduous strain to keep hold on so much weight for extended periods of time. As exhausting as it was, both dragons could undeniably see the results of their training on their growing psychic powers. Once the twins had gotten good progress on rock lifting, Brock and Misty started mixing in the rock and leaf exercises together, forcing both psychic dragons to focus both on raw strength and delicate finesse at the same time. Every time they stopped to eat, the two gym leaders would make the dragons train to learn Dragon Breath. Both agreed that it was vital for both dragons to know at least one dragon-type attack. During the nights or early mornings, Latias and Latios would pause their training to meditate together. Latios had heard from his Legendary Pokémon friends that meditating was a great exercise for psychics. With the intense training he and his sister were submitted too, relaxing and meditating was a great activity to relax themselves. Even if Latias found it boring and wouldn't stop complaining the first times.

On the road, Ash and his friends had also told Latias and Latios stories of a lot of their adventures. Latias and Latios were, understandably, extremely secretive about their lives before meeting them. Save for a few small stories, the two's past remained a large mystery for everyone. Despite that, the humans greatly enjoyed sharing their adventures with them. Stories about how Ash's journey had been up to the point where he had met the eon twins, with them taking a very keen interest in the stories that involved Ash and his friends meeting other Legendary Pokémon. The dragons found it a great activity to get to know their new human friends, even if all the storytelling only made their already tough training even harder.

After a little more than a week of traveling, during which they also made point in having Latios battle many trainers and have a lot of practice battles against other Pokémon from the group, Latios and Latias had vastly improved in their psychic powers. Specially Latios, who was clearly proving himself to be several leagues above Latias' strength.

A whole hike later...

"We should be nearing Blackthorn City," Brock announced, his eyes focused on the map he was holding.

Ash grinned excitedly. "That's awesome."

"Yes," Misty agreed. "We're still on track of our catch-up schedule."

"*I'm curious as to what the city is like,*" Latios commented, slightly interested in a city heavy on dragon folklore. At the moment, the two dragons weren't training. With the city nearing, Brock and Misty decided it was time to stop the training and let Latios rest so he was in optimal conditions for the gym battle.

"*I don't know... uh, probably has a lot of dragonish stuff?*" Latias asked, chuckling nervously. Latios rolled his eyes in amusement.

"So, Ash, have you decided which Pokémon you'll use to battle the Blackthorn Gym Leader?" Brock asked, closing his map. "Aside from Latios, of course."

Ash shook his head once. "No, I haven't."

Misty looked at him disapprovingly. "You should start learning to plan ahead. You'll one day be traveling without Brock and I, and when you do, you'll suffer a lot. A Gym Leader that uses dragon-type Pokémon is going to be very powerful."

"Dragons are not something you'll defeat just by sending the first Pokémon you think will do well and having some luck afterwards."

Remember the time you battled Sabrina? Remember how bad it ended when you went against a very powerful type completely unprepared? Dragons are even stronger than psychic-type Pokémon."

Ash cringed at the notion of Dragons being even more powerful than psychic-type Pokémon. "Ouch."

Misty nodded. "Sure, your unorthodox strategies and luck usually do well against most Pokémon. But, in my opinion, there's three types that won't ever work against. Dragons, Psychics and Ghosts. You already tested that against Psychics and Ghosts. Like Brock said, look what Sabrina did to us when you challenged her unprepared. As for ghosts, remember Morty? We had to plan ahead a lot and train specifically to beat him, and you *still* struggled a lot to beat him." Misty shook her head several times. "Dragons are also stronger than Ghosts, before you ask."

"The dragon-type is the most powerful Pokémon type out there. Remember Drake's Dragonite back at the Orange League? That's one of the few times you actually saw and faced a Dragon in battle. That thing smashed through your entire team before you could put it down. You have Latios, yes, but he's still in very early stages of his training. You can't trust him to beat the gym on his own. And, besides, your entire team is at a big disadvantage against dragons," Brock said, his voice very critical and lecturing.

Ash cringed again, not entirely sure if he should worry more about Dragons being stronger than Psychics and Ghosts or that his team was weak against dragon-types. "Really?"

"Well, dragon-type Pokémon resist Grass, Fire, Electric and Water. That means Bayleef, Cyndaquil, Pikachu and Totodile are all at a disadvantage when using their main attacks," Brock responded. "Noctowl could be a good choice since he doesn't have an advantage or disadvantage, but he's small and frail. I doubt he could take more than one big and powerful dragon move. Dragons are super-effective against themselves, that means Latios will be hit just

as hard as he'll hit," Brock continued. He hummed, tapping his chin with a finger in thought. "It would help if you had an ice or fairy-type Pokémon, but you don't."

"As you can see, Ash, you don't have the best team to battle the Blackthorn Gym Leader right now," Misty told him.

"I guess that means I'll have to speak to Professor Oak before the battle and swap a Pokémon into my team," Ash commented. "Even if he's at a disadvantage, I trust Pikachu to do well. I'll use him and Latios. I'll pick my last Pokémon once we're there."

"I guess that works. It's not like he has much to pick from that isn't weak to Dragons," Brock mumbled. Having finished discussing Ash's team, the group continued walking, and it was then that Brock noticed that something was off. It was too calm, like something was missing. When he realized what that something was, he stopped and glanced around suspiciously.

Ash, Misty, Pikachu, Latios and Latias looked at him in puzzlement. "What's wrong?" Misty asked, frowning. Even Togepi stared at Brock awkwardly.

"Have you guys noticed everything has been way too calm ever since we departed Alto Mare?" Brock inquired. Ash and Misty looked at each other and shrugged, not really getting what Brock was referring to. Brock decided to enlighten them. "Team Rocket hasn't bothered us for a long time now."

Ash and Misty's eyes widened. "Huh, you're right," Ash admitted. "Where are they? It's not like them to leave us in peace for such a long time."

"Thinking about it, Brock has a point. Those three haven't been anywhere near us ever since we left Alto Mare," Misty said.

Latias and Latios looked tense at the mention of Team Rocket, it didn't bring good memories for them. " *What do you mean?*" Latias

asked telepathically.

Ash noticed her hesitation and decided to reassure her. "Don't worry, we don't mean the ones that attacked Alto Mare. Pretty sure they're in jail. There's another trio that usually follows us, trying to capture Pikachu." Ash laughed slightly. "They attack us on a daily basis. But, they aren't really a threat. They're very weak."

Brock nodded in agreement. "They're more annoying than actually a problem. Anyway, maybe they're trying to find us somewhere in Alto Mare?"

"Or they're looking for a bite to eat," Misty joked. The group shared a good laugh at that. They hoped those three idiots wouldn't bother them for a good long while. At least they weren't going to hear that horrible motto anytime soon.

The group continued their travel to Blackthorn city. Ash's Gym Battle was around the corner...

...

Meanwhile, in one of the vast forests of the Johto region...

A Meowth-shaped hot air balloon, with two people and two Pokémon aboard, was aimlessly floating about. "How did we lose the twerps!?" Jessie demanded angrily while looking through a pair of binoculars. James, Meowth and Wobbuffet were looking through their own binoculars as well, trying to find their eternal quarry.

James growled in annoyance, leaving his binoculars to glare at Jessie. "I told you that leaving that water city early and ambushing them at the port was a bad idea, because we didn't know what damn port they were going to dock at in the first place!" he snapped.

"Shut it and keep looking," Meowth grumbled.

"I will find them!" Wobbuffet saluted. The blue Pokémon continued looking out through his binoculars.

"We're never going to find them like this," James muttered, adjusting the balloon's flame so that they could go higher.

"What do you suggest?" Jessie asked. She was willing to accept any option now.

"Well, we could wait for them at Silver Town, that's where the conference will be held. By now the twerp either already has all eight badges or is winning his last," James suggested.

The other three nodded, that seemed like a good idea.

"Then to Silver Town it is!" Jessie shouted enthusiastically, throwing a fist in the air.

James nodded and changed course, this time for Mount Silver.

...

A choruses of laughter were the only sound echoing over the obscure scene currently found over one of the rural roads of the Johto Region. Two burning police vehicles, several unconscious or dead police officers, and a pair of laughing maniacal madwomen. "This was too easy," Oakley commented, shaking her head. "Where do they train these guys?" she wondered.

"Yeah, too easy. I can't wait to get out of these garbage clothes that prisons use. I've never seen so many fashion disasters put in one place in my life, bleh!" Annie said, dramatically pulling the edges of the shirt she was wearing.

"You'll get out of those soon enough," Oakley promised. "We need to get away. It won't be long before police realizes these guys aren't responding and that we are missing. Got to love failed prison transfers."

Annie shuddered. "I am not looking forward to reporting to Giovanni our failure, though..."

Oakley sighed. "I don't either, but, let's hope all the information we have makes up for it. We've got many things he's going to love to hear. Come," she turned and walked in direction of the forest, knowing they needed to go to a city different than the one they came from to get new clothes and acquire transportation. She paused for a second. "Um, Annie?"

"Yes, Oakley?" Annie said, walking beside her.

"That little episode I had while inside the DMA... that stays out of the report, okay?" Oakley said slowly.

Annie nodded. "I don't want to see my sister dead anytime soon, so I agree."

"Thank you," Oakley said appreciatively, turning back to the forest before daring forward in a rapid sprint. Annie effortlessly did the same, keeping up pace with her.

Within moments, there was no trace of the two athletic women anywhere close to the scene of their deadly escape...

Author Notes: Chapter is over! I hope you all liked it.

Battle For The Rising Badge!

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech."

'Thoughts.'

"Telepathy."

Author Notes: Chapter rewritten.

Last Revision: April 16th, 2016.

Chapter 5 - Battle For The Rising Badge!

"Finally!" Ash shouted enthusiastically as the outskirts of Blackthorn City came into view in the distance. "It's about time we got here," he added.

Brock chuckled at the boy's eagerness, shaking his head in amusement a couple times. "I'll side a bit with you on that one. It seemed like we'd be on the road forever," he commented. The training of Latios had certainly made the trip seem even longer.

Ash nodded in agreement. "Now, let's head to the Gym and win my last badge, it's long overdue!" He immediately began to pick up the pace, despite not yet being aware of the Gym's exact location within the city.

"Hold it!" Brock and Misty shouted in unison, their voices loud and firm.

Ash stopped dead in his tracks and slowly turned to face them with a frown. "What now?" he asked impatiently. He flinched slightly at their very stern looks.

Brock crossed his arms above his chest. "First, you have to go to the Pokémon Center. You have to switch one Pokémon from your team, remember? Also, I'd suggest having Latios checked up by Nurse Joy. He's trained hard along the trip and it'd definitely be a good idea to have him checked up before a very important battle you can't afford to lose," the former gym leader responded strictly. "And maybe check your entire team while we're at it. It's best to be prepared," he added after a quick pause.

Ash winced, but found it impossible to contend with his friend's arguments. "Yeah, you're right, let's go," the youngster conceded, resuming the walk at a more controlled pace once Brock and Misty had caught up with him. The group continued walking in the direction of Blackthorn City with Brock leading the way, as he was the one who had the city's map. Eventually, they made it out of the wilderness and into the city. They made their way through the city's streets, enjoying a fair share of sightseeing along the mid-sized metropolis. Blackthorn City was surprisingly green and clearly larger than what they had expected. Numerous colorful buildings of varying heights lined the streets, but trees still dominated the landscape, indicating it was a nature-friendly city. Many of the city's buildings and public areas had dragon-themed ornaments, which caught the attention of the group whenever they noticed them, particularly of Latias.

Following the map, the Pokémon Center was relatively easy to locate. The building was brightly colored and had a large red-colored 'P' at the top. Ash and the group entered it. The Pokémon Center's lobby was currently empty aside from the lone Nurse Joy, who seemed to be quite entertained going through a large stack of paperwork. Latias looked around, noting that the Pokémon Center's interior layout looked a lot like the one in Alto Mare, which was hardly a surprise to her. She sweat-dropped when she saw Nurse Joy at the counter. Now *that* was definitely a surprise to her. *'It seems that it's true, there's a lot of Nurse Joys all over the regions...'* she idly thought to herself, still not entirely comprehending how there

could be so many nurses of the same looks and same name dotted all over the cities.

The sound of footsteps made Nurse Joy glance up at the approaching group. "Hello, Pokémon Trainers, welcome to the Blackthorn City Pokémon Center. How may I help you all?" the nurse behind the counter asked the group politely, flashing them a kind smile.

It was the former Pewter City Gym Leader who made the first move. "You could heal the long-lasting ache in my heart!" Brock shouted in a lovesick voice and made an attempt to sprint towards the counter. Before he could get far, Misty's hand darted forward and caught Brock's ear with absolutely perfect precision, causing the former Gym Leader to let out a screech of pain. Misty grumbled several incoherent things in annoyance and proceeded to drag him away towards the exit. Nurse Joy just stared at the awkward scene blankly.

"... Uh, sorry about that," Ash apologized, scratching the back of his head in embarrassment.

Nurse Joy shrugged. "Don't worry about it. I've seen way weirder trainers before."

Ash nodded slowly, completely sure he didn't want to ask what Nurse Joy exactly meant with that. "So, uh, could you check my Pokémon, please?" Ash asked, placing his five Pokéballs on one of the trays already laid out in the counter. Pikachu jumped over the counter and sat down beside the Pokéballs.

"Sure, no problem." Nurse Joy smiled and took Ash's Pokéballs, putting them in the examination and healing machine behind her. She then turned around and picked Pikachu up to place him in a table nearby to examine him while the machine began to make a series of humming sounds as it scanned the Pokémon in the Pokéballs and healed any that needed it. Occasionally, Nurse Joy spared glances at the screen, carefully reading the complicated-

looking diagnostics displayed by the equipment from the Pokémon it was currently examining.

Latias watched in wonder, mentally comparing the Nurse Joy before her with the one from Alto Mare. She found herself unable to find any significant differences. *"How can there be so many Nurses all looking the same?"* she wondered telepathically, deciding to voice her curiosity to her friends.

Barely a second after she had finished her question, she found Brock was already in her face. "Don't you dare say that," Brock said in a serious voice, causing a startled Latias to hide behind Ash. She poked her head over his shoulders, watching the former gym leader warily. "Blackthorn City's Nurse Joy is clearly one inch taller than Alto Mare's Nurse Joy!" Brock said proudly. "And uses a clearly different, more aggressive-scented perfume."

Latias' jaw dropped as she glanced at Nurse Joy. Despite Brock pointing out the apparently obvious differences, she still couldn't notice if they were correct or wrong. *"Wait, I thought Misty dragged you away,"* Latias suddenly said, wondering what Brock was doing with them.

"She can't stop me forever," Brock replied confidently. Misty and Ash sighed while Pikachu just shook his head in exasperation from the examination table he was on.

Nurse Joy sent Brock a wary glance. Despite being focused on tending six Pokémon, she had more than enough awareness of her surroundings to note several things were off. She had never heard the silent girl wearing the green shirt and white miniskirt talk, yet, the strange man who she thought seemed familiar responded directly towards her. Deciding not to over think it, she shrugged and returned to her job. *'Another bunch of strange trainers,'* she thought dismissively, idly comparing them to other strange groups she had seen before.

Latias threw Brock an annoyed look. *"Was that necessary?"* she asked telepathically as she stepped from behind Ash.

"Absolutely! There can't be any mistake in that," Brock replied, reinforcing Nurse Joy's doubts about his sanity.

Latias' eye twitched in annoyance. *'I'm going to prank him for that,'* she thought to herself.

"Here they are, they're all in good health," Nurse Joy called, drawing everyone's attention back to her. She handed Ash his Pokéballs back while Pikachu jumped from the counter to his shoulder, resting down on his favorite spot. "Have a nice day. Thank you and come back again soon," she added kindly.

"... Does she mean she wants us to come back again soon because we've gotten hurt?" asked a visibly disturbed Latias. *"Is she... wishing us pain?"*

"Nah, I think she's just being polite," Pikachu answered, glancing once at the sweet, smiling nurse. "They say that a lot, but they never mean it in a bad way."

" *Oh, okay,*" Latias replied uneasily.

"Thanks!" Ash said to the nurse gratefully, ignoring the quick exchange between the two Pokémon, before turning around to walk towards the phones that were lined up on one of the walls of the lobby. Meanwhile, Brock and Misty went to a bench on the other side of the room to take seat while Ash made the important phone call. Ash specifically went to the phone that had a Pokéball transporter device attached to it, since he knew he'd need it. He dialed Professor Oak's number and waited for a couple instants. After going through the initial answering machine and properly identifying himself, Professor Oak's image appeared. "Hello, Professor!" Ash greeted warmly with a smile.

Professor Oak seemed extremely giddy, barely containing excitement and curiosity. It was something that Ash instantly found strange within the normally calm and collected Pokémon Professor. "Hello, Ash." He paused, letting a second of awkward silence pass between the two before continuing speaking. "Now, may I ask, where is he? I really need to see him."

Ash looked confused. "Who do you mean?" he asked uncertainty.

"The flying spaghetti monster. Honestly, Ash, who do you *think* he's talking about?" Pikachu snarked. Ash promptly ignored him.

"Well, you just recently captured a Legendary Pokémon, Ash! That's simply *insane* ! I know you run into them every once in a while... you even got to ride a Lugia, though it'd have been nice if you caught him as well..." Professor Oak shook his head several times. "I'm rambling and getting off topic, sorry about that. Anyways, can I see him?" the elder asked eagerly.

Ash considered the professor's offer for a while, but after some careful thinking, he smirked and decided to mess around with him for a bit. "Nope, you'll have to wait until you see me in person to see Latios."

Oak groaned in disappointment, but acknowledging that he didn't have any swaying power over Ash at the moment, he gave in and dropped the matter entirely. Besides, he was perfectly aware that he'd be seeing Ash soon at the Johto League tournament. "Okay, fair enough, I guess. So, I take it you already are in New Bark Town to register for the Silver Conference?"

Ash frowned, clearly confused. "What do you mean with that? I'm in Blackthorn City to battle the Gym Leader for my last badge." He frowned, knowing he wasn't going to like whatever the professor said next.

Professor Oak shook his head in disappointment. Same old Ash... "I'm very sorry to tell you this, Ash, but to register for the Silver

Conference you have to go back to New Bark Town. The New Bark Town Pokémon Center is the only place that has been authorized to allow registrations for the Silver Conference. After you register in New Bark Town, you can go to Silver Town. But, there is no way you can walk from Blackthorn City to New Bark Town before the registration closes," the professor said informatively. "Registrations close in two days, by the way."

Ash looked terrified. "What!? How am I supposed to do that?!"

Pikachu tapped Ash's head, making the trainer turn to look at him. "Relax, we'll find a way. Focus on step one first, which is actually winning the last badge. Finding a way to reach New Bark Town will be useless if we don't have that last badge to begin with. One step at a time," the electric-type spoke levelheadedly.

"Yeah, you're right, Pikachu. That's a good point," Ash said, taking a deep breath to calm the terror he felt at potentially missing out on the league. Professor Oak blinked, rapidly taking note of the eerily natural way that Ash seemed to have understood Pikachu's long speech. Ash sighed, pushing the thoughts of being delayed to the back of his mind to allow a determined look to form on his face as he thought of his upcoming battle against dragons. "Don't worry, Professor Oak, we'll find a way. Anyways, I'd like to exchange a Pokémon to get ready for my Blackthorn Gym battle."

Professor Oak nodded once, mentally wishing Ash the best of luck. "Who do you want back?" Oak asked.

Ash smiled, looking forward to seeing an old friend. "I want my Snorlax," he replied. "I'll send Noctowl back for now. When my Gym Battle's over I'll send Snorlax back again," Ash continued, placing Noctowl's Pokéball in the teleporter.

Oak nodded. "Wait while I go and get Snorlax." He stood up and disappeared from the screen. After a few minutes had passed, Professor Oak reappeared once again on the screen. "Here it is, Ash. Snorlax's Pokéball. He's awake, too. Which is good news if

you're going to be battling soon." Professor Oak placed the Pokéball in the teleporter nearby and pressed the transfer button. The machine activated with an electrical rumbling sound and, once all the data had been processed, swapped the Pokéballs in a bright flash of light.

Ash took the new Pokéball deposited before him and quickly hooked it to his belt next to the others. "Thanks a lot, Professor."

"No problem, Ash." He let out a thoughtful hum. "Also, could you connect your Pokédex to the machine? Since your last call I've been gathering all the data I could from other Pokémon professors and research institutes. I've got an update for you so that it so that it can recognize your new *Legendary* Pokémon," Oak told him, putting special emphasis on the *Legendary* part, as if he still had trouble believing it.

Ash's eyes lit up in delight. "Okay!" the young trainer replied while connecting the Pokédex to the machine. The Pokédex's screen turned on, displaying a slowly filling bar that noted the progress of the update Professor Oak was sending. It beeped once the updated was completed and then rebooted itself.

"Aside from now having Latios' Pokédex entry and some additional information about him, it also has the entry of a strikingly similar Pokémon called Latias, just in case," Professor Oak announced. "It's not a full update, though. That only comes in if you go to a new region after Johto."

Ash nodded once. "Thanks a bunch, professor. That sounds awesome," he replied, inwardly wondering how much the elder professor would expect him to actually have a Latias as well.

"Also, Ash, Professor Elm wants you to do him a quick favor, so call him after your Gym Battle please," Oak continued. "From his tone, it sounded rather important."

"But, professor, I'm on a very tight schedule right now." Ash whined, crossing his arms in annoyance.

"Don't worry, Ash. You have to go to New Bark Town anyways to register for the Silver Conference," Oak pointed out. "Maybe whatever he wants isn't going to be too time consuming."

Ash sighed in defeat. "Okay, I'll call him."

Professor Oak smiled. "Thank you. Good luck beating time, Ash. I think that will be a tougher opponent than the Blackthorn Gym Leader and her dragon Pokémon."

"I'll need that luck. Good bye, Professor." Ash hung up the phone and unplugged his Pokédex from the machine, but remained seated there for a few seconds while trying to think of a way to solve this. He hadn't expected to be so late for the Silver Conference. "What are we gonna do?" he muttered, a thoughtful expression on his face.

Brock, Misty and Latias walked up to him. "Why the thoughtful look?" Misty asked curiously.

"Professor Oak just told me that the only place that we're allowed to register at is New Bark Town," Ash answered. He glanced at Brock. "Did you know about that?"

"No," Brock answered, wincing. "My quick planning was assuming we could register at either Blackthorn City or Silver Town. I didn't expect registrations to be only permitted at New Bark Town. That puts a bad dent in our plans."

Misty frowned. "I imagine the league must have published an announcement regarding that and we missed it in between our travels, that's why it's not in your guidebook."

Brock nodded, a grim expression on his face. "Yeah, Pokémon Leagues often announce the registration place for the league a

month or two before the actual league, depending on how they organize themselves."

"How will we get there in time?" Ash asked, looking at Brock and Misty for answers. He was willing to accept any option that could solve their dilemma. What Ash didn't expect was for said solution to come in the form of his newest team addition. Latios burst out of his Pokéball without warning, startling everyone except for Nurse Joy, who saw that sort of thing all the time and was not impressed. She did make a small double take at the sight of the Legendary Dragon, however.

"I could take you," Latios offered.

"What!?" Ash asked, startled. "Can you get there fast enough?" he added.

Before Latios could answer, Ash's Pokédex beeped, reminding Ash that he had kept the machine in his hand after unplugging it. The Pokédex then spoke in the ever-present mechanical voice. "Latios, the Eon Pokémon. Latios is a highly intelligent Pokémon and is capable of telepathy. Latios has the ability to make people see an image or memory of what they have seen by projecting them in their minds. By tucking back its forelegs to its body to reduce air resistance, it can overtake jet planes in terms of speed, which is faster than the speed of sound."

Pikachu laughed. "That's very convenient."

Misty laughed. "That's very convenient."

Ash stared at her. "You just repeated what Pikachu said."

Misty glared at him. "You do realize I can't understand him, right?"

Ash chuckled nervously, holding his arms out in front of him. "True, you win." He glanced at Latios, who was still hovering next to them.

"Can you really fly as fast as the Pokédex says?" he asked, a glint of hope in his eyes.

Latios hummed. *"I have no idea how fast jet planes fly, but I've flown faster than the speed of sound many times in the past. So, yeah, I can. That's why I offered. I can take you to New Bark Town and then to Silver Town within a few hours."*

"Yes! Now I can get there in time!" Ash cheered. Latias smiled, glad to see the young boy's spirits greatly lifted.

Pikachu smiled. "See, that's why I told you not to sulk. I knew we'd find a solution."

Ash grinned. "Yeah, you were right, thanks buddy." Saying that, he then made to rub Pikachu's cheek, but almost as soon as his fingers came into contact with the intended area, he wound up sharply drawing his hand away as a very powerful and painful static shock seemed to run through his fingers and up his arm.

"Ow! Hey, what gives, Pikachu? I was just trying to pet you!" said a thoroughly annoyed Ash as he rubbed one hand against the other, trying to alleviate the numbness in his electrocuted fingers.

"Yeah, but I can hardly be blamed if you decide to pet me in the worst place possible, at the worst time possible. My cheeks are where my electricity comes from, remember? Now, normally, in any calm situation, you'd have no problem petting me there. But, and while I'm not sure exactly how it works, I know that whenever I'm about to take part in a big battle, or I get tense or stressed out, my electric charge gets stronger and I am likely to accidentally shock others. My cheeks and sometimes my fur get charged with potent electricity, enough to paralyze Pokémon I'm battling if they come into contact with me. And so, seeing as we're about to take part in a big gym battle, which has me eager and tense, you got shocked when you touched my cheek just now," Pikachu answered matter-of-factly, shrugging.

"Well, you could've said something!" Ash responded.

Pikachu rubbed his chin in contemplation. "True, true," he acknowledged, before his mouth curved upwards into a rather sadistic-looking smirk. "But then I wouldn't have been able to see the look on your face when you got shocked. So, so worth it," he said with a chuckle.

Ash ground his teeth together and growled, mentally berating himself for his blunder while at the same time thinking of possible ways to get back at Pikachu in the future.

"That wasn't very funny, Pikachu," scolded Latias, frowning.

"I thought it was pretty funny," admitted Latios candidly.

Latias whipped around to face her brother, fuming. "Latios!"

"What?" he asked, turning his neck to look at the red dragoness.

"I... You..." she sputtered incredulously before huffing and throwing up her hands. "You know what, forget it. Of course you'd find it funny."

Meanwhile, Brock and Misty just stood watching in confusion at the mostly unintelligible spectacle of Pikachu laughing on Ash's shoulder while Ash rubbed his hand and muttered angrily under his breath about ungrateful Pokémon, Latias crossing her arms and giving her brother the stink-eye while Latios, apparently realizing he'd said something wrong, seemed to be doing his best to mollify his sister.

"Do you have any idea what's going on?" asked Misty to Brock, not taking her eyes off the scene in front of her.

"Not a clue, but at least we're not a part of it," answered Brock, to which Misty simply nodded.

"Anyway," said Ash loudly after a minute, putting an end to the mouse's laughter and the sibling's bickering, "to get back on topic,

Latios, you said you could carry me. But, what about Misty and Brock?" he asked, turning to glance at his two traveling companions"

" I can't carry three humans," Latios stated flatly. "I'll only take you."

" And, I'm not entirely sure I'm ready to carry humans," Latias said. "I failed rather badly when I tried that with Ash at Alto Mare. Then again, I haven't tried now that I have new powers. You can't really rely on me."

Brock chuckled. "No need to, Latios and Latias. Misty and I can just go to Silver Town from here while you go to New Bark Town and back. We'll just meet up in Silver Town," he suggested.

Misty nodded in agreement. "That works."

"Okay! I guess it's settled then," Ash said, clear relief in his voice. He then turned to the Eon Pokémon. "Thanks, Latios, nice save."

Latios smiled. *"Sure, no problem."*

Ash let out a curious hum while pointing his Pokédex at Latias, who was disguised as Bianca. "Let's see what it has to say about you." The Pokédex beeped but didn't do anything. "Huh? Nothing happened."

"Maybe she needs to be in her true form?" Brock suggested. This was the only thing that occurred to him. "Her illusion appearance may be disrupting the Pokédex's scanner."

"Can you please turn back? I'd like to hear what the Pokédex says about you," Ash asked Latias. She nodded with a grin and in a bright flash of blue lights she cancelled her illusion and reverted to a Dragon. Again, Nurse Joy was unimpressed. She saw that sort of thing practically every day, in her job.

Ash pointed the Pokédex at her again. This time, it beeped and spoke up. "Latias, the Eon Pokémon. Latias' body is covered in a

down that can refract light in such a way that it becomes invisible, Latias is capable of telepathy for communication."

"Well, nothing we didn't know already," Brock commented as Latias returned to her disguise.

Latos gave his sister a teasing glance. "Little machine has better things to say about me." Latias stuck her tongue out at him, making him let out a quick laugh.

Ash grabbed a Pokéball. "Thanks, Latios. I'll put you in your Pokéball for now, that okay?" Latios nodded once. "Return, Latios." A red beam shot from the Pokéball and returned Latios into it. "Let's go to the Gym already!" Ash shouted eagerly, sprinting towards the Gym, leaving the others behind.

"Yeah, he's always like this," Misty said to the puzzled Latias as they began to walk at a more sedate pace.

"You'll get used to it," Brock added. "And, can you tell him he's going the wrong way?" He said, guiding the group to a different turn than the road Ash had eagerly gone along.

Latias let out a merry laugh and quickly relayed the telepathic message to the overeager trainer. A few minutes of walking later, obviously after correcting Ash's course, they reached the Blackthorn City Gym. The group stared in wonder at it. It looked more like a luxury mansion than a Pokémon Gym. It was three stories tall and mostly white with teal and blue-colored ornaments on the doors and windows. Elegant gardens stretched all around the impressive building. A red Pokéball was painted above the door, with a sign that read 'Blackthorn City Gym' located below it.

Ash stared at the imposing building. "This is it. Here we go." He stepped forward and knocked a few times. "Hello! Is somebody here! I'm Ash Ketchum and I'm here to challenge the Gym Leader to a battle!" he shouted loudly. A few seconds passed and no answer came.

Latias walked forward and pushed a small button on the side of the door, making a doorbell ring quite loudly. *"Big houses have doorbells,"* she pointed out at their stares. *"Some knocks don't make enough noise."*

Ash, Misty and Brock face-palmed. "I can't believe we missed that," Brock murmured. Latias giggled in amusement.

The door opened, revealing a short elder with white mustache and hair wearing dark grey clothes. "Hello, my name is Kaburagi." He gazed at the people before him, rapidly analyzing them. "I assume you're trainers and you're here to challenge the Gym?"

Ash nodded eagerly. "Yes, please!" he responded. Latias couldn't help but laugh softly at his contagious enthusiasm.

"Alright, please follow me," the elder said, opening the door for them. Once they had entered, he closed the door and began to lead them to the arena.

"Huh, that was unusually quick," Brock commented, glancing around.

"Yeah, we usually need to have some strange adventure or two and do something involving one of the Gym Leader's Pokémon or personal problems before they're ready for a fight," Misty added, idly playing with Togepi.

"I think that's good," Ash mumbled. "Doubt we have time to do stuff for the Gym Leader before our match."

Kaburagi made no comment regarding the group's chatting, silently leading them to the arena. After leading them through a series of elegantly furnished rooms and hallways, they emerged in an Arena in the back of the mansion. Immediately, Ash's group noted that the arena was clearly much larger than the arenas other gyms featured. There was a large pool that occupied at least half of the entire battlefield, slightly edged towards one side of the battlefield. "This arena's huge..."

"Dragon Pokémon must require a lot of space," Pikachu commented, silently itching to take part in the battle. "This is going to be awesome."

Kaburagi motioned to a large bench on the side. "Guests, please wait over there while I go get the Gym leader. The challenging trainer may take his place on the battlefield," the elder announced, walking away towards a door in the back of the massive room.

Ash took a few deep breaths to calm himself. *'This is it, the last one,'* he thought to himself, doing his best to push out the thoughts that a potential defeat might prove disastrous for his aspiration to qualify for the Johto League.

Pikachu tapped Ash's shoulder, making Ash look at him. "Don't worry, we'll win," the Mouse Pokémon reassured him. "You've got me." Ash smiled and nodded.

"And my brother," Latias added, her tone cheery. *"You'll win, we're all rooting for you."*

The door on the other side of the arena opened, and the Gym Leader entered. She was a woman that seemed in her late twenties with blue hair arranged in two locks that fell at either side of her face, almost like Bianca's, and a large ponytail that flowed out behind her. She wore a very tight blue playsuit that clearly showed her beautiful figure, with a black cape elegantly fanning out behind her. The woman seemed to radiate a powerful and commanding presence. "Greetings," she called, eyes focused on who she quickly identified to be her challenger. "I am Clair, the Blackthorn City Gym Leader!" she announced imposingly.

Instantly, Brock literally had a pair of hearts over his eyes. However, before Brock could do or say anything, Latias grabbed his left arm firmly while Misty grabbed his right arm just as firmly. Misty did so with much more violence than the dragoness, though. "You stay here," both girls said at the same time, one vocally and the other telepathically. A disheartened Brock collapsed in tears.

Ignoring the rather embarrassing display behind him, Ash introduced himself as well. "I am Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town, and I challenge you to a Pokémon Battle!" He pointed dramatically towards Clair.

Clair tilted her head a little. "Aren't you a bit late for that? The Conference starts *very* soon. This gym closes to the public tomorrow, in fact. I honestly wasn't expecting any more challengers to come in."

Ash winced at once again being reminded of his tardiness for the League. "Yeah, I know I'm late. Don't remind me of that... but hey! I have seven badges already. I'm still walking out of here with my eighth badge! Being late doesn't matter as long as I make it to the league."

Clair let a small grin creep to her lips, almost seeming excited at the battle to come. "It goes against the values of a dragon trainer to refuse battles. More so, I can't turn down a challenger with such determination. Very well. I accept your challenge, Ash Ketchum." She smirked, and everyone couldn't help but admit she looked rather fierce when doing so. "Don't expect me to go easy or be merciful just because this is clearly your last chance at qualifying for the league."

"I wouldn't expect any less from a gym leader," Ash responded, his usual confidence returning to him. "Battle as best as you can, because you aren't beating me otherwise." He raised a hand towards his hat and turned it backwards, all while smirking determinately. Latias smiled, enjoying the feeling her empathic powers were picking up from the young trainer. Nothing but strength and confidence.

Clair chuckled lowly, clearly interested in the battle to come. She smiled and motioned to the elderly man beside her to get ready. Kaburagi nodded and walked to the side of the arena where the referee's designated area was painted on the floor and took out a green flag and a red flag, grabbing each flag with a hand. "This is a three-on-three official Pokémon battle for the rights of a Rising Badge. Only the Challenger is allowed substitutions," he announced. "Begin!"

"I'll be making the first move," Clair announced assuredly, grabbing a Pokéball. Her voice dripped with powerful confidence only a dragon trainer could have. Ash and his group couldn't help but admit that the woman was one of the most imposing trainers they'd ever met. "Kingdra! I choose you!" She hurled the Pokéball forwards, directly towards the pool. In a bright flash of light, a very large blue seahorse-like Pokémon appeared, landing in the pool with a large splash. The Pokémon let out a strong, challenging cry at Ash while glaring at him with sharp, red eyes.

"Woah," Ash muttered in surprise, slightly recoiling back at the Kingdra's very intimidating glare. "That Kingdra looks a lot bigger and stronger than the last one I faced," he commented worryingly.

"Definitely," Brock agreed with a nod. "That's one magnificent Kingdra. You aren't beating this one with just your Totodile, like back at the Whirl Islands. That's for sure."

Clair smirked, proud of herself and her trusted Pokémon. "Raising dragons to their true potential is something only few trainers can truly accomplish. Any Trainer can have a dragon, yes, but many will never know how to truly make them as great as they should be. No Kingdra should ever be losing to a Totodile." Kingdra let out a bellowing roar, echoing approval towards Clair's claim.

"Well, that is a cool Kingdra, but, I've got something even better than that." Ash grabbed a Pokéball of his own and threw it into the arena. "Snorlax, come out!" The Pokéball burst open to reveal a cream and teal-colored morbidly obese, vaguely feline Pokémon whose eyes seemed to permanently be squinted. He scratched his stomach, yawned, and looked around lazily. "Get ready, Snorlax, this is going to be a really tough battle!" Ash called, making the Pokémon slowly stand up and adopt a serious stance.

' *Good luck,*' Latias said telepathically, her playful mind voice bright and cheery. Ash turned his head and saw Latias waving at him with a smile. He smiled back, nodded at her, and then returned his attention to the battlefield.

"Kingdra, use Swift!" Clair commanded aggressively. Kingdra immediately began shooting golden-colored star-shaped clusters of energy out of his thin snout directly at Snorlax. The energy stars, despite looking fairly potent as they soared towards Ash's Pokémon, bounced harmlessly against Snorlax's massive stomach, dissipating in showers of yellow sparkles. Snorlax lazily scratched where the stars had hit him. Clair gasped in surprise, it wasn't something common that a Pokémon easily tanked an attack from her prized Kingdra. "Okay, that was unexpected. That belly is so huge Kingdra's attack just bounced off!" Her Kingdra made an annoyed face.

Ash laughed slightly. "Snorlax has very good endurance, you're going to need a lot more than that to beat him!" he declared boldly.

"Oh, yeah?" Clair replied. "We'll see, then. Kingdra, let's up the ante a bit. Hydro Pump!" Kingdra reared his head back and then spat an extremely potent, highly pressured stream of water towards Snorlax.

Ash's eyes widened, that watery blast looked a lot stronger than the Swift attack. He also knew there was no way Snorlax could dodge that in time. "You can take that one too!" he called out. Snorlax braced himself, glaring defiantly at the incoming attack through squinted eyes. The strong projectile of water crashed against him at full force, making him let out a low, angered growl as the water painfully blasted into his belly and arms. However, the attack failed to push him back or make him falter. With a roar, he thrust his arms outwards, pushing the attack away.

"Ha!" Ash exclaimed, smirking at the astonished Clair and Kingdra. "Now, it's *my* turn! Snorlax, use Hyper Beam!" Snorlax looked visibly pleased to leap into the offensive. He opened his mouth and began gathering volatile energy in his mouth, slowly forming a sphere of shining orange light that grew bigger with each passing second.

"Kingdra, counter with your Hydro Pump!" Clair shouted, inwardly delighted that this trainer was posing a very good challenge. Kingdra spat yet another torrent of highly pressurized water at Snorlax. Seeing this, Snorlax released the Hyper Beam with a powerful roar.

Both attacks shot at each other until they crashed over the pool with a massive thundering boom, locking each other in a stalemate for a few seconds. The water in the pool rippled with the sheer force of the collision happening above it, the stalemate continuing to hold until one of the attacks finally gave in. The Hyper Beam vaporized the Hydro Pump, tearing right through it while leaving a cloud of steam in its wake as it soared towards its target. It hit Kingdra hard on the chest, making the Dragon Pokémon let out an agonizing cry as the blast exploded against him.

"Oh, no!" Clair cried out as the stunned Kingdra sank in the water. Seconds of tension passed until she sighed in relief when the damaged Dragon Pokémon emerged moments later. *'I didn't expect that Hyper Beam to be so strong... or that Snorlax for the matter.'* She let out a thoughtful hum when she saw Snorlax panting and keeling over. Perfect reminder that Hyper Beam required a rest every time it was used. *'Now is my chance!'* Clair smirked. "Kingdra, use your own Hyper Beam!" she ordered. Kingdra growled, eager to return the attack he had just taken. He began to gather a sphere orange energy at the tip of his pointed snout.

Ash let out a soft growl, knowing Snorlax wouldn't be able to dodge any attack in time if the exhaustion of using Hyper Beam was added to his size. However, it was then that Ash noticed just how close his Pokémon was to the edge of the pool. He smirked, a quick counterattack already forming in his mind. "Snorlax, quick, dive underwater to cover yourself! Just relax and let your body fall!" Ash commanded quickly, knowing that his Snorlax had learned how to swim at the Orange Islands.

Doing exactly as Ash said, Snorlax relaxed and let his body weight do the rest. He fell forward and crashed into the pool just as Kingdra spat the potent blast of bright orange energy. At least half the water in the pool was displaced when Snorlax hit the water, creating a large splash of water in every direction. The Hyper Beam harmlessly impacted where Snorlax had been, creating a large explosion. "...

Maybe I should have thought that through a little better," Ash said, wringing his hat out. He was sopping wet.

"Yeah, you think?" Pikachu complained, shaking himself out to try and dry himself.

"Nice thinking with the umbrella, Misty," Brock said as Misty closed the Psyduck-themed umbrella she had taken out to shield them from the water.

"Snorlax and pools are a bad combination. I figured we'd need it," Misty said, shrugging. Latias gave her an admiring look.

Clair groaned and ran her fingers through her soggy hair. "And I just got my hair done, too..." she grumbled. Brock did his absolute best to act normal, trying not to make his staring too obvious at the fact that Clair's very tight playsuit was now completely wet, making it cling to her skin even more than it already was.

Snorlax casually stood up, the water now barely reaching his upper chest due to him emptying half of the water in the pool. "Snorlax, use Body Slam!" Ash ordered.

Clair's attention was immediately taken back to the battle as soon as she heard Ash's command. "Dodge that!" she retaliated. Kingdra's eyes widened as Snorlax lunged belly-first right at him. The Dragon Pokémon tried to dodge but wasn't fast enough, and it didn't help that there was just so *much* of Snorlax to try and evade. Snorlax's enormous body loomed over Kingdra, colliding with him in one painful slam as well as smashing the dragon and water-type to the bottom of the pool. Snorlax stood up, a pleased expression on his face as he took several steps back.

A very dazed Kingdra floated up to the surface, panting heavily and glaring at Snorlax through the haze of exhaustion. "Kingdra, let's try Dragon Breath!" she ordered. Kingdra let out a sharp call and then spat a powerful green-colored flaming gust of wind at the Sleeping Pokémon. Snorlax crossed his arms and braced himself. The attack

hit him at full force, and like all of Kingdra's previous attempts, it failed to push the massive Pokémon back. Clair growled in frustration. *'That Snorlax is taking on almost everything I can throw at it...'* she thought, distressed. She, however, knew that all of Kingdra's attacks had to have taken some toll on the normal-type as the battle dragged out.

"Kingdra is almost out, it's time to finish this, Snorlax. Use Ice Punch!" Ash shouted. Snorlax lumbered towards Kingdra, his right fist coating itself in a frosty layer of glowing ice.

"Stop him with Hydro Pump!" Claire shouted. Kingdra spat the forceful water attack at Snorlax, who took the hit head-on and refused to let it stop him. With a roar and a twist of his body, Snorlax pushed the Hydro Pump off him, startling the Kingdra as he kept hulking his way towards him.

Clair gasped. "Hyper Beam!" she called desperately. It was more than obvious that a hit from that would certainly knock out her Kingdra. Kingdra started gathering the energy required for the attack again, but was too slow. Before he could even get halfway through charging the attack, Snorlax roared and punched Kingdra with all his might on his stomach. The Dragon Pokémon let out a screech of pain and was sent flying back through the air. He crashed into the edge of the pool, right in front of Clair, with such force that the stony wall of the pool visibly cracked. Kingdra tried to get back to the fight, struggling to move forward with his entire chest and stomach covered in a thin layer of ice. Despite his efforts, he collapsed into the water, his eyes turned into swirls.

"Kingdra is unable to continue battling!" Kaburagi called, raising the red flag indicating Ash's victory.

"Yes!" Ash cheered happily, pumping a fist into the air. "Great work, Snorlax!" Ash praised with a grin. "Can you keep going?" he asked. Snorlax might have won, but Kingdra had definitely been a formidable opponent. Despite Snorlax tanking all of the Dragon

Pokémon's attacks, Ash knew that tons of damage had to have been dealt during the entire battle. Snorlax was surely exhausted.

"Yes," Snorlax replied lazily, scratching his belly. However, the pants escaping his body were not lost to the trainer and his Pikachu.

"Alright, then keep it up!" Ash replied eagerly. Snorlax blinked in surprise at the exact reply. Had Ash just understood him? He'd have to look into that later... when he wasn't sleeping, of course.

Ash and Snorlax's attention were brought back to the battlefield as Clair called out her second Pokémon. "Gyarados, go!" In a flash of white light emanating from Clair's Pokéball, a huge sea serpent Pokémon appeared in the pool, growling menacingly at Ash and Snorlax. The gigantic Pokémon occupied most of the pool, easily displacing a good chunk of the water with his appearance. *'Taking down my Gyarados is going to be a real challenge, let's see how you react to this, Ash,'* Clair thought to herself, smirking.

In the bench on the sidelines, Misty gulped. She did not like Gyarados at all. Latias clearly looked worried, looking between the tired Snorlax and the massive Gyarados. *"You can take that one down too, Ash,"* Latias said reassuringly in Ash's mind, earning a quick smile from him.

"Congratulations on defeating Kingdra," Clair began, chuckling slightly. "Let's see how you handle challenge number two. The first move is yours."

Ash narrowed his eyes warily, but decided to take Clair's offer. "Snorlax, use Hyper Beam," he called out. Snorlax nodded and opened his mouth, slowly starting to charge the powerful attack.

"Gyarados, use Dragon Rage," Clair said calmly. With great speed, the Atrocious Pokémon gathered a red-colored flaming sphere of windy energy in his mouth, firing it with such speed that it hit Snorlax head on before he could finish the Hyper Beam, knocking him back

from the resulting blast and causing the energy he had gathered to dispel.

Ash gasped. *'That attack was fast, Snorlax didn't even finish his Hyper Beam!'* he thought in shock.

"Surf!" Clair ordered. Gyarados made a potent swipe with his tail across the water, sending what was left of it towards Snorlax in the form of a small tsunami.

"Hang in there, use Ice Punch!" Ash countered. Snorlax roared and thrust his ice-covered fist at the incoming wave, freezing most of it and creating an ice wall separating both Pokémon from each other. With that, most of the water in the pool had disappeared.

"Ice Punch that ice wall," Ash commanded, getting an idea to turn Gyarados' Surf against it. Snorlax reared his fist back as it was coated in ice once more before thrusting it into the ice wall with all his might, shattering it into thousands of pieces that rained down on Gyarados like ice daggers. The much larger Pokémon cried in pain as he was hit all over by the ice storm.

"Quick! Finish this with Hyper Beam!" Ash shouted excitedly. It looked like he was really going to knock out two of Clair's Pokémon with just one of his own!

"Iron Tail, go!" Clair responded rapidly. Gyarados let out a deafening roar of rage as his tail was coated in a white metallic sheen, hardening considerably. Using his size to his advantage in terms of reach, the Atrocious Pokémon was able to swing his tail and crash it into Snorlax fast enough to yet again interrupt another Hyper Beam. The sheer power behind the swing of Gyarados' massive tail was potent enough to send Snorlax tumbling outside the pool, landing a dozen feet in front of Ash, unconscious.

Pikachu blinked. "Wow, he flung Snorlax out of the pool. That is some power right there," he commented.

"Snorlax is unable to battle. The match is tied with both trainers down to two Pokémon," Kaburagi said, raising his green flag to signal Clair's victory.

Ash growled slightly as he returned Snorlax back into the Pokéball. "Thanks a lot, Snorlax. You were fantastic. You deserve a good, long rest," he whispered to the Pokéball.

Pikachu snorted in amusement. "He's totally gonna take you up on that offer. Don't expect him to be awake for days," he said, laughing slightly. Ash chuckled, also finding himself amused by the comment.

"Very clever strategy," Brock noted. "Clair always made sure to prevent Snorlax from getting off any Hyper Beams, that way she made sure Gyarados took the least damage possible."

Misty nodded in agreement. "However, Snorlax was still able to damage Gyarados somewhat. Ash's next Pokémon needs to knock it out. If these two are Clair's opening Pokémon, I don't want to imagine how powerful her final Pokémon is."

Brock smiled. "Ash's final Pokémon will be just as good."

" *You can do it Ash, beat that Gyarados!*" Latias cheered happily, telepathically relaying her cheers directly at Ash.

Ash smiled at the support before getting back to choosing his best option to take on the Gyarados. Ash knew that Pikachu was his absolute best choice, since he would have a double advantage against a water and flying-type. Plus, he was positively sure Pikachu was dying to take part in the battle. "Alright. Pikachu, you're next, buddy," Ash said to the small mouse on his shoulder. Pikachu nodded and charged at the field while letting his cheeks release quick sparkles of electricity, clearly eager to battle.

Clair frowned at the sight of the electric-type entering the battlefield. ' *This is bad, an electric-type has a massive advantage over my Gyarados. Due to the nature of this gym being renowned as a*

Dragon-type gym, electric-types are supposed to be rarity among the trainers that challenge me,' she thought, narrowing her eyes. She knew she had to keep Gyarados away from any electrical attacks at all costs.

"Pikachu, use Thunderbolt!" Ash ordered with fresh confidence in his voice, pointing dramatically towards Gyarados.

"Right!" Pikachu said as his cheeks started sparking even more violently than when he entered the arena. With a mighty cry he shot a large, bright yellow electrical current at Gyarados.

"Use Dragon Rage, Gyarados!" Clair ordered. *'I need to keep Gyarados a safe distance away, the farther he is, the more time we have to react to electrical attacks.'* Gyarados took a deep breath and exhaled a large spherical blast of flaming red energy at the incoming electrical attack. Surprisingly, the electricity was deflected by the Dragon Rage, just like Clair had planned. The attack hit the ground in front of Pikachu and sent him flying backwards from the resulting explosion. Pikachu recovered as quickly as he could while midair, expertly landing on his four paws. Slight puffs of smoke were raising from singed parts of his fur. Pikachu was well reminded of how powerful Gyarados were, and he couldn't lose sight of that.

"Hydro Pump!" Clair ordered, crossing her arms. Her gaze seemed far more analytical and careful than when she had been commanding Kingdra. It was clear she was being extremely cautious about Pikachu's type advantage.

"Let's get close, Pikachu! Use Agility!" Ash responded rapidly. Gyarados roared and shot a gigantic stream of pressurized water at Pikachu. Ash immediately noted that his Hydro Pump seemed a lot stronger than Kingdra's had been. "Be careful, buddy!"

"I will be!" Pikachu replied as he dropped on all fours. With a powerful sprint he dashed to the side, streaks of white being left in his wake from the speed he had moved. He managed to outmaneuver the water blast, getting out of the way in time.

Clair let out a low growl of annoyance. "Keep the Hydro pumps going, Gyarados. Push Pikachu away!" Gyarados roared in response, firing yet another Hydro Pump attack at where he could see Pikachu was heading. However, the Mouse Pokémon was way too fast for Gyarados' slower attacks. Torrent after torrent of highly pressurized water was wasted, impacting the arena's floor harmlessly.

Ash smirked once Pikachu had gotten close enough to Gyarados. "Use Thunder!" he ordered, his voice taking a triumphant tone as he did so. Pikachu suddenly took a sharp turn, dodging yet another Hydro Pump while he did so, and leaped towards Gyarados. Like Ash, the electric-type was smirked, cheeks sparkling furiously in preparation for the attack to come.

"Quick, move backwards and use Twister," Clair ordered sharply. Gyarados complied with the command instantly, using the coils of his gigantic body to move out of the pool and backwards. As he did so, he spat a massive gale of green-tinted, crackling wind towards the airborne Pikachu.

Pikachu's eyes widened as the blast of wind crashed into him, making him cry out in pain as he was violently flung backwards. His electrical attack broken, he crashed into the Gym's floor harshly. "Pikachu!" Ash shouted, concerned. "Are you okay!?"

"Y-yeah, I'll be fine," Pikachu responded as he slowly struggled to stand.

Clair smirked. "His electrical attacks won't be of much use if he can't use them."

Ash's fist tightened in frustration, silently acknowledging that Clair was right. *'I need to find a way to make the electricity actually reach Gyarados. Running at him is no good due to Twister, and launching the electricity from far away is no good either thanks to Dragon Rage. There has to be a way...'* Ash thought, carefully thinking for an

idea. It was then that he noticed an important thing. He smirked. "Gyarados sure put up a good fight. But he lost."

Clair blinked once, perplexed. "How so? We are not letting any electricity get to him."

Latias grinned, picking up Ash's idea. "*That's brilliant!*" she echoed in everyone's heads.

Brock turned to look at her. "What?"

"*Just wait and see,*" Latias replied.

"Look all around, Clair. You were too carefree with attacking Pikachu with Hydro Pump," Ash began, chuckling. "Water."

Clair did as Ash said, and her eyes widened when she realized what he meant. Throughout the time she had ordered Gyarados to keep attacking Pikachu with constant Hydro Pumps, she had effectively coated the entire battlefield in water. Even the arena's pool was already half-way full from the water flowing into it from the wet floor. Most importantly, Gyarados himself was damp from his battle with Snorlax in the pool. It was then she realized that she had sealed Gyarados' defeat.

"Thunder!" Ash declared victoriously. Pikachu let out a triumphant cry as his cheeks began sparkling violently. His cry echoed mightily as he released a massive blast of yellow electricity upwards. As soon as he released the attack, the water he was in contact with on the floor conducted the electricity from his body in every direction, rapidly finding its way to Gyarados. The Atrocious Pokémon roared in pain as the electrical attack shocked him. However, the worst was yet to come. Unable to move due to already being electrocuted, he was unable to defend himself from the incoming Thunder attack Pikachu had released, which made an overhead arch before descending down on the hapless Gyarados. The water and flying-type let out a roaring cry of pain as the even stronger electrical attack coursed through his body.

Clair looked clearly baffled at the sheer power of the attack. *'That's one well-trained Pikachu.'* The electricity died down as Gyarados collapsed, the damage he had previously taken from Snorlax making Pikachu's attack become a clean one-hit knock out. Gyarados crashed with a slight tremor onto the battlefield, completely unconscious.

"Gyarados is unable to battle!" the referee called, raising the red flag again. "The gym leader is now down to her final Pokémon."

"Yes!" Ash shouted, pumping a fist in the air. "Just one more and the badge is ours! Way to go, Pikachu!"

Pikachu turned to look at him and grinned. "Don't worry. I'll take her last Pokémon out as well." He was panting slightly, using an electrical attack of that caliber had taken a massive amount of energy out of him on top of the damage Gyarados had managed to inflict on him.

Clair returned Gyarados to his Pokéball before turning to look at Ash. She suddenly smiled, taking the young trainer off-guard. She raised her hands and to his surprise, she began clapping slowly. "That Pikachu is *very* well trained, and so was that Snorlax," she admitted, praising Ash. "Congratulations. You raise your Pokémon well and you have proven to be a worthy challenger of my gym. I did not expect such a rich encounter from someone so late to register for the league. However, your next trial will be harder than Kingdra and Gyarados *combined* . Let's see if you are fully worthy of receiving the Rising badge."

Latias gulped. *"What can be stronger than her two previous Pokémon put together?"* she asked worriedly, looking at Brock and Misty. *"They were pretty tough."*

Ash couldn't help but echo Latias' thoughts. "What's next?" he asked, briefly glancing back at Misty and Brock.

"A Dragon," Misty replied slowly. "The one reason the Blackthorn Gym is recognized as the toughest gym in all of Kanto *and* Johto."

Clair smirked. "I'd expect Cerulean and Pewter City's former Gym leaders to know as much." She grabbed her final Pokéball.

"Dragonair, go!" She daintily tossed the Pokéball towards the battlefield. Ash watched as the Pokéball opened up in a flash of bright light and released the Pokémon it contained. A very large, long and slender serpentine Pokémon appeared before them. She had glossy blue scales, with white scales on her underside. A white horn adorned the top of her head while a large blue jewel-like sphere rested on her neck. Two similar orbs ornamented the tip of her tail as well. She had a pair of small, white, fluffy wings on the sides of her head that spread out as she opened her violet-colored eyes. The Pokémon elegantly soared down to the pool, letting out a beautiful greeting cry that resonated all over the arena as she did so.

" *Wow, she's really pretty,*" Latias commented.

"And really powerful," Brock added. "She is Clair's pride and joy, even when she was just a Dratini. This match will not be easy for Ash or his remaining Pokémon."

Ash's eyes widened in alarm. "Oh... no." He knew from experience that *any* Pokémon in the Dratini evolutionary line was bound to be a very powerful opponent. His thoughts drifted to his battle on Pummelo Island and Drake's Dragonite, recalling how it took the combined efforts of Charizard, Tauros, Squirtle and Pikachu to defeat him.

" *Dragonair aren't as powerful as Dragonite, though,*" Latias said in his mind, sensing his trail of worried thoughts. "*It'll be a tough battle still.*"

' *Yeah, thanks, Latias, we'll do our best,*' Ash thought, knowing she'd pick up the thoughts. "Pikachu!" he called to get the Mouse Pokémon's attention. "Can you keep going?" he asked.

Pikachu nodded fiercely. "I just took a couple attacks and did one Thunder, Ash. Of course I can keep going!" he replied, cheeks sparkling to show his readiness. Ash turned and nodded to the referee, signaling him that Pikachu was going to keep fighting.

Latias was impressed with Pikachu. Every time the electric-type's strength was put to test, he never disappointed. Even if it was against Latios. *"I don't know what's stronger. Pikachu's skill or his determination."*

"I'd say both are pretty powerful," Misty responded, one of her hands idly playing with Togepi to entertain her. "This will be an amazing match."

Ash decided to let Clair move first. He knew charging head on against a Dragonair was not a very good idea. Starting conservative seemed like a good approach. "Get ready for anything, Pikachu," he advised.

"Let's start strong, Dragonair, use Twister!" Clair shouted eagerly. She was very curious as to how Ash would deal with her most trusted Pokémon. Dragonair's neck sphere began shining in a blue light, draconic power coursing through her body. Dragonair opened her maw and shot a tremendously potent cyclone directly at Pikachu.

Ash's eyes widened. That attack seemed on a whole other level than Gyarados' had been. "Dodge with Quick Attack and then use Thunderbolt!" he countered. Pikachu began running at impressive speeds, getting out of range of the twister as fast as he could. He winced, despite successfully evading the cyclone, he felt the sting of the raging winds on his body. Recovering quickly, Pikachu fired a lightning bolt directly at Dragonair.

"Dodge that," Clair responded calmly. Dragonair twisted out of the way in one fluid and elegant motion. Her long and slender body made it easy to dodge the electric attack.

"Keep up the electric attacks!" Ash ordered, hoping Pikachu could manage to land an attack if he kept the offensive pressure against Clair and Dragonair.

"Alright!" Pikachu answered back. Cheeks sparkling furiously, the Mouse Pokémon fired another Thunderbolt. Dragonair calmly made a spiraling motion with her body, letting the attack harmlessly fly through the coils of her body. Pikachu growled and kept firing as many lightning bolts as he could, but Dragonair kept turning, coiling and twisting out of the way, almost dancing between the electrical attacks.

"She looks really gorgeous while doing that," Misty commented, awed at the Dragonair's display of skill.

"Yeah, I agree. Even if that is rather bad for Ash at the moment," Brock said. "Pikachu will run out of strength fast at this rate."

Latias frowned, watching the battle without missing a beat. *"If she does beat Pikachu, can my brother beat her?"*

"I hope so..." Misty responded quietly.

"Use Iron Tail!" Clair called. During one of her graceful dodges of Pikachu's attacks, the serpentine dragon started charging the attack. Her tail hardened to iron levels, glowing a solid white color. With a sharp turn she eluded yet another lightning bolt from Pikachu while using the dodge's momentum to also get dangerously close to the surprised electric-type Pokémon. Before the mouse could react or try to unleash another electrical attack, Dragonair swung her tail in a wide arc with unbelievable strength, smashing it into Pikachu with such force that it sent him flying across the arena until he crashed into one of the walls of the room with a sharp cry of pain.

"Pikachu!" Ash cried out concerned. "Hang in there!" he shouted as Pikachu crashed onto the floor with a thud.

Brock's face reflected clear worry. "Dragonair is too skillful at dodging. Pikachu isn't landing any attacks from a distance. Ash and Pikachu can't rely on that."

"This Dragonair was powerful even from her Dratini days," Misty muttered. "Evolution certainly added a whole new level of power to her."

Brock nodded in agreement. "I didn't expect Clair's Dragonair to be so powerful..."

" *Don't sound too worried,*" Latias chided them, her voice reflecting pure optimism. *"I trust Ash and Latios to get this. And Pikachu too, of course."*

Pikachu growled defiantly, slowly standing up. His side was stinging painfully from the potent blow Dragonair had delivered, and he felt exhaustion spreading through his entire body. "I'm... fine..." he said, slowly making his way back to the battlefield.

Dragonair tilted her head, impressed with the electric-type's endurance and determination. She gave him a small nod of acknowledgement. "My respect to you."

Clair smirked. "Dragonair, Hyper Beam." Dragonair's neck jewel began to shine brightly as she opened her maw, a sphere of volatile orange energy beginning to form in it.

Ash narrowed his eyes, thinking hard for a solution. *'I can't order an electrical attack because Dragonair will just casually dodge it...'* His eyes widened, remembering what he had done to the only other member of the Dratini evolutionary line he had faced beforehand. *'That's it, how I beat Drake's Dragonite...'* He smirked.

Clair blinked, seeing Ash's smirk. "You're in no position to be smiling like that."

"We'll see, Pikachu, use Agility! Get on top of Dragonair!" Ash ordered. Pikachu smirked, getting Ash's idea. With all the strength he could muster, he got on all fours and then sprinted towards Dragonair.

"I don't like whatever they're planning... Dragonair, fire!" Clair shouted. Dragonair let out a blazing cry and then released all the pent up energy in the shape of a powerful orange and yellow-colored beam. At the very last second, Pikachu seemed to disappear due to the speed he was running at, dodging the beam just as it collided in the floor with a large explosion.

Dragonair lost sight of Pikachu in the wake of the blast for a critical split second, and gasped when she felt Pikachu running up the length of her body. She brought her tail up, slapping her body on the general area she felt Pikachu was running at, but missed due to the Mouse Pokémon's speed. Then, she felt a weight on her head as Pikachu landed on it.

Dragonair was massive in size, with Pikachu's entire body being smaller than her head. The electric-type grabbed each of the small, fluffy wings on her head to hold on tight. Dragonair, panicked, began to shake her head and thrash about, trying to get him off. "Dragonair, use your tail!" Clair shouted. Dragonair mentally smacked herself for not thinking of using her tail again, and quickly brought her tail towards her head to use it pry Pikachu off.

"Pikachu, use Thunder!" Ash shouted at the top of his voice. Pikachu's cheeks began to sparkle violently as he began to muster every bit of electrical energy he had left. Just as Dragonair's tail coiled around his midsection to pull him off, he let out a roar and unleashed the most potent Thunder attack he had ever done. A massive pillar of intense yellow electricity rose from the Dragon Pokémon, forcing everyone to cover their eyes from the sheer brightness of the attack. Dragonair's shrill screech of pain was the only sound audible over the roar of the electricity. Even with a type resistance shielding her, the sheer potency of Pikachu's attack was still highly damaging.

"Dragonair!" Clair shouted after what seemed like an eternity of time, voice filled with concern, as the electrical attack slowly died down. With the attack over, Pikachu's grip on Dragonair's wings weakened, making him slowly slide off from Dragonair's head. He fell and landed on the arena's floor with a light thud. Having spent every single last bit of energy in his body in that last attack, he had lost consciousness as soon as it was over. Dragonair reeled back, arches of electricity still curving across her body in the clear signal of paralysis. She winced as pain still rattled her body, she had never expected to take such a heavy hit from a type she had a resistance to.

"Pikachu is unable to continue battling," Kaburagi said slowly while raising the corresponding flag, looking slightly confused as to why the attacker was the one knocked out.

Ash quickly ran to where the mouse had landed. "Are you okay, buddy?" he asked while gently scooping the electric rodent up in his arms. Pikachu mumbled something incoherent and remained unmoving. "It's alright, you were amazing." Ash smiled and walked towards Brock and handed Pikachu to him. As he walked back to his area, his eyes focused on Dragonair. He immediately noted how, despite taking a gigantic hit from Pikachu, she still looked strong and wasn't panting. "That Dragonair is very strong, Clair!" Ash complimented as he grabbed the Pokéball that contained his last Pokémon. *'That last Thunder had to have done tons of damage. Hopefully enough so that Latios can clean this battle up.'*

Clair hummed, nodding once in response. "Your Pikachu is truly something else. I never thought a Pikachu would be so troublesome. Now, you are down to your last Pokémon, and I regret to tell you, you are not winning," she declared boldly, fully trusting her Dragonair to still be capable of downing another Pokémon despite the hits taken. "I eagerly await your last Pokémon," she added, thoroughly impressed with the challenge Ash was presenting her with. Dragonair let out a taunting cry to back her trainer up. Dragonair's serpentine body began glowing a pale hue of gray light as her Shed

Skin ability activated, instantly curing her of the paralysis the Thunder attack had inflicted on her.

Ash took a deep breath, thinking of the many battles he's had with Latios in the past days against random trainers. Sure, none of them compared to Clair one bit, but they were all he had as experience. *'It's all up to you, Latios...'*

Clair looked at him confused, wondering why he was taking such a long pause. "Go on, we are ready to face your last Pokémon, challenger," she said confidently.

' Oh, you totally are not,' Latias thought while trying very hard to suppress amused giggles.

Clair crossed her arms, a teasing smile forming on her lips. "Or, are you ready to call it quits after seeing my Dragonair's might?"

"Me? Give up? Never!" Ash replied. "In fact, it's you who should think about giving up and handing me over *my* gym badge. Get ready, because here we come!" he said boldly, throwing his last Pokéball forward. "Go!" he shouted. Light illuminated the arena as the blue Eon Dragon was released from the confines of the Pokéball and appeared on the field.

Immediately after the light had cleared and let them see the Pokémon Ash had released clearly, both Clair and Dragonair froze in complete shock. Brock and Misty had to hold back a laugh at their faces. Latias was unable to, and merrily burst out laughing. Once she had partly recovered from the shock, Clair gasped loudly. *'That's... one of the Legendary Eon Dragons!'* she thought in pure surprise. Never had she expected an apparently ordinary Pokémon trainer to suddenly come to her gym carrying a *Legendary Dragon* of all Pokémon on his team. Much less a trainer as young as the kid before her.

Latias grinned widely. *"You cause quite the impression, brother,"* she said, giggling softly. *"Very amusing."*

" *Seems like I do,*" Latios agreed, holding back chuckles of his own at Clair and Dragonair's reactions to his presence. "*This is hilarious.*"

"How... did you...?" Clair asked slowly, struggling to find her voice amid the shock. "How is it that you have a *Latios*?" she questioned, her voice slightly demanding. "How!?"

Ash's group were mildly surprised at the fact that Clair knew what Latios was. She was the first trainer to recognize him out of all the trainers Ash had battled on his way to Blackthorn City. Ash was the one to speak up to answer Clair's question. "I met Latios at Alto Mare, befriended him after... uh... an adventure? Yeah, an adventure, and he decided to come along with me. I didn't really have to fight him to capture him. It was all friendship."

Clair nodded slowly, contemplating that. She knew that Alto Mare was a city that had heavy lore regarding the Legendary Eon Dragons. She had once gone on a week-long trip along with her cousin, Lance, to Alto Mare to see if they could find the Legendary Eon Dragons. However, they had been unsuccessful. "That's a very honorable way to catch a Legendary Pokémon," she remarked approvingly.

"You certainly know a lot about dragons if you can recognize a Dragon as rare as him," Ash commented, curious about the matter. "All the trainers I've battled were unable to tell what he was."

"Blackthorn City has always been, historically, a city associated extensively with the dragon-type. There's holy shrines, ancient texts, folklore and all kinds of artifacts and items as a result of this city's ancient draconic roots. For generations, my family has kept track of all that and made sure to keep the knowledge alive," Clair responded. "I know of many other Legendary Dragons thanks to all that. But, never had I expected to actually *meet* one." The woman let out a low hum, carefully examining Latios.

"That sounds... rather cool," Ash said, slightly saddened by the fact he had no time to hang around Blackthorn City a few more days to

see what Clair was talking about.

"Well, all I have to say is that, I am honored to meet him," Clair said, bowing down.

"It is a great honor to meet you," Dragonair said respectfully, echoing her trainer's action by bowing her head down to the legendary dragon. Latios blushed in embarrassment, feeling awkward at the show of reverence from both of them. Dragonair tilted her head, slightly bemused at his reaction.

"This will be an amazing battle," Clair muttered excitedly. "... If we don't lose fast, that is," she mumbled afterwards. Throughout the historical texts and many tales of ancient lore in her possession, she had an inkling of just how powerful Legendary dragons were. Latios was frightening.

Dragonair turned her head to look at her trainer. "He's young."

Latios gulped. "Uh-oh..."

Clair blinked. "Really? He's... quite large. I thought he'd be an adult. Are you sure?"

Dragonair nodded. "He's quite young, actually. I can see it in him. His scent backs it up. He looks and smells like youngsters do, like someone who is still growing and in development. Trust me, I can tell."

"That's interesting... How long have you had him? How strong is he?" Clair asked curiously, shifting her gaze between Latios and Ash repeatedly.

' *Wow, she understood her Dragonair...* ' Ash thought in surprise. Clair just kept getting cooler every moment. Ash scratched the back of his head mareepishly. "Actually, he's just starting out on battles," he answered. Dragonair had completely looked through them, there was no point in hiding anything. "This will be his first Gym battle. I

befriended him about two weeks ago, I think, barely," he added, with Latios nodding once to back up his answer. "About one week is all the battle experience he's got."

Latios let out a nervous chuckle when Dragonair's knowing look settled on him. *"She totally got you,"* Latias said in his mind, which Latios replied in a positive manner.

"There goes any hope I could maybe get an easy win out of pure legendary intimidation," Latios responded.

Clair nodded, acknowledging his answer. Though, there were still hints of surprise on her features. *'Well, he's not going to be overwhelmingly powerful, then. The stories I have of a Latios' power are... scary, to say the least,'* she noted, idly thinking to herself. *'So, he's young... this brings a lot of questions...'*

"Don't think that means he doesn't have what it takes to finish this battle!" Ash added, seeing Clair in thoughtful silence. "We're walking out of here with a badge!"

Clair admitted that the boy's enthusiasm was catchy. "Well, we've got a gym battle to continue, then," she said, looking surprisingly eager to face the Legendary Dragon. "You're in possession of a young and inexperienced Latios that you haven't had for long, then. Just as a suggestion I can give as an expert Dragon trainer, don't think that having a Legendary Pokémon makes you invincible. Don't let Latios make you overconfident. He clearly has a long way to go."

Ash blinked once, but then nodded after thinking over her advice several times. "Thanks."

"Very good advice," Brock said, showing his approval.

"Yeah," Misty agreed. "But, knowing Ash, we'll have to wait and see if he'll actually put it in practice."

Dragonair let out a soft, humming noise. "Don't expect me to go easy on you just because you're starting out," she said, just as eager to face him as her trainer. "The best way to gain experience in battles is the hard way." Latios remained silent but accepted her with a nod, completely focused on his first major battle.

" *You can do it, brother! You too, Ash!*" Latias' excited telepathic voice ringed inside both Latios' and Ash's minds.

"This match deserves something special," Kaburagi called, walking to a control panel behind him. He pulled down a lever and, as soon as he did so, the entire arena started shaking. Suddenly, the entire roof of the Gym started sliding to the sides with a distinct mechanical sound, parting from exactly the middle. Ash and Latios looked up as the open sky was revealed above them. "Now, both Pokémon can maneuver properly in the open without a roof confining them," he announced.

" *That's kind of neat. And, quite good for me, actually,*" Latios said, looking at the now opened room.

" *Yeah,*" Latias agreed. *"It'll let your speed be used more freely."*

"Impressive," Misty muttered, having been previously unaware that the Blackthorn Gym hid such a mechanism in it.

Clair didn't pay much mind to it, already accustomed to it. Instead, she was completely concentrated on the battle ahead of her. "Last round of the match for the Rising Badge, Latios against Dragonair, begin!" the referee shouted, expecting nothing less than a great battle between the two Dragons.

"Latios, use Dragon Breath!" Ash called rapidly, taking the initiative of the battle. He hoped to catch Clair off-guard by starting out swiftly and on the offensive, contrary to what he had decided to do with Pikachu. Latios took a deep breath and then fired a potent green-colored stream of flaming wind from his mouth.

"Dragonair, shield yourself with the pool," Clair responded. Dragonair moved back, rapidly submerging herself underwater in the pool. Latios' Dragon Breath attack collided with the surface of the pool, causing steam to rise from it. But, other than that, the attack was completely harmless. "Now, use Twister!" Clair commanded. Dragonair's neck sphere began shining brightly, creating a halo of light within the pool. The water around her began spiraling before suddenly launching itself skywards in the form of a potent, raging tornado that was aimed directly at the airborne Eon Pokémon.

"Woah," Misty said, eyeing the water-infused draconic attack with awe. "That would make a water-type jealous." Latias idly nodded in agreement.

"Dragonair is no doubt powerful..." Brock muttered, worried. "Latios and Ash might have taken a bite larger than they can handle. Let's hope Latios' speed and raw power can help him win."

"Fly up as fast as you can, get out of that twister's range!" Ash commanded. Latios tucked his forepaws to his body and sped toward the sky, getting out of reach of the twister nearly instantly.

Clair's eyes widened in surprise. *'So, the tales of a Latios' speed are true. That was hard to keep track of.'*

"Now that's what I call fast!" Ash praised, grinning.

"Let's see if he's better at dodging a much faster attack, then. Dragonair, use Hyper Beam!" Clair commanded. Dragonair's head and neck poked out of the water. She let out a humming cry as she opened her mouth, a sphere of orange energy forming in it. The orb in her neck began glowing brightly as the energy in her mouth grew in power. Once she was done charging the attack, Dragonair fired it in the form of a long, yellow and orange-colored beam of pure explosive energy.

"Latios, dodge that as well!" Ash countered. Latios did as he was told, and quickly moved out of the way in a single fluid motion of his

streamlined body. The beam passed by the spot he had been without causing any harm, continuing its way into the sky until it dissipated into nothingness.

Clair growled, her fists tightening in annoyance. "Dragonair, fly up and onto the open!" she ordered. *'Latios' speed means I won't be able to hit him from long range. He'll just dodge everything that is thrown his way. Dragonair will need to fight close to him.'* Dragonair took a deep breath to recover her energy from her usage of Hyper Beam and then burst from the water, flying quickly towards Latios.

"Dragon Rage!" Clair called out. Dragonair growled as draconic energy began surging through her body. She opened her maw and spat a large, flaming ball of bright draconic energy at the other dragon.

"Dodge and use Psychic!" Ash shouted, full of confidence from the progress of the battle. Latios' evasion capabilities were far better than he had expected. Once again Latios dodged at amazing speeds, easily avoiding the attack sent his way. By the time the Dragon Rage reached where Latios had been, he was long gone.

Latios' eyes began to glow, gathering his psychic power. Dragonair let out a gasp as she felt her body freeze in place, a blue aura tightly surrounding her. She then cried out in pain once the psychic power began to mercilessly attack her body. Dragonair was then forcefully dragged from the air down and smashed into the Gym's floor harshly. "Dragonair!" Clair cried out in concern. She had clearly heard the sound of the gym's arena cracking under the force of the impact.

"I'm... fine," Dragonair snarled, rising from the cloud of dust her impact had generated. Clair let out a sign of relief and looked up, eyeing Latios analytically. He was a very complicated Pokémon to battle against.

"Latios, in the sky you have the advantage, so stay there!" Ash shouted to the Eon Pokémon. Ash was confident that as long as

Latios stayed out of range of Dragonair's attacks and kept dodging, he was going to be fine.

"Dragonair, use Shock Wave!" Clair commanded. She knew Shock Wave was weak attack in power, but it was also highly accurate. For the time being, she was fine with the idea of sacrificing power for precision. Arches of electricity danced around Dragonair's horn for a moment before she let loose an extremely fast electrical bolt from her horn.

Ash smirked. "Dodge again!" Latios moved out of the way at Ash's command as fast as he could. However, much to trainer and Pokémon's surprise, the new attack fired his way seemed to shift in Latios' direction as it flew towards him. The attack was also fast enough that it reached him before he had managed to move a far enough to evade its homing capabilities. With his evasion skills beaten, the bolt collided against Latios and lightly shocked him. The dragon and psychic-type winced as the electricity coursed through his body, his lone consolation being that Pikachu zapped much harder during sparring matches.

"What!?" Ash cried out in surprise. "Why did that hit Latios? He moved out of the way!"

"Ash, Shock Wave is an attack that never misses its target. It's too fast and accurate for Latios to evade in time," Brock clarified to Ash.

Latios felt like mentally smacking himself. He had completely forgotten how Shock Wave worked. "Well, I can't dodge that..." he muttered. "Thankfully, it's something I don't care being hit with. It doesn't do enough."

"*Yeah, it's not a powerful move, you should be okay,*" Latias agreed telepathically in his mind. "*Come on, win this one!*"

"*I'm working on that, sis,*" Latios responded.

' *The issue isn't having enough power to take out Latios, it's finding a way to make the attacks hit him through his speed,*' Clair thought to herself, humming slightly. Thinking on how Shock Wave had worked, an elaborate idea began forming in her mind. "Dragonair, fly towards Latios as fast as you can and attack him with Shock Wave again!" Clair directed. Dragonair let out a fierce battle cry and, using her coils, bolted up at a surprising speed. As she flew towards the Eon dragon, another bolt of rapid electricity was fired from her horn.

"If we can't dodge that, let's just shield from it. Latios, use Psychic to defend yourself!" Ash ordered. Latios' eyes glowed as he tried to use his psychic powers to catch the Shock Wave in midair. However, he found that the attack was traveling too fast for him to get a solid psychic grip on. Slightly panicked, he opted for the next best thing. His eyes glowed even brighter as he concentrated his psychic powers in an even stronger fashion, creating a makeshift shield of raw psychic power in front of him. The bolt collided against the shield and deflected in many directions, unable to pass through it.

Clair laughed loudly. "We got him! Dragonair, use Wrap!" she added, a triumphant air surrounding her voice.

Latios' eyes widened when he noticed that Dragonair was already upon him, realizing Clair's plan. '*The Shock Wave wasn't meant to do damage to me, it was a distraction to keep me still so they could catch me, no!*' Instinctually, Latios tried to move out of the way just as Dragonair caught up to him. To his dismay, however, his large size made it easier for her to latch onto him. She arched her body, sending her tail in the direction Latios had moved to. Her tail managed to coil around the base of one of his wings and, using that as leverage, the dragoness rapidly coiled the entirety of her body around the legendary dragon. To add to Latios' woes, despite his large size, Dragonair was even larger. Her body was more than long enough to nearly hide the entirety of his own underneath her coils, with just his wings and head visible under her body.

Dragonair smirked, her head inches from Latios' head, as she looked straight into his bright red eyes. "Let's see you fly your way out of

this one," she taunted. After a small, snarling chuckle, she squeezed. *Hard* .

Latios let out a loud, agonizing cry when Dragonair's powerful muscles began to work on painfully constricting him. He never thought she'd be *this* strong. It was like her body was made of steel! Whenever he thought she couldn't constrict any tighter, she seemed to double the strength she was compressing him with. Latios' cry was suddenly silenced when he found he couldn't breathe, panic overtaking the young battler.

"Bring him down," Clair said calmly. Dragonair's constricting was so powerful that Latios' concentration completely collapsed, breaking his levitation. With his ability to levitate gone for the moment, Dragonair had no trouble making both of them plummet downwards. Just before they crashed, the Dragon Pokémon rapidly uncoiled from him and used her tail to hurl him down to further increase the force and speed at which he was going to crash.

The arena's floor completely cracked open, sending a small tremor across the room and a large cloud of rising dust in the wake of Latios' impact. Latias gasped, clasping her hands over her human illusion's mouth, completely silent. "Latios!" Ash cried out in worry as Dragonair's slender body slowly rose from the billowing cloud of dust.

"Iron Tail," Clair spoke again, her voice once again eerily calm. It felt as if she had perpetual control of the battle. Dragonair raised her tail just as it began to shine in a solid shade of white, hardening to iron.

"I know you can keep going, Latios!" Ash encouraged. "Stop her with Psychic!" Dragonair descended from her position above the Eon Pokémon, swinging her tail down with all her might into the prone form of Latios. However, before she could reach him, her body was surrounded in a faint aura of blue light, stopping right where it was. She then cried out as a fresh wave of pain crashed onto her, the powerful psychic energies hurting and causing damage to her body and making her Iron Tail attack fade away. Latios, wincing and

panting from the painful impact, a trickle of blood emanating from his mouth, opened his eyes to reveal them glowing brightly. Slowly, he began to activate his levitation to rise from the rubble he had been almost buried on.

"Oh no, you don't! Show him that no psychic attack can stop you!" Clair shouted tensely. Dragonair growled loudly, her body beginning to tremble as she resisted the psychic forces pressing against her body.

Latos gasped as he felt Dragonair fighting his psychic hold on her. He winced and concentrated as much of his psychic power as he could on her, trying to keep her under control. "You... are... not... getting... any... further..." Latos spoke through gritted teeth.

Dragonair's growls and snarls began to get louder as she fought his hold. To Ash's horror, she began to *move* closer towards Latos. As Dragonair fought him, the sheer strength of her body proved to be much greater than the young psychic's mental strength. She pushed through his mental hold as hard as she could, her body inching closer to Latos despite his best attempts to stop her in her tracks. With a final, massive roar of defiance, she completely smashed through his psychic hold, breaking his psychic concentration.

Latos cried out at the sudden, painfully splitting headache he got from it. The backlash of power caused his barely recuperated levitation to falter yet again, making him crash again onto the ground.

"Pin him down so he doesn't go anywhere," Clair commanded firmly. "It's time to finish this." Dragonair did as she was told. She quickly moved over to Latos and rested her tail on his back, snaking it to the base of his neck before coiling it once while pushing down on him harshly. Latos coughed, flecking the concrete beside him with tiny drops of crimson as the tail around his neck made breathing a difficult task. He tried to struggle, but found Dragonair's physical strength on a far higher level when compared to his own. He wasn't going anywhere. "Dragonair, use Hyper Beam." Towering imposingly

over Latios' pinned form, Dragonair opened her maw. An orb of bright, orange energy began to form within it.

"Latios!" Ash shouted in horror just as Dragonair released the point-blank Hyper Beam. A massive explosion blasted through the arena, forcing everyone to shield their faces with their arms from the shockwave of the tremendous detonation. "Latios!" Ash shouted yet again, concern written firmly on his face.

Ash, Latias, Brock and Misty looked anxiously at the smoke-covered arena, wondering if Latios had been defeated. From the smoke, a figure rose, and to everyone's dismay, it was not the one of Latios. Dragonair calmly flew towards her trainer, coiling in front of her. Parts of her body were slightly singed, no doubt from the explosion of her own Hyper Beam. She was panting in exhaustion, but, for the most part, she seemed okay.

As the smoke began to clear, they saw Latios' unmoving form resting on the rubble. Cuts and patches of burned feathers were plastered all over his body. "No..." Ash whispered, shocked. Thoughts of failure began to pass through his mind. Had he just lost his chance to qualify for the Silver Conference? Had he lost the battle? Before the depressing thoughts could get any further, he blinked when he noticed Latios beginning to move. "Latios..." he whispered.

Latios let out an anguished cry of pain, but, at the same time, a look of pure determination was reflected on his bright red eyes as he opened them. Slowly, he activated his levitation and began to rise. "*Brother!*" Latias cried out, deeply concerned. "*Don't push yourself too much, you're already hurt!*"

"*I'm... fine, Latias,*" Latios responded telepathically. "*Ash helped save my life. His dreams are to qualify for this Pokémon League. This means everything to him. The least I could do for him is give my best. No matter how powerful Dragonair is, I will not lose!*"

"Latios..." Ash whispered yet again, immensely touched by the Eon Pokémon's devotion and determination for him. Latias let out a

worried sigh, but respected her brother's wishes. Admittedly, she too didn't want Ash's dream's to fade into defeat.

"You should surrender," Clair stated, making Ash turn to look at her unhappily. "It is a trainer's responsibility to know when their Pokémon are beaten and withdraw for their safety to prevent further injuries. Turns out, bringing an inexperienced Pokémon to a high-level gym battle was a big mistake. Latios may be a Legendary Pokémon, but he's too young. He is *not* ready for this and it is painfully showing by the difference in strength between him and Dragonair. Surrender and spare him any more unnecessary injuries."

Brock frowned, and looked at Misty sadly. Misty returned his gaze, and both could see in each other's faces the acceptance that Clair was indeed speaking the truth. "Ash..." Misty said in the gentlest voice she could speak with. "She's... speaking the truth."

Clair nodded slowly. "Of course I am. As former Gym Leaders, I am positive you two have encountered situations like this one before." Her hard gaze settled straight into Ash's own nervous, worried eyes. "Latios is defeated. And you know it." She took a deep breath and smiled, a gentler expression replacing her previous harsh one. "There is no shame in an honorable defeat. Your performance is still admirable."

"No, there isn't," Latios admitted, deciding to use his physical voice so Clair could hear him. He had noticed she could understand Dragon's speech quite well, and was positive it wasn't much of a stretch that she could understand him as well. "But ultimately, I am the one who decides if I want to quit or not. And, I've made my decision. I am not accepting defeat. And if I know my trainer, he won't either."

Dragonair sighed, agreeing with her trainer. She locked eyes with Latios. "I respect you for trying so hard, I really do. But, please, don't make me hurt you any longer," she said, her voice gentle. "I already feel bad for putting a dragon as majestic as you through this much pain already."

Latios, panting heavily, growled angrily at them. Clair and Dragonair were taken aback by his irritated reaction. The Eon Pokémon shook his head at them. "This battle is not over yet," he said.

"If there is one thing me and my Pokémon have, Clair, it's that we never know when to give up," Ash said, proud of Latios' resolve. "As I said, I'm not walking out of this gym without a gym badge."

"Foolish trainer," Clair said in annoyance. "Value your Pokémon's wellbeing before your ambitions."

"You give up on telling us to give up," Latios responded firmly.

Clair crossed her arms, irritated. "You're going to have a really long night at the Pokémon Center. You both are young fools."

Dragonair chuckled. "Let them be, Clair. After all, you know very well it is the pride of us dragons to *never* accept any kind of defeat." Clair frowned, but nodded. She knew very well how prideful dragons tended to be.

"This isn't just about draconic pride," Latios replied, making Dragonair tilt her head in confusion. "There's more to it than just me being too prideful to allow defeat. But, you don't need to know that. All you need to know is that we're not done yet." He rose to the air proudly, levitation blazing back to full power. "*Ash,*" Latios began, speaking telepathically only to his trainer as he didn't want Clair or Dragonair to be aware of his next plan. "*There's a particular ability of mine I don't feel you're using enough. I think it could allow us to turn the tide of the battle. Let's use it on them. Remember...*" Latios smirked. "*I can turn invisible.*"

Ash's eyes widened. '*Right!*' He had completely forgotten about that. He mimicked Latios' action and smirked.

"Why are you smirking?" Clair demanded. "You two are in no position to be smirking!"

"Latios... turn invisible." As soon as Ash finished speaking, Latios' special, light refracting feathers activated. Instantly, he disappeared from sight. Latios knew that his invisibility wouldn't be perfect due to the damage his plumage had taken from Dragonair's attacks and could easily have slightly distorted spots, so, as soon as he became invisible, he began to slowly fly around Dragonair, like a hunter stalking prey, to prevent them from seeing any inkling of his presence.

Both Clair and Dragonair gasped when Latios simply disappeared into thin air. Dragonair began to frantically look around, trying to spot him. "Okay, this I didn't know Latios could do," Clair commented, glancing around. "Dragonair, can you use scent or hearing to track him?" she questioned.

"No," Dragonair responded, eyes carefully looking around to try and catch sight of the Eon Pokémon. "The battle's lasted for a while. His scent is everywhere and thus unusable for precision tracking. He flies by levitation and his wings are stiff, his flight is perfectly silent."

"Dammit," Clair growled, annoyed. "So, turns out you two had more surprises in store for us."

Ash laughed. "Oh, yes. And it's about to get worse. Latios, Tackle her!" he shouted. He couldn't see where Latios was, but he could sense him, like he had several times in Alto Mare before.

"Try to predict where he'll attack from!" Clair countered.

"... Easier said than done," Dragonair muttered in exasperation. She kept looking around, eyes scanning the place for the slightest hint, but it was useless.

Latios smirked, sensing Dragonair's absolute confusion and uncertainty. *'Payback time.'* He took aim and then flew towards her, putting as much speed and power as he could into his levitation. He charged at her like a missile and rammed into Dragonair's mid-

section extremely hard, sending the larger dragoness back a few feet with a screech of pain.

"Dragonair, hang in there!" Clair shouted, worried.

"Latios, just keep tackling!" Ash shouted. Latios did just that, he circled around before Dragonair had finished recovering and tackled her as hard as he could on her back, causing her to let out another cry of pain. Latios quickly flew away and then returned for yet another potent tackle. And then he tackled her again, even harder. And again. And again. And again. Latios kept repeating the simple process of tackling her, flying away, aim from another direction, and then tackle again many times. Each time doing it harder as his confidence grew.

Clair growled in desperation, feeling impotent as she watched Dragonair get smashed around repeatedly by the invisible Latios, each time her cries of pain got louder. Clair knew she had to act fast or Dragonair would lose, the damage was rapidly escalating. Her eyes widened as an idea came to her mind. She glanced up, eying the open roof and the clear sky above them. "Dragonair, get in the pool!" Dragonair rapidly flew to the pool and submerged herself. Finally, she was allowed a breather.

Ash smirked. "Dragonair can't hide in that pool forever. Don't follow her, Latios! Wait for her to come out!"

"*Yeah, I'm definitely doing that,*" Latios replied, floating back to Ash's side of the field. *"The water displacement I'd cause if I entered the pool would instantly give away my position. And I really don't want her constricting me again. That hurt."*

Clair chuckled. "Who says I planned to have Dragonair hide in the pool forever? The pool is only a temporary solution so that she can use the attack she needs to get Latios out of hiding without him interrupting her with another pesky tackle. Dragonair, use Rain Dance!" Dragonair's neck sphere began shining, causing the entire pool to glow in a faint veil of blue light. Dragonair started doing slow

swiveling motions within the pool, slowly creating a tiny whirlpool within the pool.

"Very smart of Clair..." Misty noted, quickly figuring out Clair's plan.

A ray of blue light suddenly emanated from the pool, shooting skywards as Dragonair released the Rain Dance. Storm clouds began to spread from the center of the beam, rapidly coating the sky above the gym in murky darkness. A drop of rain water fell. And then another, and then another. Before long, a heavy downpour was falling into the gym.

Ash sighed, looking at his soaked clothes. "Looks like I'm getting wet again..."

"We're not," Brock said, standing under Misty's Psyduck-themed Umbrella along with her and Latias. Ash glared at them in annoyance and jealousy.

"Dragonair, you can come out of the pool now," Clair said slowly, completely ignoring the downpour. The battle was too intense for her to care about getting wet anymore. Dragonair slowly emerged from the pool. Immediately, she noticed where Latios was. With his feathers completely wet, the invisibility was heavily disrupted. On top of that, the rain water crashing and streaming down his body made his position painfully obvious.

Latios growled, cancelling his invisibility as there was no point in keeping it up. "There goes that idea..." He glared at Dragonair, who in turn glared back at him. For tense moments, both exhausted dragons locked gazes. Each of them reflected pride, and unwillingness to lose the battle for their trainer.

"Use Dragon Breath!" Clair shouted, knowing she had to take the initiative of the battle again. Dragonair opened her maw and fired a stream of green-colored flaming wind at the opposing dragon.

"Dodge that, fly up!" Ash countered. Latios rapidly flew upwards, easily dodging the jet of flames by moving out of the way. "Latios, this is it. We're ending this battle right now. Gather all your power and use Luster Purge!"

Latios let out a humming cry, his eyes glowing a bright shade of pure white light. His entire body began to glow as well, shining brightly in the dark, murky sky above them. Before long, he looked like a bright beacon of light in the darkness. He opened his mouth, channeling the power he was gathering in the form of a highly concentrated orb of white and blue psychic energy.

Clair's eyes widened, she had heard of that attack before. The ancient texts and lore described it as a Latios' ultimate attack. She was well aware that Dragonair was exhausted. Dodging would be nigh impossible. Clair decided to counter Latios' strongest move with her Dragonair's strongest move. "Hyper Beam!"

Dragonair opened her mouth and began to charge the Hyper Beam, creating a ball of volatile orange energy within her maw. For agonizingly long seconds, both dragons kept charging their attacks, drawing as much of their remaining strength as they could into the orbs each held in their mouths.

At exactly the same instant, both dragons gave a mighty roar and fired their respective attacks. Everyone watched in awe as an imposing beam of blinding white and blue light descended upon the arena at the same time as a mighty beam of explosive, orange energy ascended towards the dark sky.

Both attacks collided midair with a bright explosion, holding out in an even stalemate above the gym. Both Dragons gave everything they had into the attacks, pouring as much strength into them. Both of them refused to accept defeat.

"Come on, Latios! You can do it!" Ash cheered. "Defeat Dragonair!"

"I have my faith in you, Dragonair!" Clair cheered as well.

Latos smirked, recalling his training session with Pikachu several days ago when he had shown his new friends his signature attack for the first time. *'Surprise, surprise, Dragonair.'* Suddenly, many smaller streaks of light broke off from Latios' main beam, bypassing Dragonair's Hyper Beam by spiraling around it. Dragonair's eyes widened as she saw the myriad beams of light heading her way. *'Unlike Pikachu, you can't turn your attack into a shield. I got you!'* Latios thought excitedly.

"Oh, no!" Clair cried out. The smaller secondary beams impacted all over Dragonair's body, setting off many explosions of burning psychic power across her body. She cried out in pain and, as a result, her Hyper Beam attack completely collapsed. Latios' main Luster Purge tore through the remainder of the beam and smashed into Dragonair at full power. Everyone was forced to cover their eyes as a gigantic blast of light tore through the gym. "Dragonair!" Clair shouted, concerned, trying to look for her but was unable to see anything through the blinding veil of light.

The extremely bright explosion slowly died off, covering the entirety of the arena in a smokescreen that was rapidly washed away by the torrential rain. Dragonair was panting heavily, her body completely covered in scratches, bruises, burns and patches of torn scales. But, to everyone's absolute shock, she was *still* up and conscious. "I... am not... done... yet," she declared boldly through heavy pants, a low growl echoing from her.

Ash stared at Dragonair, absolutely flabbergasted. "Just how much do I need to do to beat her!?" he questioned incredulously. Latios flew down until he was right in front of Ash. Like Dragonair, his body also bore the marks of a ruthless battle in the forms of burns, bruises and cuts that colored portions of his blue and white feathers in a washed-out shade of crimson. Both heavily injured dragons were panting heavily.

For a silent moment, both dragons gazed at each other, pure respect and admiration for each other evident in both of their gazes. Latios admired Dragonair as the first truly powerful dragon he had battled

on even ground, while Dragonair admired Latios' strength and determination for one as young and inexperienced as him. The only sound audible to anyone was the sound of the constant rain tapping on the arena and on the two dragon's injured bodies. The rain dripped down both dragons, but it did little to distract them. Both of them looked like they could collapse at any moment. However, pride prevented that.

"Latios. She can't attack..." Ash began, realizing that she had just used Hyper Beam. "We can beat her. Luster Purge." Latios' eyes began to glow as he mustered what tiny bit of energy he had left for a final decisive attack. Dragonair growled in response, knowing she was too exhausted to move until the draining effects of her usage of Hyper Beam disappeared.

Clair let out a slow, weary sigh. She looked at Dragonair, eyeing her wounds and injuries carefully. She could see the almost washed away stains of blood on her scales beneath her mouth, clearly she had been bleeding from her mouth. It was hard to find a single spot in her long, slender body that wasn't marred with an injury. Clair smiled slowly and made her decision. "I concede. The victory is yours."

Ash gasped, and Latios stopped his attack upon hearing Clair's words. "What?" Ash asked incredulously.

"I conceded. I just lectured you on deciding when a battle should stop, didn't I?" Clair asked rhetorically. "Dragonair is too exhausted to move from Hyper Beam and at the mercy of your next attack. You got us. There is no point in taking a final attack," she explained. Dragonair closed her eyes. She hated to lose and it stung her draconic pride more painfully than any of her physical wounds, but she admitted her trainer was right. Defeat was imminent.

Clair walked forward until she was next to Dragonair, and then cradled her head in her arms, careful not to touch any of her wounds. "You did amazing. This is easily the most memorable battle you've ever had. I'm so proud of you." Clair leaned in and lightly

kissed Dragonair's head. Dragonair hummed and pressed into Clair, enjoying her trainer's attention.

Kaburagi slowly raised the red flag. "Dragonair is unable to continue battling! The winner of this battle is the challenger, Ash Ketchum!"

"We won..." Ash said slowly, unable to believe it. "We really just won..." he repeated disbelievingly. Ash suddenly cheered loudly as he ran into the battlefield. He hugged Latios as tight as he could. Latios winced as Ash carelessly pressed against some of his wounds, but he preferred not to spoil his moment and just contently hugged him back. "You won, Latios! You did it! The final Badge is ours!" Ash hailed happily. "You're so awesome! Thank you! Thank you!"

Latias ran into the battlefield as well. She was just about to hug Latios as well, but noted how injured he was, and decided to just give him a quick kiss on the cheek instead. *"That was amazing,"* she praised, grinning at him. *"Congratulations on winning."*

Latios smiled, enjoying the attention and celebrations of his victory. *"Thank you, both of you."*

Clair smiled at the excited child's victorious display, her hands slowly stroking Dragonair's head affectionately. She released the Dragon Pokémon and walked to where Ash was. Dragonair slowly followed after her, trying her best not to pass out from the exhaustion and wounds. Kaburagi rapidly joined them, taking out a small box as he did so.

"Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town," Clair said to get his attention. Once Ash had turned to look at her, she opened the box Kaburagi was holding and took out the object inside. "Congratulations on defeating me, you have earned yourself a Rising Badge," she announced, handing him the badge.

Ash parted from Latios and took the badge, examining it closely. It was shaped like a dragon's head, completely black with red mouth,

ears, eyes and nose, and a white outline. He proudly lifted it into the air. "Yeah, we won a Rising Badge!" Ash shouted dramatically. Clair chuckled at the enthusiastic show, shaking her head in amusement.

Dragonair lightly tapped Latios' neck with her tail, getting his attention. "Congratulations to you too. You beat me fairly."

"Thanks..." Latios responded between pants. Like her, he looked like was ready to pass out at any given moment.

Dragonair bowed respectfully. "I apologize for all the pain I put you through in the battle. I will cherish and remember this battle for a long time as the best in my life."

Latios smiled at the show of respect, wondering if many other Pokémon would behave like that because he was a Legendary Pokémon. "Hey, it's all fair competition. It's fine."

Clair glanced at Latios and gave a slight bow as well. "It was an honor for me to battle a Legendary Dragon such as yourself, Latios. I wish you and your trainer the best of luck in your travels, and that you guide him to greatness, like you guided him to victory today."

Latios returned the bow to both of them. "And, it was nice to meet you both and battle you. You two are wonderful."

Dragonair turned to look at the disguised Latias and tilted her head. Latias gulped and smiled at her nervously. Dragonair leaned in and took a couple sniffs before pulling back. "Oh. She's a Latias, I'm very sure of it."

Clair raised an eyebrow, completely trusting her Dragonair's judgement. "You also have a Latias? I am dumbfounded. Wow."

Latias giggled and decided to drop her illusion, showing her real form to both Dragonair and Clair. In her eyes, they deserved to see her. "Hello!" Latias greeted, taking one of Clair's hands in her own forepaws.

"Oh my..." Clair whispered, shaking Latias' paw. "To think I'd meet two Legendary Dragons today." Like they did with Latios, both Clair and Dragonair bowed respectfully to Latias, making her blush at the attention. Clair turned to look at Ash. "You have two very fine Pokémon with you, take good care of them. Remember, you are always welcome at the Blackthorn City Gym and the Dragon Holy Land, whenever you are near."

"I'll keep it in mind," Ash replied, opening his jacket to stick his final badge onto the interior. "We're ready for the league now. Eight badges."

"I'm eager to see Latios' participation in the league," Clair said. "I'll keep close track of your progress. Train hard, you'll all need it."

"We will," Ash promised. With the battle finished and the final badge obtained, the group shared their goodbyes with Clair, Kaburagi and Dragonair before returning to the Pokémon Center to have a good night's rest and to heal Ash's injured Pokémon after the intense battle with Clair. Now, the journey to the Silver Conference was about to begin!

Author Notes: End of Blackthorn City arc. I hope you all enjoyed the story's first big battle!

Receiving A Pokemon Egg!

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech."

'Thoughts.'

" *Telepathy.*"

Author Notes: Chapter heavily edited from the original version.
Have fun reading!

Last Revision: April 16th, 2016.

Chapter 6 - Receiving a Pokémon Egg!

An exuberant Ash entered the Blackthorn City Pokémon Center, humming a happy and catchy tune to himself as he did so. After winning the Rising Badge from Clair after an extremely intense and hard-fought battle, it seemed like nothing could dampen his perfect mood. As far as Ash was concerned, his battle against Clair was easily one of the best battles of his young career so far. Ash and his friends made their way straight towards Nurse Joy, who was dutifully standing behind the counter.

"Nu-" Brock began in a lovesick tone, ready to propose marriage to Nurse Joy. But, before he could even finish the first word, he felt his entire body freeze in place. He tried to struggle against it, but, it was no use. He was completely immobilized. As hard as he tried, he couldn't move a muscle. He couldn't even utter a single whisper.

"Huh," Misty said, looking at Brock in confusion. She was already fully prepared to restrain him if needed, but was surprised to see him stop in his tracks. She then noticed Latias' eyes glowing slightly behind him and realized what happened. "Oh, nice."

" *No embarrassing propositions for you,*" Latias said firmly, her illusionary disguise crossing her arms over her chest.

Misty gave Latias an approving nod. "I like your style."

" *Thanks!*" Latias beamed cheerfully, grinning. Brock sighed in defeat and annoyance, he hadn't counted on Latias helping Misty in restraining him.

Ash grinned and stopped in front of the counter, crossing his arms over it. "Hello again, Nurse Joy!" he greeted enthusiastically, completely unaware of what had happened behind him.

"Hello to you too," Nurse Joy greeted warmly. She quickly took note of the boy's mood and hummed slightly. "Normally, I'd assume that you lost at the Blackthorn Gym. Almost everyone does so on their first try. But, your cheerful attitude clearly shows that you won. So, I congratulate you for it. The Blackthorn Gym is the hardest Gym in all of Kanto and Johto."

Misty nodded in agreement, thinking back to the epic battle between Latios and Dragonair that had just culminated. "It definitely is."

"Yep! I won," Ash responded proudly. He opened his jacket and displayed the inside to the Pokémon nurse, revealing all eight Johto League Gym Badges required to qualify for the Silver Conference pinned to it. "But, I need to heal my Pokémon. The battle was... tough," he said, handing over Snorlax and Latios' Pokéballs. He grabbed Pikachu, who had been lazily sitting on his shoulder, and set him on the counter. Pikachu had awoken from his unconsciousness sometime on the road towards the Pokémon Center from the gym, but he was still very weak and had spent most of the time just lying on Ash's shoulder wordlessly.

" *See, I was right, Pikachu. She said she hoped to see us again soon and you said she was just being polite instead of her wanting us hurt. Well, we're indeed seeing her again soon because you, Snorlax and Latios got hurt,*" Latias said in Pikachu's mind. Pikachu

rolled his eyes, chuckling slightly in amusement. However, he quietly admitted Latias wasn't exactly wrong.

"Sure thing," Nurse Joy replied, activating the complicated machine behind her. She placed the two Pokéballs on it and took Pikachu to work on him. She seemed to repeat the process she had done the first time Ash and his friends had visited her, carefully checking Pikachu while paying close attention to the machine as it worked on Latios and Snorlax. It was immediately obvious to the group, by the fact she was taking much longer and using more medical supplies and equipment than before, that they weren't okay. After several long minutes, Nurse Joy frowned and turned around to face the group. "Snorlax and Pikachu are fine." She informed them. "After some medication and healing, they will be okay after a good night's rest." Nurse Joy paused, letting that sink in before continuing with the more dire part. "Latios, however, is *not* okay. He is quite badly injured. We'll take him out of his Pokéball and work on him on the emergency room. He's definitely not battling in a couple days and will need to stay under close watch until tomorrow morning."

Ash sighed. "Oh, man... that sucks." He had been worried for Latios' condition after the intense battle he had against Clair's Dragonair. Ash quietly admitted to himself that he wasn't surprised that he needed to spend a night under watch at the Pokémon Center, or that he required special attention. However, his mind was rapidly overtaken by the worry of his league registration, as Latios was vital to fly him towards New Bark Town. "Will Latios be able to fly once he's released from the Pokémon Center tomorrow?" he asked urgently.

Nurse Joy spared a couple glances at the machine behind her, thoughtfully assessing the situation. "Yes, he will. I don't see why not. However, nothing too stressful and no battling," she responded seriously.

Ash nodded in response, slightly relieved. "Okay. Thank you, Nurse Joy."

"You're welcome. Come here to pick up Pikachu and Snorlax tonight, and tomorrow morning to pick Latios up," Nurse Joy told him.

"Okay, I will," Ash said while turning away, deciding to head to the phones to make the call Professor Oak had urged him to earlier.

"At least we're still on schedule," Brock commented positively, walking at Ash's side. "Latios can take you to New Bark Town tomorrow so you can get registered for the Silver Conference. You'd still be right on time. Barely. But still in time."

"Yeah," Ash agreed. "I'm still worried for his condition, though. From what Nurse Joy said, it doesn't sound like he's good."

Latias frowned unhappily. *"Of course it doesn't sound like he's good. You saw how he battled Dragonair."*

"But, hey, he's proud that he won, Latias. He may be battered and hurt, but his pride is intact and his mind is at peace that he got Ash to the league," Misty said positively. "He can rest for the rest of the day without any worry. He's happy."

"*Yeah, I guess there's that,*" Latias agreed. While she was still saddened by his condition, she did admit that Misty held a good point. She had felt with her empathy the way Latios had felt after winning his battle against Dragonair. It had been a long time since she had felt him so proud, confident and happy of himself.

Ash sat at the phone and dialed Professor Elm's number. "Well, time to call him."

"I wonder what Professor Elm wants," Brock commented. "We haven't heard of him in a long time."

"Nothing too big I hope," Ash mumbled. "It'd suck to say no to him."

"I don't think it'll be big or time consuming," Misty reassured him. "I'm pretty sure that Professor Elm is aware that you have little time left to

register. He wouldn't ask for anything that'd hinder that."

After going through the identification process, Professor Elm's face appeared on the telephone's screen as he picked up the call. "Hello? Professor Elm here," he greeted politely. Once Ash's own face had appeared on his phone, he smiled. "Oh, hello there, Ash!"

"Hello, Professor," Ash greeted back with a smile. "It's good to talk to you again."

"Likewise," Professor Elm said back politely. "I assume you won the Rising Badge already, right?" he asked tentatively.

"Yep," Ash confirmed, grinning as he did so. He opened his jacked and displayed the eight badges to the Pokémon Professor. "I'm ready for the league."

"That's amazing. Congratulations, Ash," Elm said kindly before switching topics. "Well, as I'm sure you know already, you have to come back to New Bark Town to register for the Silver Conference." At Ash's acknowledging nod, Elm continued, "I was wondering if, on your way back, you could stop at the Marine Pokémon Laboratory to retrieve a Pokémon egg for me, and then bring it to my laboratory."

"That's not too bad," Ash commented, glad that Elm's request didn't seem to be particularly complex or time consuming. "Okay, I can do that. But, what's that Marine Pokémon thing and where is it?" the young trainer asked curiously.

"It's a very well-known Laboratory that researches the behavior of water Pokémon and ocean life in general. It shows up on pretty much every map of Johto. Look for it on the beaches close to New Bark Town," Professor Elm replied. "You shouldn't have any issues finding it."

Behind Ash, Brock opened his backpack and pulled out his Johto guidebook. He opened it and quickly paged through it until he found

a map of the Johto region. Carefully looking into it, he nodded. "Yeah, he's right. It's marked right here on the Map."

Elm nodded. "Very well. Brock can give you the instructions on how to get there. I'll wait for you here, Ash. Bring the egg back."

"Alright. I'll be sure to get that egg for you. Good-bye," Ash said, waving at the screen.

"Thank you and good-bye," Elm said appreciatively before hanging up, ending the call. Ash turned around to face his friends. "Well, that wasn't so bad. It's close to New Bark Town anyways."

"Okay, so the plan is quite simple I guess," Brock began, getting everyone's attention. "We'll just spend time around the city while waiting for Snorlax and Pikachu to be ready. We'll use that time to get anything we need for our respective travels. Once we're done, we'll return to the Pokémon Center to pick the two up." Brock looked directly at Ash. "Tomorrow we'll be waking up very early."

Ash winced. "I hate waking up early."

"It's a necessity," Brock said sharply. "We'll have breakfast and then you're going to call Professor Oak. You have to return Snorlax to the lab and take either Noctowl or Phanpy back. Once that's done, I'll tell Latios how to get to the Marine Pokémon Laboratory and to New Bark Town, and then how to get to Silver Town after that. Misty and I will just go to Silver Town from here. It's nearby."

"Sounds like a plan," Misty said with a nod. "We'll meet up in Silver Town and then help Ash prepare for the league."

Ash nodded in agreement. "I'm glad everything turned out fine in the end. We're on time, I got the badge..."

" *And you were worrying too much,*" Latias chided. "*See? All's good.*"

"So, let's get going," Brock said, motioning for everyone to follow him. They nodded and did so, following Brock's lead across the streets of Blackthorn City.

...

The rest of the day went very uneventful for the group, with all of them following Brock's planning on how the rest of the day would be spent. The next day, just as Brock had said, they all woke up very early to get started on their very busy day. After enjoying a quick breakfast, calling Professor Oak so Ash could swap Pokémon and picking Latios up from Nurse Joy's care, the group exited the Pokémon Center and began walking down the street that led to Blackthorn City's outskirts.

"So, is everything clear, Latios?" Brock asked, looking up to where he presumed Latios was after he was done explaining all the directions the dragon would need on his upcoming flights. Brock had to admit, explaining something to someone who was invisible was immensely awkward. Quite a few people seemed to shot him awkward glances as they were walking by.

"Yes, everything is clear," Latios responded, sparing Brock's map a last glance before floating up to his usual position above the group.

"Do you want my map? Just in case?" Brock asked, slightly lifting his booklet. "It might come in handy if you ever need to consult it along the way."

"No, that won't be necessary. I already memorized it," Latios answered, shrugging. *"I'll be fine."*

"Show off," Pikachu muttered under his breath. Latios glared at him, though Pikachu didn't notice it due to the dragon being invisible.

Misty raised an eyebrow. "Wow, really? Perks of being a psychic, I guess."

" Yeah, you can say that. Latios and I have always had amazing memories. However, ever since the entire Alto Mare affair, and us beginning to learn to use our Psychic Powers, it's increased a lot," Latias explained. *"We can remember a lot in very precise detail. It's really nice."*

"That sounds awesome," Ash noted, impressed. "It must be really cool to be a psychic."

" It is, Ash," Latias responded warmly.

Brock looked at Latios, or, where he presumed the invisible dragon was. "Okay, then. Listen very carefully, Latios. This is the most important thing in the trip, so, pay attention and use that perfect memory of yours to remember it." Latios tilted his head, wondering what was on Brock's mind. "Latios, whatever you do, don't you *dare* let Ash tell you where to go. You do all the navigating and don't follow any direction Ash tells you to. If you do, you'll end up hopelessly lost," he told the Eon dragon in a stern voice. Everyone burst out laughing while Ash glared at Brock, who gave Ash a playful look in return.

" Alright, I'll be sure to keep that in mind. But, why would we end up lost?" Latios asked in mild curiosity. *"It can't be that bad... can it?"*

Misty didn't even hesitate to answer. "Because Ash is a disaster at navigating. Every time he sets the course, we end up hopelessly lost." She shook her head. "It's so bad that it takes a traveling genius like Brock hours to find our way back to our destination. Sometimes we only find our way back through sheer, dumb luck."

"That's not true!" Ash protested. "Sure, I've done my mistakes. But, it can't be *that* bad."

"Yes it is and you know it," Pikachu said flatly. "You'd get lost in a one-way street." Ash sighed, sulking at the fact he didn't have the support of his buddy or either of the two Dragons, who seemed content to just laugh alongside everyone else.

"Well, we're here," Brock said, glancing around. They had exited Blackthorn City, now only a dirt road framed by a dense forest remained ahead. "We're going to continue on, Ash. You should depart from here."

"We'll head to Silver Town. See you there, Ash!" Misty said, walking ahead while waving at Ash. Brock did the same and followed Misty in walking down the road. Ash waved back and voiced his good-byes, with Latias, Latios and Pikachu doing the same afterwards. After a few minutes, the two former Gym leaders had disappeared down the rural road.

Ash looked at where Latios was. Ever since leaving Alto Mare, he had found that for some reason that he couldn't quite place, he could sometimes feel where Latios and Latias were on an almost instinctive level, enabling him to often be able to face them and trace them despite their invisibility. According to Latios' explanations, it could be because of the bond he now shared with him. "So, I guess we should start and go to this Marine Lab," Ash said, before suddenly pausing and snapping his fingers. "Oh, I was almost forgetting."

Latias blinked and tilted her head. "What were you forgetting?" she asked.

"Everything," Pikachu snarked and then began chuckling, prompting Latios to chuckle as well.

Latias glared at both of them, making them instantly shut up. "That's better," she said approvingly.

Ash smiled. "Thanks, Latias. Anyway, I'd like to introduce someone to you two," he announced. He detached one of the Pokéballs from his belt and then dropped it forward. The mechanical sphere opened, releasing with a bright burst of white light a small, predominantly blue-colored elephant-like Pokémon. "This is Phanpy, he'll be traveling with us now. He used to be with me before Alto Mare, but, I

had to send him back to Professor Oak's lab in order to make space in my party for Latios. Now, I'll have Noctowl be the one at Oak's."

Phanpy looked around and smiled cheerfully when he spotted Ash. Pure delight and glee was suddenly reflected on his young, childish eyes. "Daddy!" he squealed happily.

"Huh, what?" Ash asked, confused. However, before he could say anything else, Phanpy tackled him with a surprising amount of strength and knocking him to the ground.

"Daddy!" Phanpy said again, nuzzling himself as much as he could into Ash's chest. "I missed you so much!" he squealed happily. "I'm so happy to see you again!"

Latias and Latios looked at the small Pokémon curiously. "Why did he call Ash, 'Daddy'?" Latios asked. "That's... strange."

Pikachu decided to answer that question because Ash was currently busy trying, and failing, to get the over-excited Phanpy off of him. "Well, you see, Ash won a Pokémon egg at a race a few months back. The egg hatched into this little guy. Since Ash was the one that hatched him and the first person he ever saw, he refers to Ash as his daddy," Pikachu summarized, recalling the race and the following adventure.

"Oh..." Ash said, realization coming to him. Now that he was able to understand Pokémon, he was beginning to realize just how much Phanpy loved and cherished him. Silently, he felt immensely thankful of Latios and the accidental gift of Pokéspeech that had been bestowed on him thanks to the dragon.

Latias grinned, floating down to them while dropping her invisibility. "Aw! You're so cute!" she squealed, making a surprised Phanpy turn to look at her. She picked him up with her claws, lowering her long neck down to nuzzle him. "You're such an adorable little kid."

"Hello," Latios said in a more reserved manner, also dropping his own invisibility so Phanpy could see him.

Now that Phanpy was off him, Ash was finally able to stand up. "Phanpy, this is Latias and Latios. They are two of our newest friends and will now be traveling with us."

"Ooooh," Phanpy said, voice full of wonder, as he looked at Latios. He looked up, gazing at Latias' face now. "You two look so cool!"

"I'm glad you like us," Latias said, gently setting the infant down.

Phanpy turned to Pikachu, suddenly running towards him. "Hi, uncle Pikachu!" he excitedly shouted while playfully tackling the electric-type.

Pikachu winced as Phanpy crashed into him. "Ouch," the electric-type uttered, pained. Phanpy giggled and got off him. "Hi, kiddo," Pikachu greeted slowly as he stood up, dusting himself off with his paws. "How's everyone at the lab?" Pikachu inquired.

"Everyone's okay!" Phanpy answered enthusiastically. "I like them." The infant paused and then pouted. "Uncle Snorlax and uncle Bulbasaur are boring."

Pikachu laughed in amusement. "Well, one spends most of the day sleeping and the other is too serious and diplomatic to indulge a child. So, yeah, I can see them being boring. I'm glad they're okay."

Ash chuckled at Pikachu's comments, crouching down to pet Phanpy's head. "Welcome back, Phanpy. I hope you enjoyed Professor Oak's big backyard."

"I did! I could roll around for so long and still have so much space," Phanpy replied, delighted. "I could roll and roll and then roll some more! I had a lot of fun."

"I bet you did. So, Latias and Latios are newest members of our 'family' now, Phanpy," Ash told him.

Phanpy grinned, excited. "So, Auntie Latias and Uncle Latios!" He hopped and turned to face them. "My aunt and uncle!" Latias grinned and nodded back at him.

"Yep," Ash confirmed. The young trainer held out the infant's Pokéball. "Return for now, Phanpy." A red beam shot from the Pokéball and engulfed the Long Nose Pokémon, returning him into the device.

"It was nice to meet him," Latias commented. "I'm happy he'll be traveling with us now. He's so much fun."

Ash nodded. "Yeah, Phanpy's an awesome little guy." He smiled slightly. "And... turns out, he's my... uh... son. Feels weird to be a father."

"The correct term is surrogate son," Latios informed him. "Anyway, we should get going now. That way we'll have plenty of time to do all the stuff we need."

"So, that means I get to fly on you..." Ash frowned, looking up at the blue dragon. "Eh, how do we do that?"

Latios chuckled in amusement and lowered himself until he was hovering a foot or two off the ground, just in front of Ash. "Climb on."

"Okay." Ash slowly climbed on top of Latios, seating himself just in front of his wings. Once he was carefully seated and balanced, Latios hovered back to usual height while Pikachu jumped on top of Latias.

"You know, Ash, you should feel honored. You're the second human I willingly let ride on my back. The first was Bianca," Latios commented.

"I guess I am," Ash agreed, slightly bemused by that.

"Didn't he already ride your back, technically?" Pikachu asked.
"When Latias tried to carry him and ended up dropping him into the pool. You swooped in, caught him, and carried him back to the grass."

Latios hummed, thinking back to that. "Well, that wasn't entirely a 'ride' or anything like that, it was me being nice and not letting him get all wet." He craned his neck back to look at the trainer seated on his back. "Ash, grab tight to my neck and don't let go," he instructed, not wanting a mid-air accident. "Ready?"

Ash steadied himself and firmly took hold of Latios' neck. "I'm ready."

Latios nodded to Latias, and both took off at a moderate pace, heading to the coastline so they could get to the Marine Pokémon Lab. Latias and Latios ascended until they were high enough to not be spotted easily from the ground, but still maintain a good level of comfort for their passengers. As they flew, they avoided flying over towns or cities, not wanting to draw any unnecessary attention.

"Flying is really fun," Ash commented as he watched the vast landscape below. "You're not the first Pokémon I get to fly on, Latios. But, flying is always fun no matter what."

"Oh, really?" Latios asked curiously. "Who have you gotten to ride on? Other than Lugia, you already told us about that."

"There's my Pidgeot. We battled a Fearow together. I've also flown on my Charizard's back several times. And now, you," Ash responded. "Celebi once carried me around with psychic powers. But, I don't know if that counts as riding."

"Well, how do I compare?" Latios asked, his voice teasing. "I hope I'm not lame in comparison."

"I think you're the best... maybe. Lugia was amazing too," Ash answered, chuckling nervously. "Actually, Lugia is maybe better. Sorry, Latios. Lugia's just awesome."

"Figures." Latios rolled his eyes in amusement, but allowed the trainer to enjoy the flight. He knew Lugia personally, and quietly admitted that flying on him was probably better. Lugia was awesome indeed.

After some time flying, Ash looked down. He noticed how the land scrolled past them. It was apparent that while they were flying fast, they weren't flying at a very high speed. Ash recalled how the PokéDex had said that they could fly even faster than planes.

"Latios, can't you fly faster? I remember the PokéDex said that you could fly faster than Jet Planes."

"I don't fly at that speed because if I were to do that, you'd die. A human body isn't designed to handle flying at that speed or resisting that kind of pressure. This is the fastest I can go without hurting you or bothering you," Latios answered. "Besides, it's still going to take us just a few hours at our current speed." Ash nodded slowly, sorting out what Latios had just said.

"Hey, that reminds me. How are you feeling, Latios?" Ash asked, slightly petting the dragon's neck. "Are you still hurt from your battle with Dragonair?" he added. Now that he could closely examine the Dragon's body, he could see that there were still scratches and scrapes in some areas of his body. Though, it seemed like his healing was going exceptionally well.

"Eh, I've been better," Latios answered, shrugging slightly. "I'm still really sore, but, nothing I should be complaining about. I'm tired, yeah. But, all in all, I'll be fine."

"You sure you can handle the flight?" Ash asked, just to be sure.

Latios scoffed. "Of course I can. I'm *okay* ."

Pikachu nodded. "That's good. Glad to hear you're doing okay. I heard your battle was pretty intense."

"It was," Latios said, smiling. "Dragonair was tough. I *barely* won."

"It's a shame I missed it," Pikachu commented, sighing in dismay. "I'd have loved to see that battle."

"I can psychically project my memories of it in your mind, Pikachu," Latias offered. "If you want to see it that badly."

"Oh, that'd be appreciated. Yes, please," Pikachu said, grinning. "This is going to be good."

Latios chuckled as Latias' eyes began to glow. They kept flying, mildly chitchatting amongst themselves as they flew, with Latios carefully following the instructions Brock had laid out for him earlier that day. Their talk mainly centered about the group's battle in the Blackthorn Gym and Latios' performance. After several hours of flight, Latios began to steer in more specific directions. Soon enough, a small white building came into view on the land below, resting on a small cliff overlooking the ocean. Latios looked at it, his keen eyesight easily identifying the building despite the vast distance. *'Yep, that's the Marine Lab, according to Brock.'*

Latias and Latios slowed the pace down a bit until they were in front of the building. Latios lowered himself to allow Ash to hop off. Once Ash had gotten off the dragon, he looked at the building and walked towards the main door. "So, this is the place?" he asked, just to be sure.

"It is," Latios responded. "It's the only building in miles, so, I don't think it's really possible to be wrong. Though, there's no way I'm ever fitting through that door. I'll just wait for you guys outside."

"I think I can fit," Latias said, eyeing the doorway. She began to glow, creating a sparkling swirl of blue lights as she adopted her illusionary disguise of Bianca.

Ash walked up to the main door and knocked. "Hello!" he called out. "Anyone home!?"

Moments later, a woman in her mid-twenties opened the door. She had short bright red hair and was wearing an elegant lab coat. "Hello, I'm Naomi, the Director of this research facility. You must be Ash Ketchum, right?" she asked kindly.

The young Pokémon trainer nodded. "Yes, I'm Ash. How did you know my name?" Ash asked.

"Professor Elm told me of your arrival, so, I was expecting you," she answered. Naomi gave the disguised Latias a quick glance. "Who's your friend?"

"This is... uhh... Bianca," Ash answered, deciding to use Bianca's name on Latias' disguise, as saying 'Latias' was probably not a good idea. Latias gave Naomi a greeting wave of her hand and a smile.

Naomi nodded at them, gesturing them to come inside. "Please, come in."

Ash and Latias entered the Laboratory, curiously looking around at all the equipment and different machinery that was there. It all looked very scientific and completely beyond their comprehension. Several other scientists were working on some of the equipment, however, they didn't seem to pay much attention to them. "Wait here, please," Naomi told them, walking towards a door.

"*Looks nice,*" Latias commented, glancing around at all the neatly stored equipment, everything was shining clean and the place looked in perfect order.

"Yeah," Ash agreed, looking around as well. The lab looked different to what he recalled of professor Oak's own Lab. There were more charts and diagrams of Water Pokémon here, and some of the machinery looked like it could be used in the ocean.

"I have no idea what to make of all this," Pikachu said, scratching his head. "I like Professor Oak's laboratory more. Looks less... creepy." Ash and Latias chuckled at the electric-type's comment.

Naomi came back out of the room she had entered holding an incubator. Inside it was a dark green-colored egg. "This egg was secured by a local Officer Jenny from a group of Pokémon Poachers a few days ago. Please take it to Professor Elm. He'll know where it's from and what to do with it."

Ash frowned, alarmed. "The egg was *stolen* ? That's horrible! Poor little guy... the mother must be crushed, too."

Latias nodded in agreement, a sad look on her face. "*Poachers are a horrible thing,*" she commented, looking at the egg. "*I hope we can return it to the mother. No mother deserves to lose her child.*"

"Well, if I had to guess... Professor Elm is going to task us with returning this egg to its mother," Pikachu commented. "Not that I mind if that's the case. I'd love to do that."

"Do you know anything about the mother or Poachers?" Ash asked, glancing at Naomi. "Anything you know could be helpful."

Naomi sighed and shook her head. "No, I don't. That is why we are giving it to Professor Elm, he is a more qualified individual." She gestured to the egg. "Also, we don't know what might hatch out of it as we don't have any equipment that can help us determine that. However, the egg has been shaking every once in a while. It shouldn't take long for it to hatch."

Ash reached forward to grab the egg incubator from her hands. The second he took hold of the incubator, Ash felt a small jolt shoot through his body, causing him to blink in confusion. It didn't feel like an electric jolt, he was much too used to those from Pikachu. The jolt seemed to be of a spiritual sense, touching at his soul and emotions. The sound of faint crying echoed in his mind, along with distant words. He tried to make out what the voice was saying, but he was

unable to. He could almost *feel* the sadness and despair coming from the egg. Unconsciously, Ash hugged it tight to his chest. He felt drawn to it in a special way. Latias looked at Ash, confused at the veil of emotions that she could sense coming off from him and from the egg.

Naomi noticed the small yet subtle shudder Ash made when he had taken hold of the incubator. "Is something wrong, Ash?" she asked, slightly concerned.

Ash shook his head reflexively, not even looking up at her. "No, everything is fine."

Naomi nodded slowly. "Okay. Please, take good care of it. I'll call Professor Elm to inform him that you've taken the egg."

Ash looked at egg, staring at it with a lost expression. "The egg is in good hands, don't worry." He gazed up at her face and smiled. "Thanks a lot, Naomi." He turned around and began to walk to the exit. "We'll get going now."

Naomi walked alongside them, escorting them to the exit. "Very well. Good bye to you too and thanks for doing this favor to me and Professor Elm."

"No problem," Ash mumbled. He looked down at the egg as he headed toward the exit, a fond look settling on his eyes. *'I wonder what happened... what was that voice... what does it mean?'* he wondered, unconsciously hugging the incubator tighter to his chest.

...

Elsewhere, in a hidden location...

A large, tall, bulky man was currently sitting behind a desk in an office adorned with expensive furniture. He was dressed in a predominantly bright orange-colored suit that, despite its extravagant color, still looked extremely elegant. He was currently looking into a

computer, analyzing various data. A Persian was lying beside his chair, peacefully slumbering.

A small voice box in the desk beeped to life. "Boss, agents Annie and Oakley have returned and are reporting in," the feminine voice of his secretary said.

The now identified 'Boss' grunted and pushed a button on the voice box. "Send them in."

A few minutes later the two aforementioned agents entered the office, both sporting stone-faced expressions. They knew they had failed the last mission, and the 'boss' hated failure. However, they knew better than to show weakness in front of him.

"Reporting in, boss Giovanni," Annie and Oakley said in unison, standing firmly before his desk. Underneath their masks of steel, both of them were nervous to the core. Their boss' simple presence conveyed an aura of sheer power and supremacy, it was hard not to be. As tough as the two agents were, Giovanni was the only person who was capable of making them nervous.

"You're eight days late..." Giovanni growled, power in his voice. "What is the status of your mission?" he asked sharply.

"We... failed, boss," Oakley responded. It was the first time the two sisters had ever failed a mission. Both of them hoped that record let them save some face before their leader.

"Failed!?" Giovanni bellowed angrily, causing both Annie and Oakley to cringe back. "This is outrageous! How come the last wave of missions I've sent to all my agents have all ended in nothing but failure!?" he demanded, slamming his hands harshly into the desk. Annie and Oakley remained silent. Giovanni sighed and shook his head. "What is there to report?" he questioned.

"We managed to obtain all the information about the island and the rumored jewel and guardians as requested, but, the capture of the

jewel and guardians was foiled by a Pokémon Trainer, resulting in both mine and Annie's capture and arrest. We were detained for about a week before managing to escape," Oakley responded firmly.

"Did you lose any of our technology or leak any information to authorities?" Giovanni asked immediately, his tone grave.

"No, sir," Annie answered quickly. "All of our technological equipment was either safely recovered or destroyed. We escaped from police before we could be properly interrogated," she added.

"Good..." Giovanni said, relieved. The last thing he needed was information of Team Rocket leaking into authorities.

"All gathered information on the mission was sent to your personal database as per protocol," Oakley reported. "The detailed reports are there."

Giovanni nodded slowly. "Good."

"Are we going to be sent on another mission to Alto Mare?" Oakley asked. "The Soul Dew proved to be far more powerful than expected. We saw it in action. It moved oceans, had the power to destroy the entire region. The guardian Legendaries also proved their power."

"That would be such a powerful asset and weapon to Team Rocket. I don't think we can let it pass," Annie added. "I am sure the jewel has unmeasurable value."

To Annie and Oakley's absolute shock, Giovanni shook his head. "At the moment, no. There is no time left to send you two to another mission. Until now, you two have had a spotless record of success. I'll tolerate failure just this one time, however, I expect better results from both of you in future assignments."

"Yes sir," Both Annie and Oakley said in unison.

"Good," Giovanni said simply.

"May I ask, why is there's no time for us to undertake this mission again?" Oakley asked. "Is there a new assignment for us?"

"Some of Team Rocket's best scientists have been working on a project in top secrecy for the last decade. Now, it is nearing competition. Once this is unveiled, all Team Rocket manpower and funds will be solely focused on it. This project is far more important than an island jewel or a pair of weak Legendaries. You two will be an important part of it. For the time being, assist Professor Sebastian in anything he needs and remain on standby," Giovanni replied, his voice calm and collected.

"Yes Sir!" Annie and Oakley chorused. Both of them were deeply disappointed that Alto Mare and the dragon twins were apparently no longer of Giovanni's interest. However, neither showed that. They knew Giovanni very well. Whatever his plans were, they must be magnificent and they would follow his head.

Both exited the office, leaving Giovanni alone to further his dark machinations...

Author Notes: Chapter's over.

A Mother's Pride

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon.

As always...

"Speech"

" *Telepathy*"

' *Thoughts*'

A/N: Here's chapter 7! The lucky number! Thanks to all who have been keeping up and reading the tale. Also many thanks to my Beta Reader, he's been helping out a lot.

"Hello Professor!" Ash called as he entered Professor Elm's Lab, having flown from the Marine Research Lab aboard Latios. Latias entered behind him, disguised as Bianca, as usual. Pikachu shouted a greeting as well, not really expecting it to be returned.

Professor Elm looked up at Ash. He was currently sitting on a couch, probably enjoying a small break from his work. "Well hello Ash, it's good to see you again. Congratulations on getting all those badges, by the way!"

Ash grinned. "Of course Professor! Next time you congratulate me, it'll be for winning the Silver Conference."

"That I'd like to see. So who's this lovely girl?" Professor Elm inquired, glancing at the disguised Latias.

"This is Bianca, a friend of mine," Ash answered. Latias gave a small shy wave.

"Well, I'm professor Elm, nice to meet you," Professor Elm introduced himself kindly. Latias flashed a small smile back. "So Ash, how's the egg doing?" Elm asked.

Ash grabbed his backpack and opened it, taking out the small incubator inside. Ash showed it to professor Elm, who carefully took it from Ash. The second it left Ash's hands, Ash once again heard the sound of very faint crying, and also felt quite sad.

Latias looked at him in worry, she had sensed what happened to Ash when he first took the egg, and now it was happening again. Even though in human form most of her psychic senses were diminished, she could still sense some things. She couldn't make out what was happening through, she only sensed that *something* had happened.

Professor Elm seemed to not have noticed anything. "Well this little guy sure looks nice, I'll check if it's completely healthy." He began walking to a small machine in the back of the room.

" *Ash, what's wrong?*" Latias inquired telepathically.

Ash gave a startled jump, almost making Pikachu fall off his shoulder. He had been so caught up in thinking about the egg that Latias' question had startled him. He turned to look at her. "Nothing, I'm fine," He lied. He didn't know how to explain this to her.

Latias gave him an annoyed look. She put her hands on her hips and scolded him. "*No, something's up with you and you're telling me what it is right now!*"

"She's right Ash, you've been acting weird ever since receiving that egg," Pikachu agreed. He had known Ash long enough to know when something was bothering him.

Ash sighed and gave in. "I'll tell you later, it's a little hard to explain." Latias frowned but decided to let Ash be for now. He was starting to worry her, and Pikachu didn't look any better.

Professor Elm walked up to them. "The egg is perfectly healthy, but we'll have to wait until it hatches to know what will come out so we can return it home."

"Alright professor," Ash answered, happy to hear the egg was okay.

A sudden knock on the door caught everyone's attention. Ash opened it and was quite surprised to see Professor Oak and his mother, Delia. "Hello everyone!" Delia chimed in her usual very cheerful mood. Ash could swear that Latias and his mom were always smiling and cheerful. The second Delia saw Ash, she sprinted and hugged him in a loving motherly way, but why did something seem different about Ash's eyes? Thankfully, Pikachu managed to jump off Ash's shoulder before getting crushed in the hug. Latias looked at them in confusion.

" *Pikachu, who is she?*" Latias asked the yellow rodent telepathically.

"That's Ash's mother, and the man behind her is Professor Oak," Pikachu answered. Latias nodded in understanding. Now she knew why she was being so affectionate to Ash.

Professor Elm looked utterly confused, first Pikachu spoke to the girl for some reason, and then the girl had nodded as if she had understood him perfectly. Professor Oak didn't seem to notice.

"So, how's my sweetheart doing?" Delia asked after she finally broke the hug.

"I'm doing great!" Ash answered happily. It had been quite a while since he had last seen his mother.

Professor Oak looked very confused. "Ash, just how did you get here from Blackthorn city so fast? We talked around mid-day after you won the badge from the Blackthorn Gym. How did you get here?"

Ash smirked. "Latios took me here." Both Professors' eyes widened as they remembered Ash had a Legendary Pokemon in his team.

"Latios?" Delia idly wondered. "Isn't that the Legendary Pokemon you caught that Professor Oak doesn't stop babbling about?" Ash, Pikachu and Latias sweatdropped collectively. "Ahh, where are my manners," Delia said once she noticed the girl with Pikachu. "Who's she, Ash? A new friend?" Delia walked closer to the girl. "I'm Delia, nice to meet you!"

"She's Bianca, and yes she's a new friend," Ash introduced her again. It felt awkward to call her 'Bianca' instead of Latias. Latias smiled and waved hello, at least this time it wasn't a shy one. Latias felt comfortable around Delia, it was as if she emitted an aura of happiness and friendship, just like Ash.

"So Ash, can we see your Latios?" Professor Elm asked. He was also itching to see this Legendary Pokemon.

Ash had asked Latios during the flight if he could show him to the Professors, he knew that they were going to ask him to. Latios had asked Ash if he truly trusted the Professors, to which Ash had answered 'yes'. Then Latios had said that as long as Ash stayed near him and the professors didn't try anything funny, it'd be all right with him. Latios wasn't really one for humans.

"Sure, just don't overreact or something like that," Ash told them, reaching for Latios' Pokeball. "And let's go outside to give Latios more space."

Once everyone had walked outside, Ash took a few steps back. "Latios, come out!" he shouted as he threw his Pokeball to the ground. With a bright flash Latios appeared. He eyed the professors cautiously. They didn't seem like bad people, just like Ash had said.

Professor Oak and Elm's eyes were as wide as dinner plates. They had rarely seen a Legendary Pokemon, and now they had one right in front of them. Latios chuckled a little at the look on their faces. It was priceless!

"Incredible," whispered Professor Oak. "A Latios, right in front of me!"

"Congratulations Ash, you got yourself a really rare Pokemon! Finding and capturing him must have been really difficult!" Professor Elm said, looking at Latios a bit closer.

Ash chuckled a little. "The funny thing is, I didn't battle him, I befriended him and he decided to come with me."

Delia smiled as she walked a bit closer to Latios. "That's one impressive Pokemon dear, and a Legendary nonetheless!"

"Ash, did you by chance run into a Pokemon called Latias? It's said that where a Latios is, a Latias is always nearby," Professor Elm asked.

Ash and Pikachu chuckled and glanced at Latias. She blushed at the sudden attention. Ash gave a small nod to her. Professor Elm and Oak looked confused. "Why do you look at her like that?" Oak asked.

Ash smiled and grabbed Latias' arm. "Mom, Professor Elm and Professor Oak, meet Latias, Latios' sister."

All three humans looked utterly baffled. "Ash... she's a human, how can she be a Latias?" Professor Elm asked, very confused. "And how can she be Latios' sister?"

Suddenly the girl was engulfed by a soft blue light, startling the professors. When the light faded, a red and white dragon was floating in her place. She gave a small coo of greeting.

Professor Elm and Professor Oak looked in utter disbelief and were about to faint. Delia looked between Latias and Latios. "Awww, she's so cute!" she squealed, walking forward eagerly and giving Latias a hug. To Delia, Latias was a lot cuter than Latios.

Latios just turned to look at them. Usually when someone got that close to Latias he'd immediately move to defend her, but because it was Ash's mother he let it slip. Besides, everything seemed good about her.

"S-S-She can turn into a h-human," Professor Elm stuttered. He was completely astonished by this. He'd never heard of a Pokemon capable of assuming human shape, heck, he hadn't even known if such a thing was even possible before now.

"Yes, that's one of her abilities, she can shape-shift into a human at will," Ash clarified proudly. "She's amazing isn't she?" Latias blushed slightly at that comment. Latios and Pikachu hid a small snicker. Thankfully no one else noticed because Latias was currently being petted by Delia.

"Impressive," both professors said, completely awestruck.

Professor Oak composed himself a little. "But Ash, I don't remember a Latias appearing in your trainer record," he stated, remembering that only a Latios had appeared in it.

"You mean captured?" Ash asked.

"Essentially, yes," Replied the Pokemon Professor of Kanto.

"Well, I haven't captured her, she doesn't want to battle yet so I keep her like this so I can still have a full six team even with her around. She'll become my Pokemon when she finally decides to be captured and when she learns how to battle well," Ash stated. "Right Latias?"

Having already parted from Delia's hug, Latias flew to his side and nodded eagerly, giving another coo, this time meaning 'yes'. The professors still didn't understand.

"That means that you have two Legendary Pokemon with you?" Professor Elm asked.

"Yes, one officially and the other unofficially, at least for now," Ash said, suddenly felling proud of himself. Having Legendary Pokemon was great! Training them was hard, though. Both Professors looked like they were about to have a heart attack. Pikachu had to choke back a laugh. Ash decided to change the topic. "So, where do I register for the Silver Conference?" he asked eagerly. He couldn't wait for the conference to begin, his prime motivation being kicking Gary's ass in a battle.

"You have to register at the Pokemon Center," Professor Elm told him, pointing at the Pokemon Center in the distance.

Pikachu, Latias and Latios looked at him in utter disbelief. "Why didn't we register at the Blackthorn City Pokemon Center, then?!" Pikachu demanded angrily from Ash's shoulder.

"Pikachu has a point, why didn't we register at the Pokemon Center in Blackthorn City?" Ash asked.

"You can understand Pikachu?" Professor Oak asked in astonishment. Ash was simply full of surprises these days.

"Yes, and answer my question please," Ash demanded.

"Well, to prevent confusion and to keep a proper record, only one Pokemon Center in the region is permitted to register Pokemon Trainers to the Silver Conference, in this case, the one in New Bark Town," Professor Elm explained.

Ash sighed along with his Pokemon. "Guess I can't complain about that."

"Yes you can," Pikachu said.

Ash frowned. "Hey yeah, that's right, I can!" Everyone else sweatdropped. "Oh well... I'll go and register. I'll probably sleep at the Pokemon Center, too," Ash said, returning Latios to his Pokeball.

"Alright Ash, we'll wait for you here in the morning," Professor Oak said.

"Wait Ash," Professor Elm said as he walked back at the lab. A few seconds later he exited with the egg incubator. "Here, take it with you for now." Ash nodded and took the egg back gently.

Delia smiled and hugged Ash again. "Congratulations on making it to the league again dear," she congratulated him. She took a small glance at Latias, who was still hovering beside Ash. "Also, nice job with the Legendaries, you finally captured one! Especially a Legendary as cute as this one!"

Latias gave a coo of contentment. Delia walked up and patted Latias gently on the head again, loving the feel of Latias' soft feathers against her hand. Latias gave another happy coo. Pikachu sulked in the back of the group, muttering that Latias now had Delia's affections and was no longer interested in him.

Delia looked at Ash and noticed that he had a small necklace hanging around his neck. She walked to him to examine it closer. The necklace had two small crystal figurines that looked a lot like Ash's new Pokemon, it looked quite cute on Ash. "Nice necklace, did you buy it to match your new Pokemon?" Delia asked.

"No, it was a small gift from her," Ash said, looking at Latias. Pikachu almost started laughing when he remembered the *other* thank you gift she had given him. The fact that Ash looked like he was forcing back a blush told him that he remembered it as well. Latias giggled happily.

"Well, this looks nice," Delia commented about the necklace. "Also Ash, I notice that there seems to be something a little different about your eyes. They have a reddish tint in them instead of the usual brown," Delia stated.

Ash sighed. *'And I was hoping she didn't notice.'*

" *I was hoping that too.* " Latias telepathed. She paused. '*Why did I hear Ash's thoughts so easily?*' she wondered to herself.

Ash looked at her. "Well mom, it was... ahhh... a little outcome of one of my usual adventures," Ash answered.

"Let me guess, that little adventure was with Latios and Latias right?" Delia asked.

Ash nodded. "Yes."

"Care to elaborate?" Delia asked.

Ash gulped. "Alright."

Ash began to tell her of his adventure in Altomare, occasionally receiving support from Latias or Pikachu. Ash wisely left out the fact that he nearly died three times, twice from drowning had Latias not saved him and a third time in helping Latios survive, he just told her the only risk was being unconscious for a day.

His mother had scolded him to no end when he almost drowned during the adventure with Lugia, or when he almost fell off the waterfall while infiltrating Entei's crystal tower, or when a giant Celebi-controlled twig monster almost killed him had Suicune not intervened (Brock let slip this one), he didn't want to add another I-almost-died event to his mother's knowledge. Ash had also never told Delia that he actually died during Mew and Mewtwo's fight. He had remembered this after Mewtwo restored his memory at Mt. Quena, in Purity Canyon.

Delia couldn't help but sometimes turn to look at Latias in mild disbelief. Latias and Latios were a lot more powerful and special than she had thought when she had seen them for the first time. Latias and Latios didn't really seem capable of stopping an entire tsunami, and yet they had. They were even viewed as guardian deities in Altomare.

At least what Delia found a lot of comfort in was that with two Pokemon like Latias and Latios her dear son would be a lot safer during his travels. She could now rest assured that two Legendary Pokemon would always protect Ash from anything during his journey and guide him. Her son was in caring hands, or claws...

"So after all this Latias and Latios decided to come with me on my Pokemon journey. Thanks to them now I can understand Pokemon speech!" Ash finished, hoping that his mother didn't view the adventure negatively.

"Alright dear, at least you didn't get in danger again," Delia said in false relief. She suspected Ash was hiding another I-almost-died moment, but decided not to pry. She turned to Latias. "Thanks for helping my son."

Latias cooed and smiled. *'It's I who should be thanking him,'* she thought to herself.

"She says you're welcome," Ash translated to his mother.

"You know, that Pokemon understanding ability is rather helpful. Maybe you could help me understand Mimey a little better," Delia mused.

"Maybe. Well, I have to go. See you mom!" Ash said. They parted ways and he headed for the Pokemon Center. *'That ended a lot better than I expected. At least I didn't get scolded or something,'* Ash thought, breathing a small sigh of relief.

Much to Delia's surprise, Latias disappeared into thin air, just like Ash had said she could. *'Just how much is that little Pokemon capable of?'* Delia thought to herself in pure wonder. She could barely remember all the abilities that Ash had described of her. *'That little dragon girl sure is something else. I assume Latios is just as great.'* She wondered if Ash could really win the Silver Conference with them. *'Latias and Latios, please protect my son during his travels and make sure he always stays safe,'* she silently wished.

As Ash disappeared from view, she walked back inside the Lab.

Ash smiled as he entered the New Bark Town Pokemon Center. "Finally! I'm just one step closer to the Silver Conference," Ash said happily.

"Well aren't we a little enthusiastic?" Nurse Joy chided from behind the counter. "Let me guess, you came here to register for the Silver Conference?" Ash nodded eagerly and walked over to her.

" *Seriously, how can there be so many Nurse Joys!*" Latias whined telepathically, she was starting to get a headache from pondering this. When she asked Latios, he had groaned and told her to ask someone else.

Pikachu sighed. "I already told you, it's completely unknown. But maybe Brock can give you a few answers."

Latias huffed. "*I'd rather die than ask something of that pervert!*"

Pikachu laughed. He found Latias' dislike of Brock's perverted side rather funny. Even more that every time Brock tried something, Latias would prank him.

Ash ignored the little display behind him and decided to continue with the registration. "Here are my eight badges, Nurse Joy."

"Okay," Nurse Joy said as she took Ash's Badges and inserted them in a machine, most likely to verify that they were authentic. Nurse Joy couldn't count the number of fools that had tried to register with fake badges. The Machine gave a small 'beep' and flashed a green light. "Just give me your PokeDex so your registration will be complete," Nurse Joy told him. Ash did as he was told and handed over his PokeDex. Nurse Joy inserted the PokeDex in a slot in the machine. Soon it gave another beep, signaling that the registration was successfully completed. "All set and ready to go. You are registered at the Silver Conference. From here, go to Silver Town

and verify your matchups for the preliminaries, good luck!" Nurse Joy informed Ash. "Also the conference starts in 13 days, so prepare yourself and train hard."

Ash nodded. "Very well, for now I'd like a room for the night."

"Room 7 is unused, you can take it," Nurse Joy said, pointing to the stairs.

"Okay, thanks Nurse Joy," Ash thanked her. He started heading toward the stairs, the still invisible Latias following him.

After some walking and reading room numbers, they arrived at room number 7, which was pretty much the same as any other Pokemon Center room. Ash headed toward the bed on the right side and took out the incubator from his backpack, gently lowering it onto his bed. Latios released himself from his Pokeball, jumping at the opportunity to get some fresh air. Ash took a seat on the bed and stared at the incubator. "Are you going to tell me what's up with you concerning that egg?" Latias asked gently as she resumed visibility, hovering closer to the bed until she was just in front of Ash. Latios and Pikachu listened in. Latios had sensed what had happened to Ash, even inside his Pokeball.

Ash sighed. At least he found Latias's gentle tone soothing. Maybe they could help him in figuring out what was happening to him.

"Alright, you see, when I first took the egg I felt a small jolt course through me, and for some reason it felt as if I was hit by a wave of pain and sadness. I also heard the sound of faint crying echoing in my mind." Ash paused to gather his thoughts a little better. "This happens to me every time I leave the egg out of my sight for too long, almost as if the egg was calling to me in a way."

Latias hummed in thought, trying to make sense out of this, but nothing occurred to her. "Brother, do you know something about this?" Latias asked Latios.

Latos frowned in thought. "Well... possibly the egg is transmitting its feelings. Since it was stolen, maybe even as an egg, the infant is in pain because of the loss of its mother's love, so it wants to transmit those feelings to someone, like pleading for help. Maybe the egg chose Ash for this because he is pure hearted, so it trusts him. At least that's what I believe," Latos answered.

Ash smiled. "If that's the case, I won't fail the egg!"

Latos signed. "The only problem is how can we find this infant's parents, or even know who they are?"

Ash's hopes crashed. "Well, maybe we can wait until the egg hatches, and then we'll know which Pokemon it is. That'll narrow the search a lot." Latos shrugged, that was their best bet for now. Ash yawned. "Well, I'm taking a bath and I'm going to sleep."

That said the little group got ready for bed, hoping that the next day would be just as peaceful as this one. Ash's last thoughts before falling to sleep were about the egg. He wished that they could succeed in finding its parents.

Well that was all for Chapter 7! Hope you all like it a lot!

Please be kind and leave a Review! They are all fondly appreciated!

Until Chapter 8... see ya later!

A Child's Distress

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon.

"Speech."

' *Thoughts.* '

' *Telepathy.* '

It was about three in the morning. Inside the Pokemon Center, a certain group slept. The bedroom had two beds, one on each side of the room. In the one to the right, Latias and Latios slept peacefully. They always slept together in the secret garden, high in the treetops, and saw no reason to change that habit. Usually whenever the group camped out in the open, Latios burst out of his Pokeball to sleep outdoors, stating that he really didn't like being stuffed in a Pokeball for too long. On the bed to the left Ash and Pikachu were also sleeping. However, Ash wasn't really enjoying his night.

With a gasp the trainer suddenly woke up, sitting up in bed, panting and covered in cold sweat. He had just had a horrible yet weird nightmare, but he didn't really understand it. His abrupt awakening was enough to disturb Pikachu from his slumber, and he did the only thing that a suddenly startled electric rodent could do when abruptly woken up: he released a tremendous amount of electricity. The bed turned yellow as Ash screamed in pain, electricity coursing through his body.

The sound of Pikachu's outburst was enough to wake up Latias and Latios. Both raised their heads to get a better view of what was happening at the other bed. They saw that Ash was in a sitting position, his form blackened and smoking. Pikachu was standing beside him with a sheepish look on his face, scratching the back of his head in embarrassment. Both eon dragons had a very good

guess as to what had happened. "Sorry," Pikachu apologized, gesturing to the slightly carbonized Ash. Latias and Latios sweatdropped. With the use of his psychic abilities, Latios turned the lights on.

"What was that for?" Ash asked weakly, still a little dazed after being shocked. At least he was used to Pikachu's electrical attacks by now.

Latios got up and floated closer to Ash. "Are you alright?"

"Maybe..." Ash whimpered, still roasted a little.

"Why did you shock Ash?" Latios asked Pikachu.

"He woke up all of a sudden and I got a little startled," Pikachu answered, not really used to Ash waking up like that. Usually Ash slept in most days.

Ash's eyes widened in dread, remembering his nightmare. Latios noticed this. "Something wrong, Ash?" He inquired calmly, a sleepy tone in his voice.

"I had a really weird nightmare. I just can't understand it," Ash muttered. Latios looked at him in puzzlement.

"Care to describe it?" Latios asked, curious as to why the nightmare seemed to have shaken Ash so much.

"I don't know how to describe it," Ash stated. "Latios, you're a psychic, can't you read my mind and see it yourself?"

"Well, I could. But invading someone's mind without consent is *very* rude, and I wouldn't want to invade your personal mind space," Latios answered.

"Don't worry, you have my consent. But Just the nightmare, nothing else please," Ash said.

"Alright," Latios murmured. His eyes started glowing slightly, as he gently read Ash' mind, heading directly for the memory of the nightmare. Ash felt weird. When Latios started reading his mind, he felt how Latios' mind was a lot larger than his own. Then again, Latios was a Legendary Pokemon as well as a psychic, and Ash was a mere human. After that he felt oddly... calm. Latios was being gentle with his mind, not wanting to hurt him.

Latios quickly found the nightmare. *'What a weird dream,'* he thought to himself.

The nightmare Latios saw was depicted from Ash's viewpoint, inside a spherical yet transparent prison, which Latios quickly deduced was really the egg Ash was taking care of. Ash was seeing through the infant's eyes. How the egg could have done this puzzled Latios. Maybe the kid was special? In front of the egg there was a colossal Pokemon which Latios recognized as a Tyranitar fighting an even larger machine. The machine hit Tyranitar with a powerful attack, cutting a large hole in her chest. The whole world went black, and then lights reappeared as the egg was being taken away, the figures of the Tyranitar and machine fighting becoming smaller with each passing second. The faint cry of 'Mommy!' could be heard constantly in a distressed child's voice.

Three humans appeared in the distance. Latios deduced they were the poachers Naomi had told them of in the Marine Research Lab, and that this nightmare Ash had witnessed was really the egg telling its story. The memory went black, telling Latios this was when Ash had woken up.

Latios's eyes stopped glowing as he relaxed, Ash doing the same. "Well Latios, what does it mean?" Ash asked, hoping that Latios could give him some insight. After all, Latios was a psychic, he probably understood the way minds worked a lot better than him.

Latios turned to look at Ash. "What you witnessed was the story of how the egg was abducted, the rest you should figure it out quite

easily." Ash's eyes widened a little as slowly the nightmare began to make sense.

"Ah, sorry to interrupt, but can you tell me just what you're talking about?" Pikachu grumbled, feeling a little left out. He was starting to get jealous of both eon dragons' psychic abilities.

"I didn't read his mind, care to tell me as well?" Latias asked. She didn't want to intrude into Ash's mind if it wasn't needed. She too knew that it wasn't a nice thing to do, especially to a close friend.

Latios nodded. "Sure, I'll use my ability to project my memories of what I saw in Ash's mind." Latios's eyes started glowing again as he projected his memories of the nightmare into Latias's and Pikachu's minds. A minute later he was finished. "Understand a little better now?" Latios asked. They nodded.

"Thanks Latios," Ash added, finally understanding fully what the dream had meant.

Latios smiled. "Sure, No problem."

Ash reached for his backpack and took out his Pokedex. He began looking through the images of the Pokemon that inhabited the Johto Region, and stopped when he found one that looked like the one in his dream. The Pokedex beeped and said in its mechanical voice, "Tyranitar, the Armor Pokémon. Tyranitar has a heavily armored body that can withstand powerful attacks and is able to crush a mountain with one hand. This Pokémon wanders about in mountains seeking new opponents to fight."

Ash, Pikachu, Latias and Latios gulped. "Holy crap. I hope that when we deliver the kid to her, she recognizes that we're just trying to help and she doesn't attack us. I don't want to fight something that strong," Ash said.

"And knowing the luck we have, she'll think we're the ones who took her egg in the first place and try to kill us from the start," Pikachu

added, sounding sure of himself and quite annoyed.

"I second that," Ash grumbled. Ash continued looking at the Pokemon on the screen. He noticed it was a Dark-Type, meaning that Latios had a major disadvantage. Ash idly wondered if Latios could match it in a battle.

Latios almost choked. "Are you kidding, I'm not fighting that!" Latios exclaimed.

Ash looked at Latios in annoyance. "Didn't you say reading other's minds was rude?"

"I didn't read your mind, I picked up your thoughts, which is something completely different," Latios clarified.

Latias nodded. "He's right, reading your mind and reading your thoughts are two different things. Reading your mind means to look at all your memories, all the things you know and all your secrets, basically know *everything* about you, which is something neither me nor my brother have done to you. Like he said, it's too rude. Reading your thoughts are just picking up what you're thinking at the moment or saying in your mind. Besides, he didn't make any effort to hear it, I heard it as well."

Latios continued. "Sometimes, as psychics, my sister and I pick up stray thoughts of others without really wanting to. But just thoughts, not entire memories or pieces of a mind."

"Alright, but how did you pick up my thoughts?" Ash asked. "Does that mean I'm becoming a Psychic too?" He remembered Latios had told everyone that he might get some new abilities because of the Life Force exchange he went through to heal Latios, and later himself. Understanding Pokemon was the first benefit. Maybe there were others?

Latios hummed a little in thought before voicing his answer. "Maybe. I have to admit that using telepathy with you has gotten easier with

each passing day. You see Ash, using my telepathy with Latias is very easy since we're siblings. Using telepathy with a human is harder and more limited as we have no ties to them. But using telepathy with you has become easier than doing it with Brock and Misty, so there's a chance that this might be because you're starting to develop psychic powers."

Ash felt like he was going to explode from happiness until Latios continued. "However, Psychic abilities are not developed overnight. You could take years just to *start* being able to do something psychic, in addition to the years it takes to learn how to use them." Ash's hopes crashed rather violently. Latias giggled at his expression. "Don't worry; it may also take just months, or maybe even weeks. It depends," Latios reassured him. Ash just grumbled incoherently. Why did he have to wait to get cool stuff?

"You know Latios," Pikachu started. "Ever since Ash met you two he's been acting a little smarter. Maybe this whole psychic thing is boosting his brainpower. The old Ash wouldn't have understood a thing about that whole mind and thought thing," Pikachu said, cautiously eyeing Ash out the corner of his eye.

Ash fumed. Latias and Latios laughed wholeheartedly. "That's not true at all!" Ash yelled.

"Of course, there are still things that have to be worked out. You're still way too childish." Pikachu continued.

"Am not!" Ash countered, horrified at the idea. He wasn't childish, right?

"Are too," Pikachu answered back calmly.

"Am not!" Ash countered again, an edge in his voice.

"Are too," Pikachu said again.

"Am not!" Ash shouted again.

"Then why are you arguing with me so childishly?" Pikachu asked, tilting his head to the side with a devilish smile adorning his lips.

Ash looked like he wanted to commit suicide. "I'm still growing up," Ash grumbled under his breath. Pikachu laughed.

"Don't worry, I didn't mean all that, you're perfectly fine as you are." Pikachu comforted him, jumping into Ash's lap and giving him a small hug. "Besides, I just couldn't resist the chance to mess with you a little," he continued. Ash looked at him in annoyance. Latias and Latios looked at the little scene with interest. Traveling with Ash certainly was fun, even if it was about three and a half in the morning.

A powerful glow suddenly erupted. The foursome turned to look at the small table beside Ash's bed. The incubator was shining brightly. Ash stood and walked to the table, carefully removing the glowing egg and placing it on the bed. Latias, Latios, Pikachu and Ash watched in wonder as the little egg slowly started changing shape, all the while glowing a bright white, the shine of evolution, or in this case hatching.

' I hope the Pokemon that hatch es isn't as big and scary as its mother,' Ash thought to himself. Latios and Latias once again picked up the thought and sweatdropped.

When the light dimmed a new Pokemon was now sleeping in the bed. It was a small green Pokemon that had an erect spine on top of its head, angular black streak markings below and on the upper corners of its eyes, and several black marks on the side of its small body. It had a scaled red rhombus-shaped belly of sorts. It had fingerless arms and legs with a single nailed toe and a tail somewhat resembling a pinecone in appearance.

Latias cooed in delight. "He's so cute!"

"You think all kids are cute, sis." Latios muttered offhandedly. Latias glared at him but made no comment. Latios raised an eyebrow at her

expression. Latias was unable to keep a straight face for long and started giggling.

Ash had meanwhile taken out his PokeDex. He pointed it at the small Pokemon. It beeped and said, "Larvitar, the Rock Skin Pokémon. Larvitar generally hatch deep within the earth and take a long time before coming to the surface."

Pikachu blinked in surprise. "Hatch deep within the earth? Who invented that crap? Didn't this one just hatch before us?"

Latias nodded. "That's a really good question. That can't be very healthy. How can an egg hatch in the coldness of the underground?" Latias wondered if such a thing even was possible. She remembered that she had hatched in a warm and cozy garden, directly into the loving arms of her slightly older brother.

Latios looked at the PokeDex. "Ask that to whoever programmed that stupid little machine."

Ash sweatdropped at his Pokemon's comments. "Let's go back to sleep, we'll show him to the Professors in the morning."

Everyone nodded in agreement. Soon the group was asleep again. What a weird interruption that had been. At least there were no more nightmares.

At least, not for the four of them...

Morning came, Pikachu had to wake up Ash to prevent the cap-wearing trainer from sleeping in again. As usual, a thunderbolt attack served as the alarm. Ash had at least learned by now not to complain.

Ash looked at the still sleeping Larvitar. He tried to pick him up, ready to head downstairs... and was bitten in the arm. Ash gave a

startled cry and took a step back from Larvitar. "What was that for!" he asked, wiping the blood trail off his arm flowing from the bite.

"What happened?" Latias asked in concern.

"He bit me." Ash answered her, pointing at the Larvitar.

Latias looked at the Larvitar. "That wasn't very nice, you know." The Larvitar just looked at Latias, a completely blank look on his face. Ash felt a chill run down his spine. The Larvitar's gaze held... nothing. No emotion was shown on his face, like he didn't care for anything at all.

Latias sighed. She had an ability that allowed her to sense the emotions of others, that's why she knew which humans were good enough to trust back at Altomare. And what she sensed in the Larvitar troubled her. She sensed a lot of pain and sorrow, but the Larvitar was bottling it in, trying to hide it behind that emotionless look. "You don't have to hide your emotions, it will only destroy you from within, let it out." she said in a sweet voice, trying to comfort the Larvitar. The Larvitar grunted and turned around, clearly trying to ignore her, probably annoyed that she could read him so easily.

Latias sighed again and reached for the Larvitar, trying to help him. She hated seeing people sad, that's why, whenever someone was sad, she always did her best to cheer them up, especially if it was just a child. Latios stopped her, putting a claw on her wing. "Leave him alone for now, don't rush it, give him time," he gently whispered to her. Latias looked a little crestfallen, but nodded in understanding.

Ash looked confused. "Let it out? What are you talking about, Latias?"

"Just as I can project memories to anyone easier than Latias can, she can sense the emotions of others easier than I," Latios clarified.

"And this little one is really hurt. He tries to hide it, but bottling large amounts of pain and sorrow can be really bad for you in the long

run," Latias added, a sad edge in her voice.

Ash looked sadly at the Larvitar. He sat in the bed next to him. "You know, you don't have to ignore us like this. All we want to do is help you. We'll do our best to see that you return to your mother. What do you say, Larvitar?"

Through Larvitar didn't really care about what Ash had said, the last part caught his attention. They wanted to help him find his mother. Maybe he would accept their help for now. Larvitar turned around and nodded to them. They smiled. At least it was progress, even if the little Pokemon was still as quiet as a grave.

Ash smiled and tried to pick him up to take him downstairs, but failed, mainly because Larvitar weighed about eighty pounds. Larvitar looked wary at Ash's touch. He just jumped off the bed and looked ready to walk. "That didn't go very well," Ash muttered, rubbing a sore spot on his arm. That little guy was heavy! "Let's go," he said, walking out the door and down the stairs. Pikachu and Larvitar followed. Latias and Latios turned invisible and followed as well, always keeping a few feet behind Ash.

Ash and his little group exited the Pokemon Center and began heading toward Elm's lab. Ash was going to say goodbye and then take off to wherever Elm suggested they could find Larvitar's mother. After that, he'd head to Silver Town. The Silver Conference was literally calling to him.

Once again Ash remembered that Gary was going to be there. Ash wanted to pit Latios against Gary's team; it would be interesting to see how Gary would react to a Legendary Pokemon in battle. Ash then remembered Clair's words: *'A very honorable way to catch a Legendary, but don't think that having a Legendary makes you invincible. Legendaries can be defeated just like regular Pokemon.'* Ash should really memorize those words. Clair was a respected Gym leader and had far more years of experience than Ash. He knew she was right, Ash even knew that if he asked Brock, he'd say the same thing. He must always bear in mind not to get overconfident because

of Latios. Ash looked up after thinking all this; he was already at the entrance to the Lab. From what he recalled of the little walk, every time Pikachu tried to talk to Larvitar, he didn't answer back. So far Ash hadn't heard Larvitar's voice.

He knocked two times and waited patiently. Soon, his mother opened the door. "Hello my dear!" Delia chimed, giving Ash a loving embrace. "Come in." Ash entered, Pikachu and Larvitar walking beside him. Latias and Latios entered as well just before Delia closed the door. "So where are Latias and Latios?" Delia asked, glancing around and noticing that Ash wasn't with the usual disguised Latias.

Ash chuckled. "Latias is beside you and Latios is behind me."

Delia turned to look and suddenly heard a cute giggle as Latias and Latios resumed visibility. Delia patted Latias on the head. Pikachu's head hung in disappointment. Before Delia met Latias and Latios, it was always he who Delia had petted and adored. Pikachu could swear he heard a small 'I'm a lot cuter than you' in his mind. He glared at the dragons.

All the noise seemed to have attracted the attention of both professors, as they were walking down the stairs. "Hello, Ash," Professor Oak called.

"Hello!" Ash greeted back. Latias and Latios gave a coo of greeting as well. Both Professors returned it, even if they didn't know if it had been a greeting in the first place.

Professor Elm noticed the little Larvitar next to Ash. He guessed that it had hatched from the egg. "I guess the little egg hatched right?"

Ash nodded. "Yes, this little Larvitar came out, but you should leave him alone, he's not the social type."

Professor Elm looked confused. "What do you mean?" He approached the Larvitar to examine it, but the second he got too

close... Larvitar screeched. It was the most powerful screech attack anyone had ever heard. Professor Elm quickly stepped back, and Larvitar stopped screeching. Everyone groaned. Probably they all had a headache now.

"Could someone pick up that phone?" Professor Oak asked, cleaning his ears.

"Oak, I don't think there is one," Delia muttered, a little dazed by the screech.

"Okay, he finally made a sound, but not the most acceptable one," Pikachu commented, rubbing his head.

"You think?" Latios asked sarcastically.

"I've heard of antisocial, but this, from just a baby?" Professor Oak said, a little saddened.

"So, where can I find his parents?" Ash asked. He wanted to help Larvitar as soon as possible.

"Well Ash, how convenient! Larvitar are Pokemon native to Mount Silver and the surrounding areas." Professor Elm announced.

"That's right; you are heading to Silver Town anyway to participate in the conference, so you can search for Larvitar's parents while you prepare for the conference," Professor Oak suggested.

Ash kneeled next to Larvitar. "See, we'll find your mom soon." Larvitar turned to look at him but made no comment or even a gesture.

"At least he didn't screech." Delia said in relief. She had expected Larvitar to screech when Ash got close to him. "Well, I made breakfast! Let's eat!"

Ash walked to the back garden to release his Pokemon so they could eat too. However...

"Ash!" Bayleef cooed, body slamming Ash affectionately.

After some effort Ash managed to pry Bayleef off him. "I thought we worked that whole body slam thing out long ago!"

Bayleef grinned sheepishly. "Sorry, couldn't resist the chance."

Professor Elm served all the Pokemon a good meal before going inside to eat. Latias and Latios had managed to stay with the humans and were lucky enough to get a bite of Delia's cooking. Delia's cooking was by far the best they had ever eaten. Brock's cooking looked like a novice's in comparison. To say Latias and Latios were completely delighted was an understatement. After eating and taking a small rest and returning all Pokemon to their Pokeballs--except Latios and Pikachu--Ash got ready to head for Mt. Silver. "So, when are you guys departing for Silver Town?" Ash asked.

"We'll take our time. We'll make sure to be there by the Final rounds, or the second phase," Professor Oak told Ash.

"Why not be there from the start?" Ash asked in confusion.

"Because the first rounds are boring. They have way too many battlers, so most of them are really incompetent or too inexperienced. We watch on television as these trainers are eliminated so that we can go and see the real battles up close in the Conference during the second phrase." Professor Oak said off-handedly.

"Besides, the only two trainers we are really interested in watching are you and Gary, and I'm sure both of you can pass the preliminaries with ease," Delia added.

Ash and Pikachu sweatdropped. "Sounds logical," Pikachu admitted.

"So where has Gary been?" Ash asked.

"Gary gathered all eight badges one and a half months ago. He's been taking intensive training in Mt. Silver since then. He will not accept another defeat like the one in the Indigo League. All his Pokemon have gotten a lot stronger," Professor Oak informed Ash.

Ash and Pikachu paled. *'Oh crap. I'm busted,'* Ash thought.

"And something tells me you two are going to fight," Delia added.

"That will be a truly epic match. I also can't wait to see Latios in battle, it is said that watching a Legendary Pokemon fight is awe-inspiring." Professor Elm gushed.

'Tell me about it, I've lost count of how many times I'm almost gotten killed because of battling Legendaries,' Ash thought. Something occurred to him. "You haven't told Gary about Latios, right?" Right now, Latios was Ash's best hope of winning if he was matched with Gary, unless he called in more heavy artillery with Charizard.

"No Ash, I want a fair battle between the two of you. I'm not going to give you a disadvantage by divulging what I guess is your trump card for the conference," Professor Oak reassured Ash.

Ash sighed in relief. "I'm still gonna train hard the few days I have left. I'm gonna win the conference! Right?" Ash asked enthusiastically, directing the question to Latios and Pikachu, two of his strongest fighters. Both nodded, willing to give Ash their full support. Latias nodded as well, even if all she could do was keep cheering them on.

Professor Oak smiled. "That's the spirit."

"I'd better get started, then," Ash said, turning to leave, only to notice someone was missing. "Where's Larvitar?" Everyone glanced around, noticing that the little Pokemon was indeed nowhere to be seen. "Latias, can you sense where he is?" Ash asked.

Latias shook her head. "No, since I haven't gotten to know and befriend him, I can't sense him easily."

"What did she say?" Delia asked.

"She says she can't sense him, we'll have to look for him. Scatter," Ash said. Everyone turned and began looking around the lab.

Every passing minute made Ash more and more worried, where could that little Larvitar have gone? Since he hadn't heard a screech, it meant that nobody had found him yet. Currently Ash was looking through the back gardens of the Lab on his own. All three of the Pokemon that usually stayed out with him had taken different paths in searching for Larvitar. Professor Elm's back garden was smaller than Oak's, but it still had different habitats.

Ash paused when he saw a small lake, most likely intended for water Pokemon. He walked over to it and was surprised to find Larvitar at the edge, looking at his reflection in the water. Ash smiled. "There you are," he said softly as he approached Larvitar and sat next to him.

Larvitar made no move to acknowledge Ash's presence. Ash sighed and gently scratched Larvitar on the head. Finally Larvitar turned to him, so Ash knew he had his attention. "You know, you shouldn't push us away from you like this. I know you must feel bad, but at least accept us as your friends. We only want to help you," Ash said gently, still scratching Larvitar's head tenderly. "You hurt Latias' feelings when you rejected her help. All she wanted was to be your friend. She actually finds you kind of adorable." Larvitar gave Ash a startled look, surprise evident in his eyes, even if only for a moment.

"I understand the pain you're going through, the sorrow of never knowing a parent. I never knew my father either." Ash paused. "Latias and Latios understand this too, they also never knew their parents. By the time Latios hatched, his father had already died saving a city, so Latios was forced to mature faster to give Latias a parental figure, even if Latios is only a few days older than her," Ash

continued. Latios and Latias had refused to tell Ash their true age, but they had told him that Latios was a few days older. When it came to mental age, however, Latios was far more mature and knowledgeable than Latias. Larvitar gave Ash a completely surprised look, clear disbelief in his eyes.

Larvitar now regretted ignoring Latias like that that morning a little. "We'll help you find your mother. Soon we'll return you to her, but at least try and talk to us until then, alright?" Larvitar looked down a little, pondering this. Ash's words still lingered in his mind. The fact that he and the two dragons knew what he felt like comforted him a little. Maybe he could trust them, but only them, everyone else was untrustworthy. "So, what do you say Larvitar?" Ash asked, hoping that maybe the little Larvitar would at least accept them for now.

Larvitar turned to Ash and nodded, a small smile on his lips. Ash beamed in joy and hugged him. He would have picked him up and hugged him like a baby, but Ash remembered Larvitar weighed almost eighty pounds. "Let's go back, everyone must be worried about us," Ash said, glancing back in the direction of the Lab.

"Okay," Larvitar said in a quiet tone. Ash looked at him in surprise but smiled. Larvitar still looked apathetic to everything around him, but at least he spoke. That was a start.

Ash started walking towards the Lab, with Larvitar following him. "That reminds me, you're apologizing to Latias." Larvitar froze for a second, but nodded. He understood that he at least had to be nice to them because they were helping him.

As they walked, unknown to Ash, a pair of eyes was watching him all the while. Latias smiled. She had found Ash and Larvitar just as Ash took a seat at the edge of the lake. She was glad that Larvitar was opening up a little and that she was at least getting an apology, but she was surprised that Ash had done so well in talking to Larvitar. She was right in leaving Altomare to follow Ash, he was a remarkable little human. She quickly flew to the Lab, wanting to get

there before Ash and Larvitar, which wasn't really difficult as she could fly very fast.

After everyone had reunited and seen that Larvitar was fine, Ash said his goodbyes and prepared to head to Mt. Silver to fight in the Silver Conference.

Ash exited the Lab and walked to the town outskirts, not wanting all of New Bark Town to see him flying off on Latios. He had no problem doing that in Blackthorn because that city was quite used to majestic dragons flying all over the place. Once he was on the road, Latios and Latias resumed visibility, having turned invisible when they had left the lab. "Before we depart, you have something to say, right Larvitar?" Ash stated rather than asked, looking down at the small Rock and Ground Type.

Larvitar looked down a little, maybe ashamed. He turned and walked until he was just in front of Latias. Larvitar had to look up just to see Latias' face. She took the cue and floated a little closer to the ground. Larvitar sighed and spoke in a quiet and shy voice, "I'm sorry for ignoring you earlier this morning. I just thought that I couldn't trust any of you."

Latias smiled sweetly and gave Larvitar a hug. "Don't worry, its okay, I forgive you."

Larvitar felt oddly comforted. For a moment Larvitar wondered if he related Latias' hug to the loving embrace of his own lost mother. Latias sensed that Larvitar's sorrow had diminished a little, but it was still vast. She knew emotional wounds like this healed slowly. Maybe later she would talk to Larvitar so he can fully release his pain.

"Finally, he talks." Latios whispered to Pikachu, who nodded in agreement. Latias rolled her eyes. Silly big brothers...

That issue finally worked out, Latios lowered to the ground to allow Ash to climb on. Latias did the same for Pikachu and Larvitar. Soon,

the group was flying to Silver Town high above the clouds, ready for the Silver Conference and to search for Larvitar's mother.

So, the Journey continues. Will Larvitar fully open up to the world? Who knows!

Hope you all like this chapter! Review please!

Silver Tragedy

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: Chapter 9! Hope you all like it!

"Wow!" Latias said in awe as she and Latios approached Silver Town. They were flying high above the clouds, barely visible from the ground.

"Yeah," Ash agreed, peeking over Latios' neck as he saw Silver Town in the distance. The Town was located between two lakes. Directly in the space between the lakes was a colossal stadium with a very modern design. Surrounding the stadium were a series of structures arranged in a circle. Half of them were smaller battlefields and the other half were stands and small buildings, most likely for souvenirs and stores. Across the stadium's entrance was a high stone arch, giving the gateway to Silver Town a nice touch.

On the right side of town, almost touching the lake was a big five-story L-shaped building. This was the hotel that would house all the trainers participating in the conference and their relatives. Directly behind the stadium after following a path was an enormous Pokemon Center, jumbo-sized to tend to all the pokemon participating in the tournament. Surrounding the Pokemon center were several small fields for training and sparring. Silver Town was also very nature-friendly, aside from the stadium the entire town was covered trees and vegetation, numerous building seeming to actually sprout from the landscape. Overall, Silver Town was impressive to

look at from above, and Latios and Latias slowed down a little to admire the city.

"Looks better up close than on television," Latios commented, gesturing at the city.

"You've seen it on television? When?" Ash asked, wondering how Latios could have seen any competitions if he lived in the secret garden.

"Well, when the tournaments start, sometimes Latias and I go to Lorenzo's house to watch them. They're a good to pass the time," Latios answered. "For instance, I remember when we watched the last Silver Conference."

Latias smiled, also recalling how they had watched the competitions back in Altomare with Bianca and Lorenzo. "And I'm sure that back then, the thought that you were going to participate in this year's tournament never crossed your mind." She giggled.

Latios smiled at her. "I guess. I would have never thought of it. Scratch that, I never even expected to leave Altomare with a trainer in the first place."

"Hey, I fought in the past Indigo League. Did you see me?" Ash asked.

Latias flew a little closer to Latios. By now they were passing Silver Town, their real destination for now was the distant Mt. Silver, or more specifically, the Pokemon Reserve on Mt. Silver. "Well," Latias started. "We watched the last year's Indigo League, and I think I remember you, Ash, but I didn't really pay attention to you since I never expected that I'd meet you. I remember you losing to a Trainer that looked like you, though." She and Latios started laughing.

Ash and Pikachu exchanged glances. "What's so funny?" Pikachu demanded. Larvitar looked at them quizzically, not understanding their unique way of getting along with each other.

Finally Latios regained his breath enough to speak. "I remember you lost because a Charizard decided to play lazy." Latios resumed laughing and Latias laughed even harder.

Ash and Pikachu flushed in embarrassment. "Why does everyone always remember that instead of any of my victories?" Ash mumbled in annoyance.

"For once I agree with him," Pikachu mused. He had worked very hard in that battle, and the Indigo League overall.

"You have to agree, that was really funny," Latias commented, suppressing another fit of laughter. Ash sulked on Latios' back.

"Look, that's the Pokemon Reserve," Latios announced as he started descending towards a small building that was in the middle of a clearing in the forests surrounding Mt. Silver, a towering silver-hued mountain that reached for the heavens. Both eon dragons stopped in front of the building and lowered themselves to allow Ash, Pikachu and Larvitar to get off their backs.

Ash stumbled a little, still not used to flying on Latios for long periods of time. "Latios, what time is it?" Ash asked, remembering that he had departed early from New Bark Town.

Latios looked up at the sun. "About four o'clock."

"Guess we did fly almost all day," Ash muttered. "Do you think that Misty and Brock have already reached Silver Town?"

"Maybe, it isn't really that far from Blackthorn to here," Latias answered, recalling the map Brock had shown them when giving directions to Latios.

"Latios, would you mind going back to Silver Town to find them? In the meantime, Latias and I will see with whoever is in charge here about finding Larvitar's mother," Ash said. Larvitar perked up a little at the comment about finding his mother.

"Sure Ash," Latios answered, readying himself to speed over to Silver Town.

"Take care, Bro!" Latias said, grinning joyously. Latios nodded and took off for Silver Town, quickly disappearing as he turned invisible.

"Okay, let's go," Ash announced, walking over to Pokemon Reserve. Ash knocked a few times on the door. It opened and a woman in her mid-twenties appeared. She had dark reddish-brown hair with a green headband and wore an orange Jacket with the symbol of a Ranger on it. She smiled. "Hello trainer, I'm Ranger Mason, the protector of this Pokemon Preserve." One of her eyebrows rose at the sight of Latias. "That's a nice Pokemon," she idly commented. Latias answered with a shy coo.

Ash smiled. "Thanks, I guess."

"You must be Ash, right?" Ranger Mason asked. Professor Elm had foretold her of Ash's arrival after he had left the lab in New Bark Town. Ash nodded. She glanced down. "And this must be the Larvitar," she crouched to properly greet Larvitar... and he screeched again.

Ranger Mason was thrown back a few feet and Ash and his little group held their heads in pain. Great, looks like professor Elm had forgotten to warn her about that. "What was that for?" The Ranger asked, shocked at Larvitar's reaction.

"He doesn't like strangers all that much," Ash answered, looking a little sadly at Larvitar.

"Oh, sorry to hear that," Mason said as she stumbled to get up. That was one powerful screech!

"So, where can I find his mother? She's a Tyranitar," Ash asked.

"Obviously she *must* be a Tyranitar," Pikachu muttered sarcastically. Latias giggled. Larvitar glared at them.

"That's going to be a tough job, there are 12 confirmed Tyranitar in Mt. Silver," Ranger Mason said grimly.

"That's going to be a problem. At least we can hope that Larvitar recognizes her," Ash said, glancing hopefully at Larvitar.

Larvitar looked down sadly. Latias turned to Ash. "Ash, even though he longs to see his mother, he has never seen her physically, so he can't tell the difference. His bond to her seems to be a more spiritual one. However, if I remember correctly, in your dream his mother received a scar on her chest. That means we have to look for a Tyranitar with a slash-shaped scar on her chest," Latias said, reminding Ash of his vision.

' She's right. Now that she mentions it, his mother does have a scar,' Ash thought to himself. "You're right, thanks a lot Latias," he said gratefully, gently patting Latias on the head. She cooed in delight. Larvitar glanced at Latias, wondering how she knew that so easily.

Ranger Mason looked confused. "You understood her? All I heard were squeals."

"That's another story," Ash said offhandedly. "So, where can I find Tyranitar?"

"That's a bit of a problem," Ranger Mason muttered. "There's a group of Pokemon Poachers roaming the area. They were the ones who kidnapped Larvitar's egg in the first place. They lost the egg to Officer Jenny, but I know nothing of the mother's whereabouts."

Everyone's eyes widened in alarm. Larvitar looked utterly crushed and like he was about to cry, but sniffed back the tears. Latias hovered down to him and embraced him, sensing how his sorrow had skyrocketed. "Don't feel bad," Latias cooed gently, patting Larvitar on the back. "She said she didn't know, but she might still be free, and if she is we'll find her. I promise."

"Sorry," Ranger Mason apologized quickly. She hadn't expected her warning to affect Larvitar so severely. "Anyway, in my opinion the best thing you can do is find the poachers and get them to tell you if they have or not the mother Tyranitar. So far, I've tried to keep track of them but they always seem to elude me."

Ash nodded. "We'll help you find the poachers. We'll make them pay for what they've done." Latias finally parted from Larvitar and nodded, a determined look on her features. Pikachu nodded enthusiastically, his cheeks releasing a few sparks. Larvitar looked at them and hid a small faint smile. A part of him was grateful that he had friends that were so willing to help him. He was starting to understand the value of friendship, but he still had a long way to go.

"The poachers operate more at early morning and mid-day. Since it's already afternoon, they're likely at their hideout somewhere on Mt. Silver. I suggest you go back to Silver Town and return here early so that we can start hunting them down," Ranger Mason suggested, knowing that those coward poachers were already hidden somewhere on Mt. Silver.

Ash nodded. "Alright, we'll return in the morning."

With that said, the group started for Silver Town. Ash regretted sending Latias ahead, he was great for giving small rides to anywhere. The walk back to Silver Town was rather uneventful. Ash's thoughts were mostly around Larvitar and Tyranitar, a family he hoped to reunite soon. He looked up and noticed that the sky was getting slightly darker, meaning that they had walked for quite a while. Thankfully they were at the entrance to Silver Town. Latias turned invisible, not wanting to draw attention. The town was bursting with life, most likely because the preparations for the Silver Conference were starting.

"Latias," Ash whispered softly.

" Yes, *what's the matter Ash?*" she responded telepathically.

" *Could you please try to contact Latios and ask him where he is?*" Ash thought.

Latias nodded, though Ash couldn't see it. "*Sure, give me a minute.*" She began searching for her brother's mind. As siblings it was easy for them to communicate telepathically then it was for humans. After a few seconds of searching, she found him. "*Brother!*" She mentally cooed.

" *Hi sis! I found Brock and Misty. We're currently in the Trainer's hotel, room number 125,*" Latios informed his sister psychically. "*See you here. Also, tell Ash to register the room we're at, only qualified trainers are allowed to get rooms here.*"

" *Then how did you enter in the first place?*" Latias asked in puzzlement. Ash was the only one that had registration for the Silver Conference.

" *Brock flirted with the receptionist and I stole a key while she was distracted,*" Latios answered. Latias sweatdropped and added another prank to her to-do list. She beamed a mental nod to her brother and telepathically told their location to Ash. They started heading for the hotel.

" *So that's pretty much it,*" Latios finished. He had spent the past little while telling Misty and Brock what had happened during their separation.

"Interesting," Brock muttered, thinking about the Larvitar's condition. Latios had strictly warned them not to get near that kid unless they wanted to get a headache and lose hearing for a while.

A knock on the door got their attention. Brock started for it, but Latios beat him to it and opened the door telekinetically. Latias appeared in the open doorway and tackled Latios playfully. He smiled and returned the hug.

"Hey, Ash!" Misty said, happy to see her friend as he and Pikachu entered the room.

"Hey Brock, Misty, Latios. I'm glad you guys all got here in one piece," Ash said.

"What did the manager of the Pokemon Preserve say?" Brock asked, as Ash took a seat across the table from him. Their suite was quite large. It had two double-beds, a computer and a kitchen and bathroom.

"Did Latios tell you what we've done recently?" Ash asked. Brock and Misty nodded. "Long story short, we have to hunt down the poachers to find out if they have Larvitar's mother. Let's hope they haven't done anything to her," Larvitar cast a small downwards look at the ground. Pikachu walked over to him and comforted the little guy.

Misty and Brock nodded gravely. Not wanting to make the mood any sadder, Brock decided to change the topic. "So, have you thought through your overall strategy for the Conference?" Seeing Ash's completely blank look, Brock got his answer. He sighed. "Listen Ash, we know that Gary had gotten a lot stronger, Latios told us so, so you need to be extra careful in how you deal with him at the Conference. If you want to defeat Gary successfully, he must not find out about Latios under any circumstances." He had been talking this over with Misty on the way to Silver Town. Both former Gym leaders were sure that Ash wouldn't plan ahead. Right now Brock was happy that Ash was at least listening to him. Latios and Pikachu were also paying attention.

"Listen, you shouldn't use Latios in any match except the final rounds. Only use Latios if that's your last resort. Gary must be taken by surprise when Latios faces him," Misty added.

"Also, your Pokemon need to get stronger, especially Latios. He may be a Legendary Pokemon but he still isn't on a fully competitive level, so you can't rely on Latios to knock out all of Gary's team.

Remember this Ash, Gary *isn't* the strongest trainer out there, and you might be matched up against someone stronger. All the more reason to give your team heavy training," Brock lectured.

"There are twelve days left before the conference starts. That should be enough time to raise your Pokemon a few levels and help them learn new attacks," Misty continued. "Brock and I will help you there."

Ash, Pikachu and Latios nodded, all of them agreeing with the former Gym Leader's plan. "I have a question," Ash spoke up. At Brock's nod, Ash continued. "If I remember you can see other trainer's Pokemon using the computer. How do we now Gary won't look into my records and find Latios?"

Brock chuckled. "That's an easy one. Gary will be confident that you won't pose much of a problem to him so he won't bother to look. If some trainer did look, they would probably not recognize Latios."

"Ah, that reminds me," Misty spoke up. "Brock and I called Liza and Officer Jenny so that they could bring Squirtle and Charizard when the Silver Conference second round starts."

Ash grinned eagerly. "Thanks, guys! They'll be a big help."

"Misty and I came up with the best move choices for your Pokemon to learn. We'll start helping you train them once you return Larvitar to his mother," Brock announced. Ash nodded.

"For now let's get some sleep. Early tomorrow we'll go to Mt. Silver to help find the poachers," Misty muttered, holding back a yawn.

With that the group went to sleep, waiting for the next day to arrive. For one eager trainer, it was one day less until the beginning of the Silver Conference.

After a rather rude awakening for Ash courtesy of his personal alarm clock Pikachu, the group set off for the forests of Mt. Silver. Latios

had to guide the group to the Pokemon Reserve building since Ash had forgotten the way, something that really didn't surprise anyone.

Once they got there, Ash knocked on the door. "Hello!"

Soon Ranger Mason appeared. "Good, you're here." She came out and closed the door, a Croconaw walking behind her. "Alright, we'll divide and search the mountain separately to cover more ground. Here is a picture of the machine the poachers operate," She handed them each a photo of the giant robot. It looked very intimidating. "Be careful, it's powerful," she warned them.

"We have experience dealing with giant robots," Misty said flatly. Brock and Ash nodded.

"If anyone finds the poachers, have a Pokemon shoot an attack into the sky to signal the others," Ranger Mason advised. "Good luck." With that she turned and began heading into the forest.

"Let's go," Ash said, turning around and walking in a different direction. Latios, Latias, Pikachu and Larvitar followed him. Misty and Brock turned around and headed a different way. Soon everyone had scattered in different directions.

Once Ash had lost sight of his friends he turned to Latias and Latios. "Both of you fly over the forest and look for the machine. Use your invisibility so that the poachers can't see you. If you find them, don't fight, return and guide me to them, all right?" Latias and Latios nodded, both then took off, flying upward and becoming invisible. "Okay, let's keep searching," Ash said to Pikachu and Larvitar. Both nodded and kept walking behind him.

"Hey, Ash?" Larvitar asked quietly after a few minutes of walking.

"Yes, what's the matter Larvitar?" Ash replied kindly.

"If we find the ones that separated me from my mother, will we be able to beat them? They defeated my mom after all," Larvitar

muttered sadly.

Ash smiled. "Of course we will! We'll teach them a lesson for messing with you, right buddy?"

Pikachu nodded. "Yeah, besides, we've dealt with a lot of robots before, what's one more?" Larvitar nodded, giving a faint smile. Ash smiled back.

After what seemed like an eternity of looking around the forest, Ash heard the pained cry of a Pokemon. It sounded like it was in trouble. "Let's hurry!" Ash shouted. He began running in the direction the scream had come from.

He burst into a clearing and saw an injured Donphan running away from a huge machine. It was dark purple in color with a tank-like lower body and a huge humanoid upper form. Two long snake-like arms stretched from either side of the robot, and three holes were present in the midsection. A small frontal window comprised the main windshield. An orange rubber prison was fired from one of the holes in the machine's chest, hurtling towards the wounded Donphan.

"Pikachu, stop that thing with Thunderbolt. Also, shoot one of the bolts skywards!" Ash shouted. Pikachu complied without question, running a few meters before firing a powerful bolt at the orange prison. Through the attack didn't affect the cocoon because it was made from what appeared to be special rubber, it had enough force behind it to knock it off-track, causing it to miss the Donphan and allow it to escape to safely in the forest. Pikachu fired another bolt into the sky, the signal to tell everyone where they were.

Ash looked down and noticed that Larvitar had a look of fear and anger on his face, and seemed ready to charge at the machine at any second. "Don't worry Larvitar, we'll handle this together, don't fight them alone," Ash advised. Larvitar nodded and walked forward until he was besides Pikachu, ready to fight.

The machine turned to them, a hatch opening on the top and three figures wearing gray and black full-body spandex suits emerging from within. The second Larvitar saw them, he felt a massive rage burning within him, but he made no move, reminding himself that they had to find his mother first.

Ash clenched his hand into a fist angrily. "You!" he accused, pointing at the men. "You're the Pokemon Poachers!"

They smirked. "Of course we are! We are the Pokemon Poacher Brothers! I'm the leader. Braggo is the name," the one in the center shouted arrogantly. He was the tallest and had a blue beret.

"And I'm Chico, the inventor specialist!" The shortest and skinniest one said. He had a weird vaguely bowl-shaped haircut and had what appeared to be two whisker marks on each cheek.

"And I'm Blurt!" the biggest one called. He looked very strong and had a big red nose.

"Hey boys, look at that, it's a Larvitar! Just what we needed," Braggo remarked, looking down at the Larvitar.

Ash growled. "You won't get him! Now what did you do to his mother!"

The Poacher brother's looked confused. "His mother? Then that must mean he's the egg that Officer Jenny took from us!" Chico deducted.

Braggo smirked. "If you were wondering, we captured the mother and sold her for a big load of cash!" They laughed in unison

Ash froze. "You... WHAT!" Ash simply couldn't believe it. They had simply sold her like she was some kind of object?

Larvitar looked really shaken. A lone tear fell from his eyes. "And that kid's next!" Braggo shouted as he pressed a button on a remote

control. The machine fired another orange rubber prison at Larvitar, who was too deep in despair to get out of the way. Thankfully, Ash noticed something better.

"Psychic!" Ash shouted. The entire prison was torn to shreds by an unseen force rather violently.

The poacher brothers paled. "What happened to the capture prison!" Chico asked in astonishment.

"DragonBreath!" Ash called.

The Pokemon poacher brothers frantically looked around when suddenly a powerful blast of white flames appeared from the sky just above them. They quickly retreated back to the interior of the machine and accelerated, getting the machine out of the way of the fires. Latios and Latias quickly flew down to Ash and resumed visibility, floating directly in front of Ash and Larvitar protectively. Both dragons sported very angry looks on their faces. They had heard the poachers claim to have sold Larvitar's mother.

"How dare they, to separate a mother and her child in such a cruel way... I'm going to make them pay dearly!" Latios muttered angrily. Ash gulped. He had never heard or seen Latios this angry. He knew from experience that an angry Legendary Pokemon was a really frightening sight. He also knew that Legendary Pokemon could easily kill, heck, he had been killed by a Legendary Pokemon in the past once. He just hoped that Latios wouldn't go that far, even if he also thought negatively of the poachers.

"You little runt!" Braggo's roared from the machine. The robot started accelerating towards them.

"Thunder!" Ash shouted. Pikachu ran forward and released a tremendous amount of electricity upwards, arcing through the air and impacting against the machine. Rather than exploding, however, the machine recovered and stood its ground. "It survived Pikachu's

Thunder? Maybe it's really well-made... or Team Rocket's machines are just a lame pile of junk," Ash muttered.

"I think its Team Rocket's machines that are junk," Pikachu agreed.

Ash grabbed three Pokeballs. "Totodile, Phanpy and Cyndaquil, come on out!" Ash released his Pokemon. "Larvitar and Latias, you two come here, the rest of you get ready to fight the machine! Latias, you stay beside me, if that machine fires something at any of us, use Psychic to protect us," Ash said as Latias floated beside him. She nodded and readied herself.

"You think those lame Pokemon can stop us!" Braggo shouted. The machine started charging at them, but Ash was ready.

"Cyndaquil, use flamethrower! Latios, boost that flamethrower with DragonBreath, and Latias, use Psychic to make the attack even stronger!" Ash ordered quickly. Cyndaquil's back flames burst to life as he spat a large stream of fire. Latios floated beside him and opened his mouth, spewing a large white flame directly at the flamethrower, combining both attacks. Latias' eyes glowed a bright blue as she pushed the combined attacks at the machine with Psychic.

Seeing that they couldn't get out of the way, Braggo accelerated faster, hoping to tear the attack apart. The machine collided against the flames produced by Ash's Pokemon. It was actually stopped in its tracks as the fire washed over it. When the flames died down, the machine was relatively unscratched, only a bit reddened from the intensity of the attack.

"See, your efforts are useless! I designed the machine to be indestructible!" Chico bragged over the speakers. The machine fired another three orange rubber prisons, but they were torn apart easily by Latias' psychic attack. Braggo growled. They were shaking off their attacks too easily.

"Who did you sell Tyranitar to!" Ash asked angrily. Larvitar's eyes widened. He hadn't thought of that, maybe they could also recover his mother! Larvitar gave Ash an admiring look.

"Sorry, we never reveal information on our clients!" Blurt shouted.

"Guess we'll have to do this the hard way then," Latios muttered, maybe a bit too eagerly.

"Try this!" Braggo shouted as the machine extended one of its arms forward and fired a missile. Ash didn't move, he knew that Latias would tear the missile apart before it reached them. That's exactly what she did, using a powerful Psychic attack the missile exploded in mid-air. Latios used a Psychic attack of his own to keep the explosion away from them.

"Totodile, use water gun!" Ash commanded. The little blue pokemon complied and fired a stream of water at the machine, soaking it completely. "Pikachu, use Thunderbolt!" This time, Pikachu fired a powerful lighting bolt at the machine. With the addition of the water the electrical shock was even stronger than before, but even so, the machine refused to go down. Ash growled. This machine was far better than Team Rocket's usual worthless robots.

Braggo laughed. The Machine opened a small hatch on its side and fired a large net at them. "Cyndaquil, burn that net with Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. The little Pokemon's back fire erupted and a large torrent of flames shot toward the net, reducing it to cinders in seconds.

"This is not over!" Braggo shouted, accelerating the machine at them.

"Totodile, aim Water Gun at the ground!" Ash shouted. Totodile fired a powerful water torrent at the ground where the machine would be in a few seconds. "Phanpy, use Earthquake. Latias and Latios, lift us with Psychic so the Earthquake doesn't hurt us!"

"Alright daddy!" Phanpy squealed happily before jumping as high as he could.

Latios and Latias' eyes brightened with white light as Ash, Pikachu, Totodile, Cyndaquil and Larvitar were lifted a few inches off the ground. Not a second later, Phanpy slammed to the ground hard, sending a powerful tremor across the clearing. The machine was passing the spot Totodile had soaked just as the tremor reached it. The ground, soaked and weakened by the earthquake, collapsed under the weight of the machine, causing it to sink a few meters into the ground. "What the! Braggo shouted, looking around and noting that they seemed closer to the ground. He tried to accelerate forward, but the machine was trapped in the pitfall created by Totodile and Phanpy.

"Latios, finish that thing off with a Luster Purge!" Ash shouted, hoping that Latios' strongest attack would be capable of destroying that machine.

Latios' body started shining brightly as he readied his Luster Purge. He channeled as much power onto it as he could, creating a sphere just as big as the one he and Latias had created back in Altomare to stop the Tsunami. He fired it directly at the machine. The Poacher's eyes widened in dread. "What the!" Blurt cried, looking at the colossal attack heading at them.

"Chico, raise the shields!" Braggo ordered frantically.

Chico quickly pushed a few buttons and an energy shield formed around the machine to protect them from Latios' colossal attack. The Luster Purge impacted the shield, pushing against it and causing a few cracks and ripples to run across it. Latios smirked proudly. *'You can't compare the power of a lousy machine to the power of a Legendary Pokemon!'*

"The shield is cracking!" Chico shouted in astonishment. "Raising heavy internal steel reinforcements!" He pressed a few switches. Heavy layers of steel covered the windshield and most of the cabin.

Soon after that, the shield gave in to the power of Latios' Luster Purge. The Attack struck the machine, creating a terrible explosion. "Everyone return!" Ash shouted, recalling Cyndaquil, Totodile and Phanpy to their Pokéballs. Latios and Latias used a Psychic attack to keep the Luster Purge from harming Ash, Larvitar and Pikachu. The Blast died down a few seconds later, leaving a large crater that covered a good portion of the clearing. Ash stood barely at the border, and he gulped at what Latios had done. He noticed the remains of the machine lying in a heap in the center of the crater. Ash jumped down and walked towards it, followed by his Pokémon.

Ash reached the machine, or more like what remained of it. He could barely make out its original shape in the rubble. Metal was twisted in odd directions and beyond recognition. The whole structure of the machine was torn apart. "I think you overdid it Latios," Ash commented, a hint of fear in his voice.

Latios huffed. "Lowlifes like them deserve worse."

Ash noticed that a metal piece began moving. It toppled over as Blurt pushed it away, Braggo and Chico emerging as well. All three were covered in large burns and cuts, parts of their outfits were torn apart. The steel reinforcement they had applied before Latios' attack struck were probably the only reason they were alive now. Latios growled. "Guess I'll have to finish this." He flew a few inches forward, but Ash stopped him.

"Wait Latios, it's more important to figure out who they sold Tyranitar to," Ash said quickly. Latios nodded and stopped. Ash walked forward until he was a few feet from the injured poachers. "Okay, what did you do with Tyranitar!"

Braggo laughed weakly. "We won't tell you."

Ash growled. "Tell me NOW."

Braggo smirked. "We never reveal information. Besides, even if we told you, we're still going to jail. Our fate won't change by telling you

or not."

Latios grew angry. "Tell them that if they don't tell us, I'll kill them."

Ash gulped and took a step away from Latios. "Latios! That's too much!"

"Are you saying that you prefer their lives over Larvitar's? Or his mother's?" Latios countered. He honestly had no trouble with killing them. To him they were trash that needed to be removed from the world. Besides, he was nearly killed by humans similar to these ones in Altomare. He would have died had Latias and Ash not saved him.

"That's not the point!" Ash shouted back.

Latios sighed. "Alright Ash, if you're so scared of taking other's lives, I understand, but sometimes it's better to simply remove the problem. Humans like them are the reason most Legendaries avoid human contact in general." Ash frowned.

Latias watched the exchange quietly. She was neutral in this. She understood the reason Latios was acting like this, in Altomare he wasn't really one to make contact with humans, barely even opening up to Bianca and Lorenzo. After Annie and Oakley's attack, his opinion on humans had dampened a lot. Thankfully, Ash had befriended him and reminded him there were still good humans. She was also against harming humans, believing sometimes that even the most evil of people could change, but like Latios had said, sometimes removing them was for the best. For humans like these poachers, who committed a sin as horrible as separating a mother and child for simple profit, she couldn't care less what happened to them, but she respected Ash's hesitation to order Latios to kill them. He was still too young and innocent to think about things like this in depth. Besides, Pokemon thought differently than humans.

Larvitar was silently wishing for Latios to kill them, after they found out where his mother was of course. Pikachu wasn't sure what to think.

"Tell them that if they don't spill it, I'll extract the information myself. The process won't kill them, but it'll leave them with some horrible mental scars. If I go through it, they'll be lucky if they can ever move again." Latios told Ash, motioning to the bewildered poachers.

Ash gulped. "Latios is a powerful Psychic. If you don't tell us who you sold Tyranitar to, he'll extract the information himself. It won't be pretty."

"Ha! Some lousy psychic won't be enough to crack us!" Braggo bragged. Chico and Blurt nodded.

Ash sighed. It looked like there really was no other option. "Go ahead, Latios."

Latios smirked as his eyes glowed brightly. The Pokemon Poacher Brothers braced themselves, not really expecting much, but were surprised when a colossal presence filled their minds, easily tearing their psyches apart as Latios entered their heads. They clutched their heads as a searing pain coursed through them. They tried to scream but they couldn't produce a sound, they just wailed miserably. When Latios had read Ash's mind prior to Larvitar's hatching, he had done it gently and with Ash's consent. But now, not only were these foolish poachers posing resistance, Latios didn't really care what happened to them. He tore their minds apart to find the information he wanted.

A few seconds later Latios finished, pulling back from the minds of the three poachers. They slumped and fell over unconscious. Ash gulped at what Latios had done. "So, where's my mother?" Larvitar asked.

"Apparently the poachers sold her to another guy named Rico. He operates mostly in the Hoenn Region. They sold her five days ago, and this Rico is going to go to Kanto from here to do a few 'errands' and then head back to Hoenn," Latios summarized.

"So are we going to go after this guy?" Larvitar asked hopefully.

Latios shook his head. "He obtained your mother five days ago. By now he could be anywhere between Kanto and Johto, it'd be impossible to find him."

Larvitar visibly slumped. He sniffed a little, fighting back tears. Latias flew down and hugged him gently, rubbing his back slowly to comfort him. "We didn't say we would abandon hope. By the time Ash finishes the Silver Conference Rico should be on his way to Hoenn. We'll go there, hunt him down, and rescue your mother, I promise." Latias said kindly.

A few tears escaped Larvitar's eyes. "Thank you," he said quietly between small sobs.

Ash smiled sympathetically and walked to them, crouching down and scratching Larvitar gently on the head. "Yeah, we'll get your mother back, you'll see." Larvitar nodded as Latias broke the hug. Ash turned to Latios. "What does this Rico guy look like?"

"Like this." Latios used his memory projecting ability to form an image of Rico in their minds. He was a muscular man with bright green hair and a red jacket. A Fearow flew beside him.

"Great, I hate Fearows," Ash muttered.

"Me too," Pikachu groaned.

"So Latios, what will become of these three?" Ash asked, motioning towards the Poachers.

"Judging by the mental damage they suffered because of my intrusion, I'd say they'll remain comatose for a very long time, and if they wake up, they will never move again. Serves them right, they'll never harm anyone again," Latios answered him. Ash cringed a little.

"Ash!" The voice of Brock sounded in the distance. Ash looked to the edge of the crater and saw Brock, Misty, Ranger Mason and

surprisingly Officer Jenny. They must have called her to help them apprehend the poachers.

"About time you guy got here!" Ash shouted back. *'What will I tell them if they ask me what happened to the poachers? I can't simply say that Latios tore their minds apart and that they will barely live, and If they do they will never move again due to brain damage.'*

" Just tell them that the explosion knocked them out and that they told us who they sold her to before destroying their machine," Latias suggested helpfully.

It took them a few minutes to get down to Ash and his Pokemon. "What happened here?" asked a bewildered Misty, motioning to the crater and the destroyed machine.

"We confronted the poachers but their robot didn't go down quietly. Latios destroyed it though," Ash informed them.

Ranger Mason walked to the unconscious and barely alive poachers. "What happened to them?" she asked.

"The explosion of their robot did this, they barely survived," Ash said quickly.

"They should have died. The world doesn't need trash like them," Mason muttered. Ash sweatdropped and laughed nervously.

"You kids return to Silver Town, I'll handle this situation," Officer Jenny said to Ash's group. "I'll see that they are punished for their crimes."

Ash nodded as he and his group turned to leave, climbing over the edge of the mid-sized crater. Officer Jenny and Ranger Mason stayed behind to take custody of the crippled poachers. "So Ash, where's the mother?" Brock asked as they reached the road that would guide them back to Silver Town, Latias and Latios flying quietly behind them.

"They sold her to some poacher named Rico from Hoenn, but we'll get her back," Ash said with determination clear in his voice.

Brock and Misty nodded, following him down the path to Silver Town. "Let's go and get some rest. I suggest we begin the training tomorrow." Ash said.

"Okay Ash," Brock replied. It was only mid-day, though... Brock wondered why Ash had changed his mind. Had something happened in the fight with the poachers? Something seemed... off...

He wondered what it was.

The rest of the day was rather simple. The gang decided to have some fun and enjoy themselves in Silver Town. Since the conference was starting soon, the town was lively and there were lots of fun things to do, though Ash avoided Latios most of the time.

It was now around midnight, but Ash couldn't sleep, so he went out to the balcony of his hotel suite. Since he was on the fifth floor, the balcony had a nice view of the lake, the moon's reflection creating a nice image as gentle breezes gave the night a passive feeling.

He still couldn't get the day's actions out his mind. The fact of what Latios had done and had *almost* done still unnerved and scared him. He sighed. This was just too much, and he was so focused that he didn't notice the Pokemon his thoughts were centered around had just floated beside him. "Can't sleep, Ash?" Latios asked quietly, not wanting to wake up everyone.

Ash gave a startled jump. "Latios," Ash hissed quietly. "Don't do that."

Latios chuckled. "I came to talk a little with you."

Ash gulped. "Yes, what is it?"

"You've been acting a little strange around me today since we defeated the poachers. Care to explain?" Latios asked calmly.

Ash froze. "It's just... I don't know,"

Latios sighed. "Listen, I know that you don't fully approve of what I did earlier, but it was for the best. You don't have to beat yourself over it."

Ash nodded. "I know, but it's hard to ignore it."

Latios smiled. "I know you're a bit scared by what I did and what I can do, but you don't have to be. I'm your friend, I'd never do something like that to you."

Ash smiled back and patted Latios on the head gently. "I know."

Latios chuckled. "Let's go to sleep, tomorrow will be another day."

With that said, both went to peacefully rest. Tomorrow the training would begin, to prepare for the Silver Conference!

That's all for chapter 9! Hope you all like it a lot!

Don't forget to review. Until Next time!

Final Preparations

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: Chapter 10! Hope you all like it!

Today, we find our heroes walking to the forests around Mt. Silver, ready to start training for the upcoming Silver Conference. Ash was eager to participate in his second Pokemon League. They weren't using the special training fields outside the Pokemon Center because they were supposed to keep Latios a secret for as long as possible. If even a few trainers saw him, the word would spread like wildfire, so they decided to train in a secluded spot in the nearby forest.

"So Brock, you said that you and Misty had planned the best moves for my Johto Team to learn, right?" Ash asked, glad that he was receiving support from his friends.

"Yes Ash. Our goal is to have each of your Pokemon learn one attack as that could be very helpful for the tournament," Brock answered. He noted that Ash seemed to have returned to his normal mood. Whatever problem had bothered him yesterday after the poacher fight seemed to have vanished.

"Which moves did you choose?" Ash asked curiously. Pikachu listened in as well, he was eager to learn something new.

"Well," Misty started. "Bayleef lacks a strong Grass-type attack, so let's try and teach her Solar Beam. Cyndaquil lacks a strong close

range Fire-type attack, so we'll work on Flame Wheel. Phanpy should learn Hidden Power as a surprise move. Totodile can learn Hydro Pump to boost his attack power. Pikachu should learn Iron Tail to help him against Rock and Ground-Types. And for Latios, we'll teach him Steel Wing. That attack will be useful against Ice-Types, and he needs a close range attack anyway."

Ash's eyes were sparkling with joy at the prospect of his team receiving such attacks. Latias giggled at his expression. She was currently flying behind them along with Latios. "As long as I'm not attacked over and over again, I'm fine," Latios muttered, shivering at the memory of how he had learned Recover.

Pikachu laughed. "I *loved* helping you learn Recover."

Latios glared at the electric mouse. "I'll get you back for all those shocks someday."

"In your dreams!" Pikachu replied.

Ash hid a small chuckle at their conversation. Misty and Brock ignored them, mainly because they couldn't understand a thing. '*Stupid language barrier,*' Brock thought in annoyance.

Once the group had reached a small forest clearing, they decided it was a good place to start training. The clearing had a small river going through it and a few rocky areas. "Everyone, come on out!" Ash shouted, releasing all his Pokemon. He sidestepped quickly, skillfully dodging Bayleef's Body Slam. She pouted. "Sorry, you need to be faster than that." Ash said.

Bayleef smirked mischievously. "We'll see next time." Ash shivered at her tone.

"Okay, let's start," Brock said while walking closer to Ash's team. "Misty, you help Totodile learn Hydro Pump." She nodded and walked to the river. At Ash's nod, Totodile followed her.

"Larvitar knows Hidden Power, right Ash?" Brock asked. Ash nodded. Larvitar knew the attack, he just hadn't used it.

"Then Larvitar will help Phanpy learn Hidden Power," Brock said, looking at the small Rock and Ground-Type. Larvitar didn't even move an inch. Brock sighed.

"Larvitar," Ash started kindly, crouching down to face the small Rock Skin Pokemon. "Could you please help Phanpy learn Hidden Power?" Larvitar nodded and began walking away. The little blue elephant followed. "Good luck!" Ash called to the retreating Ground-Types as they walked to the edge of the clearing.

"Thanks daddy! I'll do my best," Phanpy chirped happily.

Larvitar looked at him quizzically. "Why did you call him 'daddy' if he's not your real father?" he asked, tilting his head in confusion.

Phanpy smiled and nudged Larvitar playfully. Larvitar, still not used to contact in general, backed away nervously. "I call him daddy because he hatched me and he always takes care of me even when he doesn't have to. That's why I love him as a father," Phanpy explained happily.

Larvitar looked at the little blue elephant oddly. Larvitar realized that they were pretty much the same, Both were hatched by Ash, even if Phanpy treated Ash like his father and Larvitar was searching for his mother. Larvitar wondered if it would be alright to refer to Ash as Phanpy did. Usually Larvitar never knew their fathers as it was always the mothers that took care of the offspring, so maybe Ash could play that role for him like he did with Phanpy.

"You should call him daddy too, he hatched you and cares for you too," Phanpy suggested happily. Larvitar wondered if Phanpy had somehow read his mind.

"I'll think about it," Larvitar muttered.

"That means you'd be my brother!" Phanpy squealed childishly and nuzzled Larvitar happily. The Rock skin pokemon laughed nervously.

"Can we get to teaching you the attack please," Larvitar said quickly, prying Phanpy off of him. The little blue elephant nodded eagerly. In the distance Latias smiled happily, glad that Larvitar was opening up a little more.

"Well," Brock started. "I'll help Bayleef learn Solar Beam, and you Ash will help Cyndaquil learn Flame Wheel."

"How do I do that?" Ash asked.

"I'll explain shortly," Brock started. He turned to Latias. "Latias, you'll help Latios and Pikachu learn their attacks. According to my Breeder's Guide, for a Pokemon to learn a Steel-type physical attack, the Pokemon first needs to strengthen the muscles in the appendage used for the attack. Basically, Pikachu and Latios are doing exercises for that, Pikachu to make his tail stronger and Latios to make his wings harder." Both Latios and Pikachu got a sick feeling. Something told them that they weren't going to like this one bit.

"Okay Ash, for Cyndaquil to learn Flame Wheel, he needs to make his back flames as strong as possible so they cover him completely. Then he should keep the fire up for a while," Brock instructed. "Latios and Pikachu, follow me," he said, walking to the rocky area, leaving Ash to handle Cyndaquil's training. Latias followed him too.

Once he reached the rocks, Brock took out three ropes, one small and two long and sturdy. Both Latios and Pikachu got an idea of what Brock was planning and turned green in the face. "Okay Pikachu, I'm going to tie a small rock to your tail. You have to lift it consecutively until your tail muscles get stronger. It might take a few days." Brock explained. Pikachu almost fainted. "Latios, I'm going to tie one large rock to each wing. You have to move your wings up and down a little. That will make them stronger and also help you build up endurance. Since you fly by levitation, the rocks won't hinder you

since your wing shape tells me you use them just to stabilize yourself. Am I right?" Latios nodded. Brock then turned to Latias. "Latias, you make sure they don't slack off." Latias grinned devilishly. Latios and Pikachu gulped in terror.

Brock proceeded to tie the rocks to both Pokemon. First he tied a fist-sized rock to Pikachu's tail, and then he tied one mid-sized rock, about double Pikachu's size, to each of Latios' wings. Latios started hovering about a foot lower. "Jeez, these are heavy," Latios complained. He exerted a bit more power and regained his normal height. Pikachu started moving his tail up and down and Latios did the same with his wings. Latias watched them as they exercised. She was going to enjoy this.

"I'm off to train Bayleef," Brock said as he turned around, leaving Latias to take care of them. He walked over to Bayleef. "Sorry to keep you waiting. Now, how to teach you Solar Beam?" He glanced at his Pokemon Breeder's guide. He flipped through the pages until he found the desired attack. He read through the summary a few times and nodded. "Okay, Bayleef, to learn Solar Beam, you have to first learn to concentrate the sun's energy into your neck leaves. Once you manage to keep the energy focused for a while, you unleash it. Try it."

Bayleef nodded and took a glance at the sun. It was shining brightly, as usual. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She felt the sun's rays caressing her soft skin. She slowly began taking the sun's rays into her leaves, almost like photosynthesis. As a Grass-type pokemon, Bayleef usually enjoying sunbathing every once in a while, but she had never tried anything like this. Bayleef opened her eyes and glanced at her neck leaves. They were glowing very faintly, but still lacked the full charge necessary for Solar Beam. She frowned. This was hard.

Brock chuckled at Bayleef's frown. "Don't worry, no one was expecting you to get it on your first try. You need to absorb the sun's energy faster."

Bayleef nodded and tried again, but she still didn't gather enough energy. The leaves didn't shine that much, they were still as dim as the last time. Bayleef turned to Brock. "Does that book have any useful tips or something?" she questioned.

Brock chuckled and scratched his head sheepishly. "Sorry, I don't speak pokemon."

Brock heard a small giggle in his mind. *"She asked you if your book has a tip or something to help her,"* Latias translated telepathically. Brock whirled around and looked in Latias's direction. She was still near Latios and Pikachu.

Brock nodded. "Thanks."

"No Problem," she replied. She turned back to her brother and friend. "Pikachu! Keep moving that tail!" Pikachu groaned and resumed his training. It looked as though Latias's little distraction didn't provide that much of a rest.

Brock resumed reading his book. "According to this, you could try to block everything out and concentrate completely on absorbing the sun's rays, ignoring everything around you."

Bayleef frowned. "And how do I do that mid-battle?"

After a quick telepathic translation from Latias, Brock answered, "That's just for learning. Once you get used to the feeling, it will be easier to pull off the attack under the stress of a battle."

Bayleef nodded and concentrated again. This time she ignored everything. Every sound, every feeling, every thought, and focused just on the sunbeams that were hitting her. She slowly began to imagine herself as one with those beams. She took a few deep breaths to calm herself. After about thirty seconds, she opened her eyes and found that her neck leaves were shining a little more than before, but it still wasn't enough.

"That was good Bayleef, keep at it and you should master the attack quickly," Brock praised. "Now keep trying." Bayleef smiled and nodded. She took a few deep breaths and started again.

Meanwhile, a few yards away Ash was training Cyndaquil. "Okay Cyndaquil, again, make your flames really big!" Cyndaquil nodded and lit his back flames. He then tried to coat his entire body with them, but about midway the flames died and dissipated. "It seems you need a bit more strength in those flames so that they cover you completely."

"Yeah," Cyndaquil muttered. He panted. This was very tiring.

Ash smiled. "Come on, you can do it!" Cyndaquil nodded and tried again. He summoned as much of his fire as he could. Suddenly Ash had an idea. "Follow me!" he encouraged as he started sprinting. Cyndaquil nodded and started running after Ash. The added friction and wind were enough and Cyndaquil was covered in a bright coat of fire, but it still dissipated after a few seconds. Cyndaquil panted and came to a stop.

Ash smiled and crouched in front of Cyndaquil. He patted the small fire mouse pokemon. "Good job! You made it! Through you still need to maintain the attack, but it's still something."

Cyndaquil smiled brightly. "Thanks."

"You're welcome. Care to try again?" Ash asked. Cyndaquil nodded and resumed sprinting.

During their Flame Wheel attempts, Cyndaquil and Ash passed Misty, who was helping Totodile learn Hydro Pump with the help of her Politoed. She smiled at the boy's enthusiasm and eagerness, at least he seemed to be enjoying himself with Cyndaquil. She turned her attention back to Totodile. "Okay Totodile, use Hydro Pump!" she instructed, pointing at the small river that went through the clearing. Totodile nodded and took a deep breath before exhaling a powerful torrent of water.

Misty frowned. "No Totodile, that's still Water Gun. Hydro Pump uses a lot more power than that. Follow my example: Politoed use Hydro Pump!" Misty exclaimed.

The bright green toad-like Pokemon clapped his hand eagerly and took a quick breath, then spat a powerful torrent of water at the river. Totodile immediately noticed that Politoed's water attack was a lot stronger than his own.

Misty nodded approvingly. "Listen, Hydro Pump uses a lot more power than Water Gun, thus making the attack more damaging. You have to learn to concentrate that power faster." Totodile nodded and attacked again, still with Water Gun. Misty frowned. *'This is going to be a little harder than I thought.'*

Unknown to Misty, someone was having even harder times than her. "No, you need to be patient!" Larvitar grumbled for what seemed like the hundredth time.

Phanpy gave him a blank look. "Could you explain the attack again please? It's very confusing." Larvitar groaned in frustration. He had already explained it *seven* times. He took a deep breath to calm himself. Phanpy gave him a pleading look. "Please, brother!"

"Alright, but listen carefully," Larvitar started. He eyed Phanpy and saw that he was paying full attention. He continued. "Hidden Power is a move that makes the user release a powerful blast of energy. However, to learn how to draw on that energy you must learn to calm yourself completely. Once you learn to tap into that power, you can use it at any time. Got it?" Phanpy nodded slowly. Larvitar smiled. "Okay, now close your eyes."

Phanpy was just about to close his eyes, but paused. "Why is it that when someone is about to tap into some power they must always close their eyes?" he asked curiously.

Larvitar paused. "Well... I don't know." Admittedly, Larvitar found himself wondering the same thing. Maybe he'd ask Latias later.

Phanpy pouted. "Aw, come on bro, tell me!"

Larvitar glanced around nervously. "Just do it!"

Phanpy closed his eyes. "My eyes are closed."

Larvitar smiled. "Okay, now take a deep breath. Feel the energy around you. Call on it, and then expel it."

Phanpy sat like that for a while, before whining, "I'm bored."

Larvitar sweatdropped. "Listen, here is what the attack should look like," Larvitar said, pointing to a rock. He began to glow faintly as several bright spheres of light formed around him. With a mighty push all the spheres were sent charging toward the boulder. They struck the boulder, causing it to crack and fall apart.

Phanpy grinned broadly. "I'm learning that!" He chirped excitedly. "I want to learn it now!"

Larvitar sweatdropped. *'I should have showed him the attack from the very beginning.'*

Phanpy looked at him. "Bro, you used the attack but you didn't do any of that concentrate and close your eyes stuff."

"That's because I already know how to make the attack. Once you learn how to use it you can even do it while running," Larvitar explained.

"Okay!" Phanpy chorused happily and resumed concentrating. A few seconds passed. "I'm bored again." Larvitar's eye twitched. He started wondering if it'd be okay to use Hidden Power on Phanpy. Ash wouldn't like that, though, so he was going to have to tolerate this for now.

He glanced at the others. He noted that Pikachu and Latios were looking really tired and Latias was watching them intently. Misty was trying to get Totodile to use Hydro Pump but the small blue Pokemon

used Water Gun every time. Ash and Cyndaquil were still sprinting around. Every once in a while flames covered Cyndaquil as he tried to use Flame Wheel, but he still couldn't maintain the attack for long. And Bayleef was just sunbathing. Her neck leaves glowed a few times, but it still didn't look like she was making much progress. He sighed. This was going to take a while.

The rest of the day was rather uneventful. Nobody managed to pull off their new attacks, but some came close to learning them. Latios and Pikachu spent the entire night complaining about their sore wings and tail. They hoped that they learned their attacks quickly before their limbs fell off.

As the days progressed, Ash's team gained more skill. Once all of Ash's Pokemon managed to learn and successfully use their moves, they proceeded to spar continually to gain a bit more battle experience, especially Latios as he was the one that needed to get more competitive faster. At least all that time carrying rocks made his endurance higher.

Ash usually sparred against Brock and Misty, or against his own Pokemon, and for some reason Pikachu enjoyed sparring with Latios, though Latios won most of the time. Latias also sparred once in a while and learned DragonBreath too, apparently Latios taught her that. Larvitar participated a few times, but he was still reluctant to be near too many people at once, and when that happened he would Screech. Brock and Misty still couldn't get close to Larvitar without receiving an earful.

Overall the team was developing nicely, which was certainly a good thing as the tournament was drawing near, and Ash was sure that the Silver Conference was going to be far more difficult than the Indigo League. He was sure his Johto team was in good shape now. With this team along with the Kanto team and the soon to arrive Charizard and Squirtle, he would truly be ready for the Silver Conference, and whoever he fought would have a very difficult battle ahead.

After ten days of hard training, finally the big day had arrived. Today was the opening ceremony for the Silver Conference!

Ash and his friends were walking to the Pokemon Center, in the early morning. The opening ceremony was in about one hour. *"Nice Pokemon Center,"* Latias commented telepathically. She was as usual disguised as Bianca, though she was getting bored of using Bianca's look and was contemplating creating a new body for herself. Latios said that wasn't a bad idea.

On the lower floor of the Pokemon Center was the administrative area for the Silver Conference. Behind a desk with a few assorted screens was a young lady with glasses and brown hair. Brock was just about to sprint over to her but suddenly his entire body froze in place. He managed to barely look at Latias and saw that her pupils were slightly glowing. Misty noticed it and smiled. "Latias, I'll admit that you have style." She held her hand out and she and Latias high-fived. Latias smirked happily. Brock tried to whine in despair but he couldn't even do that.

Ash walked up to the lady behind the desk. "Hello miss, I'd like to know the place and times for my preliminary matches," he said, looking excited.

"Could you please hand me your Pokedex for a minute?" She asked. Ash nodded and handed her the Pokedex. She inserted it into a slot on her computer. Ash's picture and registration information appeared on the screen. "Alright Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town, the preliminaries consist of three matches against randomly assorted trainers, all one on one. You can only advance to the Second Round if you win all three matches. If you lose one, you are out. The preliminaries are designed to reduce the number of participants from over two hundred to just forty-eight," the receptionist informed him in a bored tone of voice, probably because she had to repeat this information over and over again to every trainer. She looked at the registry and read the times of Ash's battles. "The preliminary matches will be held during the next three days. All of your matches are today. The first of your battles will be at four o' clock on field six, the second at five

o'clock on field one and the last at seven o' clock on field two." She then took out the PokeDex and handed it back to Ash. "Good Luck."

Ash nodded. "Thanks!"

Latias released Brock. He took a step away from her and knew that he couldn't get near a girl anytime soon. "Just don't lose any battles, Ash," Misty muttered. Ash fumed.

"Why does everyone say I'll lose!" Ash demanded.

"Maybe because it's obvious," a familiar voice spoke from behind Ash. The second Ash heard this voice his blood boiled. He turned around and came face to face with his life-long rival, Gary Oak.

Gary chuckled. "Hello there Ashy-boy, ready to lose?" he asked teasingly.

Telepathic laughter was projected in everyone's minds except Gary's, "Ashy-boy?" Latias questioned before resuming laughing. Ash ignored her.

"Nope," Ash answered confidently. "I'm sure you're going to get your ass kicked!"

"Says you," Gary muttered before turning around and walking towards the receptionist to also ask for his preliminary matches.

"Still as overconfident as ever," Pikachu muttered.

"I'm so going to shove that huge ego of his down his throat!" Ash snarled.

"Who's that Ash y-boy? A friend of yours?" Latias asked telepathically once she had finally stopped laughing.

"That's Gary, my rival, and I forbid you to call me that," Ash answered. Latias giggled.

Deciding that he didn't want to spend another second near Gary, Ash walked outside the Pokemon Center and resumed walking. He picked up and carried Larvitar in his arms, not wanting someone to accidentally walk too close and get Screeched at. Latias was using her Psychic powers to make Larvitar lighter so Ash could carry him comfortably. They started walking to the main stadium, where the opening ceremony would commence. "I'm so going to beat the crap out of him," Ash muttered. Larvitar looked up at him and wondered why Ash was so eager to fight that particular trainer.

Brock laughed. "Make sure it's not the other way around."

"Yeah, I'm so gonna devastate his team with Latios and Charizard," Ash said, trusting that his two greatest powerhouses could knock out Gary's team, or at least a good part of it.

"Remember that those two can't do the entire job alone," Brock lectured Ash.

"I know," Ash replied. After a few minutes of walking, Ash saw a familiar person. "Hey! Mr. Goodshow!" Ash called, remembering him from the Indigo League.

The small man turned to him, brushing his long white beard a little. "Ahh, hello Ash! I knew it wouldn't be too long before I saw you. Ready to compete?" Mr. Goodshow asked kindly.

"Yeah, so where are you going?" Ash asked.

Mr. Goodshow smiled. "I'm going to the Opening Ceremony to get everything ready. I had a little problem with a Sneasel messing with the torch to ignite the flame atop the stadium, but that problem's been taken care of."

"All right," Ash said, remembering that lighting a torch was the main event of the Silver Conference opening ceremony.

"What was the problem?" Misty asked curiously.

"The Sneasel wouldn't let anyone near the torch, but it was caught by a trainer named Harrison," Mr. Goodshow summarized. "Now we can light the Stadium's great flame with Ho-oh's power."

"Ho-oh?" Ash asked. He remembered that in the Indigo League it was Moltres's flames that were used, not Ho-oh's.

"Yes, Ho-oh is part of a very important legend here in Silver Town, so it's natural that its flames are used," Mr. Goodshow explained.

"What's the legend?" Brock asked.

Mr. Goodshow took a deep breath before beginning. "It is said that long ago there was a terrible war here. The war was so devastating that the entire landscape surrounding Mt. Silver was left as a barren wasteland. Ho-oh descended from the heavens and with its mighty flames engulfed the area in a colossal fire. From the ashes of that fire, new life blossomed, and turned this area into a beautiful forest. A single flame was left behind, and that flame was preserved in a shrine, the very same flame that will be used in the opening ceremony."

"Ahhhh," everyone muttered.

"All those events gave birth to the beautiful landscape Silver Town and the surrounding areas are blessed with," Mr. Goodshow said, looking at the great mountain.

After a few more minutes of walking they arrived at the colossal stadium that made up Silver Town's center. On the upper level of the stadium was the massive torch that would soon be lit, signaling the start of the Silver Conference. Mr. Goodshow smiled fondly. "The pride of Silver Town, the great Silver Stadium. All qualified trainers have to be in the arena. All relatives I must ask to go to the seats please," Mr. Goodshow informed them before entering a private door, probably leading to the main stage set in the arena for the opening events.

The stadium looked majestic, since all the final arrangements had been made for the grand opening. The stadium was a vague oval shape. The top part was painted blue, with silver colored ornaments. On the lower parts, several arches decorated the different entrances to the Stadium. These were painted in a bright silver color.

"Looks nice," Misty commented. "Well Ash, we're going to the stands, you go on in!"

Ash nodded. "Thanks!"

"See ya Ash," Misty and Brock said, walking to one of the access tunnels for the stadium stands.

" *I'll take Larvitar, Ash* ," Latias told him telepathically, extending her arms.

Ash complied and handed him over. "Larvitar, be a good boy and please don't screech, okay?" Ash asked the little Rock and Ground type, gently scratching his head. Larvitar nodded. Latias smiled and started walking after Brock and Misty.

Ash grinned and rushed into the arena. Once inside, he was mesmerized by the stadium's interior. The stands were bursting with people. Thousands of people were seated in the numerous rows that filled the stands. The stadium's inside structure was also very nice. The support pillars were painted a bright silver color while the stands and doorways were blue, making a nice contrast. On the sides of the stadium two different things caught Ash's attention. On one side of the stadium was a huge screen probably used during the matches, and directly opposing the screen on the other side was the great torch. A stairway led from the base of the battlefield to the very top of the pedestal the torch was on.

At the very center of the arena was a stage with a microphone. Ash guessed it was for the opening speech. Numerous cameras and TV equipment were aligned along the stage. There were many news

and TV programs transmitting the Silver Conference on worldwide television.

In the stands Latias, Brock and Misty had already seen him. Latias and Larvitar were now both nervous wrecks. Neither of them was used to being near so much people, not even Latias, but in her case it was more with strangers. Larvitar was resisting the urge to screech. He had told Ash he wouldn't screech and he was going to obey, but Ash owed him big time for this.

Ash glanced at the arena and saw most of the trainers that were there. He was stunned by the sheer number of them. Most of them looked older than Ash, but then again Ash was just eleven. Pikachu laughed at Ash's anxious look. "Don't worry! We're still going to beat the crap out of them."

"Still, they all look tough compared to me," Ash said, a nervous tone in his voice.

Pikachu laughed. "Yeah, but tell me, out of all these losers, how many of them can understand Pokemon speech and happen to have two Legendary Pokemon on their team?"

"Good Point," Ash admitted. In that aspect he was far above the others.

A few minutes passed and more trainers kept pouring in, Ash also noted that the stadium was also almost filled up completely. The stands were literally bursting with people.

Soon Mr. Goodshow appeared on the stage in the center of the arena. All the cameras turned to him. "Greetings everyone! Today marks the day the Annual Silver Conference will begin!" Everyone cheered loudly. Once the noise had died down Mr. Goodshow continued. "I hereby congratulate all the trainers that qualified and will participate in the Silver Conference. It has been a long road to gain the eight badges needed to get this far and it all ends here, with all of you fighting for the Silver Conference trophy!" He frowned. "But

the road is even harder now. There are more than two hundred trainers here, but only one can emerge victorious, who will that be?" he asked, waving his arms dramatically at the crowd of trainers.

All the trainers had the same thought in their minds. ' *That's going to be me!*'

"It sad to say that after the next three days, only forty-eight out of you will continue," Mr. Goodshow continued, a sad edge in his voice. "But that makes it even more interesting. I wish you all very good luck and that you give us a Silver Conference to remember!" Mr. Goodshow boomed. The entire stadium cheered loudly.

An athlete entered the arena running with a small torch. The torch was lit by a bright and almost magical flame. The runner sprinted up the stairs that led to the Torch high on the stadium walls, touching his own torch to it and causing it to ignite. The entire stadium was lit by a majestic flame rising several meters into the air. The crowd looked in awe at the inspiring fire.

Mr. Goodshow smiled. He had always loved the opening ceremonies of any Pokemon League. "I declare the Silver Conference begun!" Everyone cheered loudly again. Once the cheering had died down, Mr. Goodshow continued. "Now, the preliminaries will be held in the smaller fields surrounding this stadium. All spectators, please exit and watch any battle you choose to. All trainers that are battling today, please report to your designated fields." With that said Mr. Goodshow walked off the stage. Soon everyone left the stadium and started heading to the battlefields surrounding Silver Stadium.

Ash pondered what to do since none of his matches were until noon. Misty, Brock and Latias soon joined him. Larvitar fidgeted in Latias' arms, so she smiled and handed him to Ash. "Hello again, Ashy-boy," Gary said, walking up to Ash.

"What do you want now?" Ash asked in irritation.

"Just saying hello," Gary said off-handedly. "My first match is in a few minutes, then the other two are tomorrow, so I'm off." With that said, Gary walked to the fields.

Ash sighed. "Let's go to the gift shops and look for souvenirs until my first match is up," Ash suggested. The others nodded and followed him. Brock's eyes sparkled at the anticipation of running into lots of pretty girls. He paused and glanced at Latias, who was glancing at him from the corner of her eye. He groaned. Was she always watching him or something?

"Yes!" Jessie shouted as the cash kept coming in. They had decided to put James' bottle cap collection to good use and they were selling them as souvenir painted badges.

James wept. "What did my little collection do to deserve this?" At least he had managed to hide the more valuable ones before Jessie got this idea, so they were just selling the cheap and easy to get ones. Still, the experience was quite painful.

"Stop whining! Look at all da cash we're getting!" Meowth beamed, counting the money. James sighed and resumed painting the bottle caps.

Jessie smirked but soon paled. Just in front of her a familiar group passed by. "It's the twerps!" She hissed. At least their salesman costumes kept them from being recognized.

James and Meowth peeked over. "I'm too tired to bother them right now, let's save all the cash and order a powerful mecha to hunt down that Pikachu," James suggested.

"Yeah!" Both Jessie and Meowth cheered. With a new resolve, they painted and worked even harder to get the money to buy something to capture Pikachu. Soon, Ash's group disappeared as they turned around the next corner.

Next chapter, the Silver Conference Begins!

Until Next time... Please Review! I enjoy your reviews a lot!

The Silver Conference Begins!

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

"What time is it?" An excited voice asked.

An aggravated sigh was his only reply. Brock righted himself quickly.
"It's still two o' clock, Ash."

"I want it to be four o' clock! I want to battle!" Ash whined. Why did time always go so slowly when he was waiting for something?

Misty sighed. "Ash, you've asked the time almost thirty times today. The more you ask, the slower time will pass."

Ash whined again and mumbled something about wanting to make time move faster. Misty and Brock resisted the urge to smack him. They tolerated him because they understood he was eager to start his Silver Conference battles. Even with the entertaining things in the shopping district of Silver Town, he was still desperate to battle.

"So Brock, how do the preliminaries work?" Ash asked, not wanting his battle to start without knowing a thing, as usually happened. He had also forgotten most of the explanation he got from the lady behind the desk.

Brock rolled his eyes and took out his Silver Conference Guidebook. "According to this, there are three one-on-one matches held in neutral fields. Both trainers are given a color, either green or red, and then the scoreboard chooses a color randomly. The color it chooses

determines which trainer sends out a Pokemon first, meaning that the second trainer will have an advantage because they will be able to select a Pokemon with a type advantage," Brock answered.

"That means it's best if I don't get picked first," Ash muttered. "But what do I do if I *do* go first?"

"Well, if you are chosen to send your Pokemon second, send a Pokemon with a Type advantage, but if you have to send out a Pokemon first, pick your strongest to be on the safe side, obviously excluding Latios," Brock answered.

"I suggest that you use Pikachu if you send your Pokemon first," Misty suggested.

Ash turned to look at her. "Why?"

"Because it's the most logical choice," Misty answered. "Pikachu's only weakness is Ground-types, and Pikachu is your most experienced Pokemon. If you send in Bayleef first for example, it'll be easier for your opponent to have a Pokemon with an advantage since Bayleef has multiple weaknesses, the same goes for most of your team." Ash nodded, this sounded like good strategy.

" *You worry too much. Ash will win, I'm sure of it!*" Latias said telepathically, not even a single doubt in her mental voice.

Ash turned to her and smiled. "Thanks."

Latias grinned happily before turning to look to a stand. Her eyes lit up. It was selling sweets. She eagerly walked up to it and inspected the things to offer, her mouth watering. Ash and the others walked up to her. "What can I help you with, young lady?" the stand vendor asked kindly.

Latias turned to Ash. "*Can I get one, please?*" she asked sweetly, tugging at Ash's sleeve.

"That can't be very healthy," Brock muttered. "No sweets for you Bianca."

"I don't care, besides I always eat your 'healthy' food Brock, one sweet can't hurt," Latias whined telepathically. Brock shook his head. Latias huffed, but it was a good thing that she knew how manipulate Brock very easily. *"Let me buy one and I'll let you flirt with a girl."*

This caught Brock's attention. "Really?" he asked hopefully.

"Yes," Latias replied. Brock whistled happily. *"You have ten minutes before I stop you,"* Latias added, sweatdropping.

Brock sighed in disappointment. "Only ten? That's too little!"

"The clock's ticking. Nine minutes and thirty seconds left," Latias continued happily. Knowing that he really couldn't argue with a Legendary Pokemon, Brock quickly started running in search of a pretty girl to try and get a date with.

Misty looked amused at Latias' antics. "We are going to stop him, right?"

Latias nodded. *"I said that I would give him ten minutes, you didn't say anything about letting him get away with anything."* Getting Latias' hint, Misty grinned and took out herallet as she began chasing after Brock to save whatever girls he flirted with.

Ash watched in amazement. "Why does he always chase girls anyway? What's so special about girls?" Pikachu started laughing and fell from Ash's shoulder. Inside their Pokeballs Latios rolled his eyes and chuckled and Bayleef sighed. Is he really that dense? (Yes, yes he is.)

Latias wrapped an arm around his shoulders. He blushed at the contact. *"That, my dear Ash, is something you will understand when you're older."*

"Why does everyone I ask say that!" Ash protested. Larvitar look at them in confusion and wondered what the heck they were talking about.

"Because that's how things are," Latias began. "You'll understand the relations between boys and girls and love later on. Don't rush it. You're still eleven, and you have a lot of time left to learn," Latias finished kindly.

Ash was even more confused. "Can't you explain why boys and girls are supposed to be with each other now? And how do I love someone?" he asked innocently. Latios couldn't take it anymore and laughed wholeheartedly inside his Pokeball. Pikachu laughed even harder on the ground, rolling around in hysterical laughter.

Latias blushed massively and took a step back. *"I'll explain it when you're older, I promise."* She paused. *'I hope someone else does it, anyone but Brock. If that pervert explained anything to Ash about this topic, he'll traumatize the poor boy for life.'*

Ash signed. "Okay, Bianca." Ash glanced down at Pikachu. "And could you stop laughing!" Pikachu ignored him and kept laughing.

Latias decided to change the topic. *"Can you buy me my sweet please!"* She pleaded.

"Sure, pick anything you want," Ash answered kindly. Latias's eyes sparkled in joy as she scanned the stand in search of something that would appeal to her. The stand owner looked at the group in confusion. This was by far the strangest group of trainers he had ever seen, but he made no comment.

Ash took out his wallet and peeked in. He had a little money, as usual, but it was enough to buy Latias a treat. Latias finally decided and grabbed a small chocolate cake in a plastic container along with a fork and napkin. She flashed the owner a cheery smile before nodding to Ash. Ash smiled to her and paid for the cake. They turned and resumed walking. Ash picked up Larvitar and carried him in his

arms to prevent accidental screeches. As usual, Latias was helping psychically.

"Psychic powers are awesome!" Ash commented.

" *Thanks,*" Latias said with a smile.

"I wish I had Psychic powers like Latios said I might do, it would be amazing!" Ash said, a dreamy look in his eyes as he thought of all the things he could do with psychic abilities.

Latias smiled joyfully . *"Yeah, I hope so too. Psychic powers sure are great."*

"If I get them, you and Latios will help me learn how to use them, right?" Ash asked.

Latias nodded. *"Sure, we'll help you. However, remember that with great power comes great responsibility. If you get those kinds of abilities, make sure to never misuse them. If you abuse those powers, Latios and I will make sure you regret it, alright?"*

Ash gulped. "I'd never do something bad with something so amazing!" he protested.

" *I know Ash, but it's fair that I warn you .*" Latias smiled. She knew Latios would have said the same things.

Pikachu chuckled. "I'll help too. An electric shock is the answer to a lot of things." Latias laughed.

In the distance they heard a scream of agony. They knew it was Brock. Latias giggled and turned to Ash. *"Thanks for the cake."*

"No problem," Ash replied. He noticed she hadn't started eating it. "Why don't you eat it now?"

Latias smiled and turned to him. *"It's because I can only eat in my true form. My human form is just for disguise, I can't live in it."*

"Ah, that's why you've never eaten before like this," Ash muttered.

"And you just noticed that now?" Pikachu mocked. Ash ignored the mouse's comment.

"What time is it?" he asked, knowing that even if Latias didn't have a watch, she and Latios were good at telling time with just a gaze at the sun's position.

Latias glanced up. *"It's about two thirty."*

Ash sighed. He really wanted to start battling. He noticed that in their walking they had exited the souvenir areas, and reached the borderline of trees. Latias sniffed the air. *"Hey, let's go to the lake to pass the time."*

Ash shrugged and followed Latias as she sped up her stride. Within a few seconds they had crossed the treeline separating the Main Stadium and stalls from the lake. The sun was shining brightly and the cool damp air created a nice setting. There were no people on the lakefront, most likely because they were all watching the Preliminaries.

After a few glances and psychic probes, Latias sensed that there were no human minds nearby. She handed Ash her cake and resumed her true form in a bright display of blue and white light. She stretched herself as the sun's rays gently hit her face. Ash took a seat near the shore and gently lowered Larvitar to the ground. Latias hovered near Ash and grabbed the plastic container from his hands. She opened it and gently rested herself beside Ash as she began to eat the cake. Ash smiled and took out a pokeball, releasing Latios. "Here, I thought you'd like a bit of fresh air," Ash said kindly. He glanced around. "If any of you sense anyone coming close, turn invisible." They nodded.

Latias smiled. "Hey brother, want some?" she asked, offering Latios some cake.

He shook his head. "No thanks, it's for you."

Latias pouted. "Aw, have a bit bro, it tastes great!" she said, holding a piece near Latios' face.

Latios smiled. "No thanks La-!" Latios didn't get a chance to finish as Latias shoved the chunk in his mouth. He blinked and started chewing. "*You're right, it is good,*" he commented telepathically. Latias offered some to Ash, Pikachu, and Larvitar. Seeing that if they refused she was going to force-feed them anyway, they wisely accepted. Even after sharing, she still had a lot of cake left for herself, and continued eating happily.

"So Ash, ready for the preliminaries?" Latios asked, glancing down at Ash.

He smirked, pumping a fist to the air. "You bet I am!"

Latios smiled at the boy's enthusiasm. "I'm sure you'll do fine. The preliminaries aren't that hard, they're mostly to eliminate the hopeless cases."

Ash frowned. "I'm not a hopeless case am I?"

Latios chuckled. "Of course not Ash, how can you call a trainer with two legendaries hopeless?"

Ash laughed sheepishly. "Good point."

Latias giggled and hovered closer to Ash. "So Ash, did you ever imagine when you started your Pokemon Journey that you were going to eventually have two legendaries with you?"

Ash looked up to the sky, contemplating his answer. "Honestly, no. The thought never even crossed my mind, I mean, legendaries are gods, and there are people who devote their lives to just *seeing* a legendary without ever getting a glimpse of one, so I never really got my hopes up." He laughed a little. "Just imagine my shock when I

saw Ho-Oh on my first day as a trainer, even if I didn't know what a Ho-Oh was back then. Even so, it's like I knew by instinct that Ho-oh was a legendary." He smiled fondly at the memory. "And I've only spent a year and a half, well, almost two years traveling, and I've seen a lot of legendaries since then, something that people have tried to do for ages without finding a single one." Ash paused, recalling a few tales his mom used to tell him. "My mom told me stories about real people who spend nearly sixty years of their lives looking for just one legendary without succeeding." He turned to Latios. "Latios, do you think that when I saw Ho-Oh on my first day as a trainer it was just luck?"

Latios shook his head. "No Ash, Lady Ho-Oh is a very powerful and wise legendary. She only reveals herself to people with a pure heart and a noble soul. The fact that she let you see her, even if only for a few seconds, indicates that she was wishing you good luck and offering you her blessings," Latios answered calmly.

Ash's eyes widened in surprise. Latios continued. "Also, the fact that many legendaries have willingly revealed themselves to you, me and Latias included, means that you are a really good human, good enough to be Lugia and Lady Ho-Oh's chosen one. And yes, Lady Ho-Oh also participated in choosing a human to help the legendaries in times of need."

"Wow, amazing," Ash muttered. He paused. "Wait, she? Lady Ho-Oh? Ho-Oh is a girl?"

Latios chuckled. "Yes."

"Why do you call her 'Lady' then, is she a queen or something?" Ash asked.

"No, I call her that out of respect; she is older and wiser than me, as well as stronger," Latios admitted, admiration clear in his voice.

"Have you met her before?" Ash asked.

Latios nodded. "A few times."

Ash looked confused. "How? I thought you and Latias never left Altomare."

"Well," Latios began. "Latias has never left Altomare since she hatched, but I've left a few times, for short periods of time, usually when Latias or I needed to discuss something with another Legendary. She stayed to protect Altomare and I left to talk with the other legendary. Then, once my business is finished, I return."

"How old is Ho-Oh?" Ash asked curiously.

"I won't tell you her real age since I don't know it, just an approximate that she told me. She's about uhh, over a million years... That's all I know, how much after the million I have no idea." Latios answered.

Ash paused in pure shock. "She's over a million!" Ash shouted, shocked that anyone could live that long. Pikachu was also impressed, he knew Legendaries were old, but not *that* old. Larvitar didn't really care as he was barely half a month old. Latias giggled at his expression. Ash recovered enough to speak. "How can someone be so old?"

"Well, she can revive people and Pokémon easily, including herself. Additionally, she is immortal." Latios answered. Ash's eyes widened, clearly impressed.

Ash looked at him. "Latios... how old are you and Latias?"

Latios looked at Latias. She nodded, her mouth still stuffed with cake. "Well, I think we'll finally tell you. Latias and I are both one-hundred and nine years old, and I'm older than she is by three days," Latios answered, eyeing Ash to see his reaction.

Ash's jaw dropped. "You... are... HOW OLD!" Pikachu also looked utterly baffled. Larvitar... still didn't care. Ash nearly fainted. They were older than a century!

"I hatched before Lorenzo's father. He took care of us in our youth. It was hard as we didn't have parents." Latios and Latias glanced at Larvitar at this point. He cast a small downward look, once again wondering if his attitude was correct around his only friends. "So I tried to behave like a parent would even as a kid, all for Latias. I'm glad that she appreciated it."

Latias hugged Latios. "I'm still grateful. Thanks a lot bro." She had finally finished her cake.

"I know, sis," Latios said, but laughed as she had some cake crumbs on her cheeks. Ash laughed too. Latias pouted. Ash thought she just looked adorable.

Ash grabbed the napkin, gently cupped Latias' head, and cleaned her cheeks. She giggled. "Thanks." She tackled Ash playfully and nuzzled him on the neck. He fell on his back laughing as Latias nuzzled him. He hugged her back, loving the feel of her soft feathers against his skin.

Latios smiled at them. He glanced up at the sun. "Mm, Ash, your battle is in about twenty minutes, we should head to the field."

Latias backed off to let Ash stand. He got up and nodded. "Finally! Let's go."

He took out a pokeball. "Latios, return." A red beam shot from the Pokeball in Latios' direction, but Latios quickly dodged to the side. Ash frowned. "Why did you move out of the way?"

"Because I was going to ask you if I could see the battles from outside my Pokeball, but you didn't let me even ask," Latios answered.

Ash chuckled sheepishly. "Sure you can, just don't let anyone see you."

Latios nodded and used his light-refracting feathers to become invisible, disappearing into thin air. Latias shapeshifted into her human form and picked up Larvitar. He was about to whine and struggle, wanting Ash to carry him, but a gentle smile from Latias was enough to calm him down. Together the group walked (and floated in Latios's case) to the arenas, which weren't really that far away.

Ash sighed, *'Now, where was my battle again?'*

"If I recall, it was field six," Latias informed him.

'Hey! Stay out of my head!' Ash shouted.

"I wasn't peeking at your thoughts, honest. I picked up the thought automatically, sorry," Latias replied truthfully.

"She's telling the truth Ash," Latios also said.

"Alright. Sorry Latias for errr... Shouting in my head," Ash apologized, turning to glance at her.

Latias made giggling motions and laughed telepathically. *"It's okay."*

Ash smiled before walking to his designated field. The battlefields were crowded with people, each with a fence separating it from the others. Each enclosure had at least a hundred people behind the fence watching the numerous battles taking place.

"There, field six," Ash said, looking at the battlefield number. Inside the battlefield were a Nidoking and a Tauros fighting fiercely.

"Hey Ash!" Misty called. She was near a small door in the battlefield's fence. Beside her was Brock... with a nice lump on his head, courtesy of Misty's mallet.

"Hi," Ash greeted.

"Where have you been? We have been looking for you all over the place," Misty asked.

"At the lake, chatting with Latias and Latios to pass the time," Ash answered. Suddenly the Nidoking slammed against the fence next to them, completely defeated. "Guess that means I'm up," Ash muttered.

Brock and Misty laughed. "Good luck Ash!"

The speakers started announcing the next match. "Will Ash Ketchum from Pallet Town and Bruce Larkings from Azalea Town please report to field six!"

A rather tall and muscular man entered the field. Ash blinked, the man was huge! He was bald and had a black shirt and pants. "So, who's my opponent?" Bruce shouted. The audience that had gathered around the field cheered, apparently driven by the man's apparent toughness.

"Good luck Ash. Beat the crap out of him!" Brock cheered. Ash shrugged and entered the field.

Latios mentally laughed. *"Ash, I assure you the guy is more bark than bite. He'll be an easy opponent; he's just trying to intimidate you,"* Latios telepathed. He was currently floating a few feet above the battlefield. Once Ash entered the arena, he hovered beside him. Ash nodded, he knew he could trust Latios' words.

Bruce looked at Ash. "Well, well, I have a small kid as my opponent! Great, why don't you give up now and save me the trouble, brat?" The audience cheered, expecting Ash to back down.

Ash grinned. "Nope, let's battle!" Bruce growled lowly, the brat wasn't intimidated the least bit! Ash mentally chuckled. *'You wouldn't act so tough if you knew I happened to have a Legendary Pokemon beside me.'*

"Trainers, take your positions!" the Referee called. Ash shrugged and walked to the green box, while Bruce proceeded to walk to the red one.

Numerous shouts of "The kid's gonna lose!" and "Poor kid" whispers were heard among the audience. Bruce laughed. "I'll go easy on you, kid!" He chuckled darkly. The audience started cheering again. Ash was getting a little nervous of having the audience against him.

Latios mentally growled. How dare they regard Ash so lowly! He was resisting the urge to use his psychic powers and give everyone a massive headache, oh that would be so nice! "*Latios!*" Latias mentally scolded her brother.

Latios chuckled. "*Sorry, I was getting carried away,*" he replied sheepishly. Latios put a claw on Ash's shoulder, calming him down. Ash smiled at his invisible friend. Pikachu's cheeks sparkled, wanting to fight.

In the meantime, a large screen on the side of the field flashed and Ash and Bruce's faces appeared. A Circle appeared in the middle, divided into green and red segments. The segments started flashing in a circular pattern until the light stopped... in a green segment, meaning Ash went first. He growled slightly. The Referee raised his green flag. "Ash Ketchum chooses first, followed by Bruce Larkings!"

Ash smirked. "Pikachu, go!" Pikachu nodded and jumped from Ash's shoulder, landing in the battlefield. Pikachu's image appeared beside Ash's on the screen.

" *Pikachu, give that guy a nice beating,*" Latios telepathed to the mouse.

Pikachu smirked. "Oh, I plan to."

Bruce grinned coldly. "Kid, you are so doomed. Rhydon, I choose you!" Bruce threw a Pokeball to the field. A massive gray pokemon appeared. It had a cream-colored drill-like horn on its snout and

many spikes on its head. It had a long tail with skinny black stripes, a cream-colored stomach, and a ridged back. The Rhydon roared.

On the screen beside Bruce, Rhydon's image appeared. The referee nodded. "Begin!"

"Let's score a quick win, use Earthquake!" Bruce shouted. The drill Pokemon roared again and slammed a hand to the ground hard, sending powerful shockwaves across the battlefield.

"Pikachu, use your tail to jump!" Ash shouted. Pikachu followed the command and slammed his tail to the ground, using it to push himself up off the ground. The Earthquake passed harmlessly underneath Pikachu as he was now a dozen feet in the air. "Pikachu, Iron Tail!" Ash commanded, eager to see how Pikachu pulled off the move during a battle. As he descended back towards the ground, Pikachu's tail began to glow a bright white, becoming hard as steel.

"Rhydon, use Hyper Beam!" Bruce ordered.

"Take this you little rat!" Rhydon growled as he began gathering a large amount of volatile orange energy in his maw, releasing it in the form of a powerful beam.

"Pikachu, twist in midair!" Ash shouted, not wanting Pikachu to get hurt by such a direct attack.

Pikachu did a quick spin, causing the Hyper Beam to roughly miss him by a few inches. He swung his tail in a wide arc, the speed of the fall adding more force to it as he slammed it into Rhydon's head. The Rhydon shrieked pain as the super-effective attack took its toll on him, stumbling back a few meters.

Bruce growled. He knew his Rhydon had taken a lot of damage from that Iron Tail. The audience seemed to be impressed and started to cheer Ash. He smiled. "We aren't done yet!" Bruce started. "Rhydon, Horn Drill!" Rhydon grinned as the Horn adorning his nose began to spin. He began to run towards Pikachu.

"Ash, don't let Pikachu get hit by that, if it makes contact, Pikachu is finished!" Latios warned Ash mentally.

"Pikachu, use Agility! Stay away from Rhydon until the Horn Drill ends!" Ash commanded. Pikachu nodded and started running around the battlefield at high speeds, his form blurring constantly from the sheer speed.

Rhydon looked around in confusion. Every time he charged at Pikachu, he would quickly disappear and reappear elsewhere. Soon, after a lot of failed attempts to hit Pikachu, his horn stopped spinning. Rhydon panted in tiredness, trying to recover his strength.

Ash smirked. "Time to end this! Pikachu, use Iron Tail! Power it up with your agility!" Ash ordered. Pikachu was still running around at high-speeds. Rhydon was turning his head from side to side quickly, trying to locate Pikachu. Suddenly, he felt a sharp pain in his chest. He looked down to see Pikachu slamming an Iron Tail into his gut, the Agility and momentum from his dash adding to the power. Rhydon was actually flung back until he collided with the Fence behind his trainer, who stood there completely shocked. Rhydon's rock skin was actually cracked where the Iron Tail had struck, and he fainted.

The Referee nodded. "Winner is Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town!" Ash's and Pikachu's faces filled the entire screen. "Yeah!" Ash cheered, running to the field and hugging Pikachu. Latios smiled.

Bruce grunted in anger. He recalled Rhydon and stomped off the battlefield without uttering a single word. Latios laughed mentally. *'What a sore loser.'*

Latias laughed in her head. *"I couldn't agree more."*

Many of the spectators were shocked. They hadn't expected the kid to win. There were many whispers of "That Pikachu is strong" and "The kid's good" or "He's too young to be so tough!" Regardless, most of them cheered.

"Seems all that training really paid off, didn't it Pikachu?" Ash praised, happy that Pikachu had performed so well in the battle.

"Yeah, but my tail was sore most of the time, and Latias wouldn't even let me rest!" Pikachu complained. Ash laughed

"Well, let's go," Ash said happily, exiting the field. He was greeted by a double hug courtesy of Latias and Misty.

"Congratulations on winning your first battle," Misty said, glad that Ash hadn't done something stupid mid-battle.

"*Yeah*," Latias agreed telepathically, tilting her human-form's head in a smile.

Ash smiled back at them. "Thanks."

"Well, well, well Ashy-boy, which of those two is your girlfriend? Or are you dating both of them?" Gary taunted, walking over to them with a smirk on his face. Latias and Misty released Ash from the hug, looked at each other, and blushed furiously. Ash blinked in confusion. Brock cried in a lone corner at the fact that Ash got a double girl hug. Gary laughed. "That was a nice battle; you defeated a trainer despite your type disadvantage without even taking a single blow. You've become strong Ash, but you're still under me. I look forward to our battle, unless you're eliminated sooner." Gary laughed again and walked off.

Ash turned to the still blushing Latias and Misty. "What's a girlfriend? Is it a friend who is a girl? That means you two are my girlfriends, right?" he asked quite innocently. Pikachu facefaulted. Latias had to exert a lot of self-control in order to not burst out laughing and thus lose his invisibility. Brock kept crying.

Latias and Misty blushed even harder. Misty growled in annoyance, handed Togepi to Brock, and took out her mallet. Still blushing, she walked over to Ash slowly. "What did you call me?"

Ash blinked in confusion and gulped. *'Why is she going to hit me? Is calling a girl your girlfriend bad? Girlfriend has to mean a girl who is your friend, but why is Misty mad?'* Ash thought desperately, wondering why Misty was acting like this. *'And why did Latias and Misty blush?'*

Sensing his thoughts, Latias decided to intervene. She stepped forward and stood in front of Ash. *"Wait Misty, he doesn't even know what a girlfriend is, give him a break,"* Latias telepathed, probably saving Ash from a painful mallet-beating.

Misty sighed and nodded, agreeing that she probably overreacted. Ash sighed in relief. "So, what's a girlfriend?" Ash asked again, wanting to clear the topic and ensure he didn't get into trouble again.

Latias and Misty sighed. "You tell him," both girls said at the same time to each other. They sweatdropped.

Brock stepped forward eagerly. "I'll tell him!"

"NO!" Everyone roared. Nobody wanted to deal with a traumatized Ash. Misty grabbed Brock's ear and dragged him away.

Latias sighed. *'Guess I'll have to tell him about this, again.'* She turned to look at Ash. She was a bit astonished that Ash was so clueless about love. *'Then again, I gave him a kiss and he looked like he didn't even know what was happening.'* She smiled fondly at the memory of her feathery cheeks brushing against his own. It had been a little awkward since in her pokemon form her mouth was located underneath her pointed nose, but it was still a nice kiss.

" *YOU WHAT!*" Latios screamed in Latias's mind.

Latias winced. *'I shouldn't have thought that so loudly.'* She grinned sheepishly. *"Don't worry brother; it was only on the cheek."* Knowing that he really didn't have much of a say in this, Latios dropped the matter, but made a mental note to watch Latias and Ash a bit closer.

Latias nudged Ash, getting his attention. *"Okay Ash, remember that I said you would understand some things when you were older? A 'girlfriend' fits in that category. Basically, when two people are in love with each other and they agree to be together, they become a couple. The girl is called a 'girlfriend' and the boy is called a 'boyfriend'. End of story, for now."* Ash nodded dumbly, sorting out what Latias said.

As they walked to the arena that would house Ash's second preliminary battle, Latios chuckled and floated closer to Latias. *"So, how was the kiss?"* he asked teasingly. Latias would have squealed in surprise had her human form not been incapable of sound.

Latias smirked, getting an idea. *"See for yourself."* With that, she used her psychic powers to 'pull' Latios's presence inside her mind and show him her memories of the kiss. Latios blushed, not expecting Latias to show it to him so directly. Latias laughed.

"I just had to ask..." Latios muttered.

After a few minutes of walking and about half an hour of waiting, Ash was finally called for his second preliminary battle. "Will Ash Ketchum from Pallet Town and Salvador from Cherrygrove City please report to field one?" the speakers blared.

Ash grinned eagerly. "That's my cue!"

He rushed forward and entered the battlefield. Soon another kid entered the field as well. He seemed about a year older than Ash with dark blue hair, a yellow shirt, and black shorts. "Hello, I'm Salvador!" He introduced himself.

"Hi, I'm Ash, ready to battle?" Ash asked, eager to win his second battle. He stood on the green side, and Salvador on the red.

Ash and Salvador's photos appeared on the screen. The small red and green segmented wheel started spinning rapidly, until it stopped... on a red segment. The Referee nodded. "Salvador of

Cherrygrove City chooses first, followed by Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town!"

Salvador grabbed a Pokeball. "Furret, Let's go!" He tossed the Pokeball, releasing a long weasel-like pokemon with soft brown and white fur.

' A Normal Type, no one I choose will really have an advantage and Pikachu's already battled.' Ash thought. He grabbed a Pokeball. "Bayleef, your turn to battle!" Ash threw the Pokeball and released the Grass-type. On other occasions she would have tried to Body-Slam him affectionately, but decided not to as the moment was a serious one.

Furret and Bayleef's images appeared on the screen. "Begin!" The Referee shouted.

Salvador took the initiative and attacked first. "Furret, use Headbutt!" The small furry Pokemon charged at Bayleef at startling speeds.

"Bayleef, use Body Slam!" Ash shouted, knowing that Bayleef's superior weight was going to give her an advantage in close combat.

Salvador seemed to have noticed this as well. "Furret, get out of the way!" Furret complied and changed course, passing just beside Bayleef.

"Bayleef, spin around and use Razor Leaf!" Ash ordered, knowing that Furret's speed was going to be a big problem. Bayleef planted her feet on the ground and twisted her body, using the momentum to shake her head leaf with more force than usual. Several leaves were sent at Furret, flying through the air at high speeds.

"Furret, dodge!" Salvador shouted, seeing the power behind Bayleef's attack. He had to admit, that Bayleef seemed tough, but so was his Furret. Furret twisted his body gracefully, effortlessly dodging Bayleef's Razor leaf attack. Bayleef's jaw dropped slightly. "Furret,

use Headbutt," Salvador commanded, having an idea on how to hit the Grass-Type.

' If I counter with Body-Slam, Furret will simply move out of the way. Maybe I can tangle him up?' Ash thought. "Bayleef, use Vine Whip!"

"Take this!" Bayleef shouted as her vines extended, heading directly at the Furret.

"Furret, use Double Team!" Salvador countered. Furret blurred as several copies of himself appeared, all surrounding Bayleef. Her vines passed harmlessly through one of the copies.

"You missed!" Furret taunted happily.

Bayleef looked around in confusion, wondering which of the at least thirty Furets around her was the real one.

"Furret, use Swift!" Salvador called calmly, knowing that he had control of the battle.

Suddenly, star-shaped projectiles started hitting Bayleef from every direction. She cried out in pain at the multiple hits. Even if some of the throwing stars were also illusions from the Double Teams, it was still perfectly masking the real one's movements. It also didn't help that he was moving around throwing stars from every direction, making it impossible for Bayleef to locate him. Ash growled.

"Bayleef, Razor Leaf!" he ordered. Bayleef swung the big leaf on her head sideways, launching a barrage of smaller Razor Leaves. They dispelled a few of the Double Teams, but none hit the real one.

Ash began to get desperate. If he didn't act fast, Bayleef would be defeated. *"Ash, calm down and think. You can detect the real Furret, just concentrate,"* Latios telepathed helpfully. He was floating a foot behind Ash, masked by his invisibility.

' What do you mean?' Ash thought.

" Just concentrate and you'll find the real Furret. Feel the world around you and you'll see through Furret's illusion. Trust me and trust in yourself. I already found the real one, but let's see if you can do it," Latios answered.

Ash decided to trust Latios and closed his eyes. He began to think, and feel the world around him, like Latios had told him to. He began to feel a strange sensation, like he could see everything around him, even with his eyes closed. It felt pretty much like when he had sensed Latias and Latios' location. But now he could sense *everything* around him, not just the eon siblings. He began to sense how Furret was moving around attacking Bayleef, hidden in the illusions. All the copies felt... hollow to him. Yet one of them felt more alive, more solid, more *real*... "Bayleef, Vine Whip to your right!" Ash shouted.

Bayleef thought that Ash had lost it. He was ordering her to attack a specific point, and the attack would simply pass through it! But still, she decided to trust Ash. Between the constant hits she was taking, she extended a vine to her right side. She didn't get her hopes up much, expecting the attack to pass through the Furret. To her utter surprise, scratch that, to *everyone's* surprise, Furret cried out in pain as Bayleef's vines struck him powerfully, temporarily knocking the wind out of him. Bayleef's eyes widened in shock, her admiration of Ash skyrocketing. *'How did you know he was there?'*

"Hold him in place and use Solar Beam!" Ash shouted. Bayleef was interrupted from her thoughts by Ash's voice. She quickly coiled her vines around Furret's feet and midsection, effectively holding him in place. She began to absorb the sun's energy through her neck leaves. Surprisingly, the cuts she had gained from Furret's continuous swift attack started to vanish and heal as she absorbed the sun's rays, her entire body giving off a soft glow.

Brock was the first to realize what was happening. "She's using Synthesis!"

Ash looked confused. "Synthe-what?"

Latios sweatdropped. *"Synthesis is a Grass-Type move that is used for healing wounds by absorbing the sun's rays, pretty much like Recover. Bayleef must have learned it after taking so much damage and then absorbing the Sun's rays through Solar Beam."*

"Great job, Bayleef!" Ash praised. Bayleef blushed a little. "Now, finish that Furret!" Bayleef nodded and began to concentrate all the energy she had gathered into her mouth, releasing it in the form of a blinding white energy beam.

Furret began to squirm and struggle against Bayleef's vines, but it was to no avail. The Solar Beam struck him in the chest, causing a bright explosion of light. When the light dispersed, a defeated Furret was lying on the ground, his eyes turned into swirls.

"Furret is unable to Battle!" The Referee called, raising his flag. "Ash Ketchum is the winner!" The screen flashed Ash and Bayleef's photo.

"Yeah! That's two in a row!" Ash shouted happily, running forward and hugging Bayleef. She nuzzled him affectionately.
"Congratulations, Bayleef!"

She smiled brightly. "Thanks!"

Ash's friends sprinted up to him. This time neither Latias nor Misty hugged him, not wanting another girlfriend mistake. "Ash, how did you detect the real Furret? You had your eyes closed the whole time," Brock asked.

Ash paused. "To be honest, I don't know exactly what I did."

Brock frowned. "Did a certain dragon tell you? Because if he did, that's cheating. I think."

Ash shook his head. "No, he told me to calm down and 'feel' where the real one was. I tried it and managed to find it."

"Impressive," Brock muttered.

"Let's watch other battles until my next one comes up. Its on the field beside this one," Ash suggested. They walked to field two next door and leaned against the fence, waiting for the current battle to finish and for his name to be called up.

"So, how have I done so far in my matches?" Ash asked, curious to hear what his friends thought of his battles.

Brock pursed his lips in thought. "So far, I'd say great. You won the first with Pikachu without taking a single hit, but in the second one you lost control for a while."

"Yeah," Misty agreed.

" *I think you were okay,*" Latias commented telepathically. She was playing with one of her Bianca-form's locks to pass the time.

After what seemed like an eternity, the last battle ended and the speakers boomed, "Will Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town and Ann Katie of New Bark Town report to field two!"

Ash smiled. "Well, final battle, here I come!"

"Don't mess up," Misty muttered. Ash sweatdropped but entered the field anyway.

A young woman entered from the other end. She had long blonde hair and wore a long red skirt with a white blouse. She smiled and walked up to Ash. "Greetings young Trainer, I'm Katie. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Ash nodded. "I'm Ash. Let's have a great battle!"

Both Katie and Ash's photos appeared in the screen. The segmented wheel started spinning and stopped on a red segment, meaning Katie would go first. Ash smiled. *'That's the second time in*

a row I have the advantage, even if I didn't get much out of it in the last battle.'

Katie grabbed a pokeball. "Ariados, Go!" She hurled the Pokeball, releasing a rather large red spider Pokemon with yellow and purple segmented legs. The sight of the Ariados didn't really dredge up nice memories to Latias and Latios. Both resisted the urge to charge at the large spider and tear it apart.

" Ash, you better give that Ariados a nice beating," Latios commented telepathically.

" I second that," Latias added. Ash sweatdropped but chose his next Pokemon.

"Cyndaquil, I choose you!" The small fire mouse Pokemon appeared on the field.

"Ah, great now it's my turn..." Cyndaquil said lazily, yawning a little.

"Begin!" The Referee shouted.

Katie attacked first. Knowing that she had a severe disadvantage, she had to be cautious. "Ariados, use pin missile!" The Ariados opened its mouth and fired a barrage of small needles in rapid fire at Cyndaquil.

"Cyndaquil, use Flamethrower!" Ash countered. The small Fire-type opened his mouth as his back flames came to life and launched a powerful stream of fire at the incoming needles. The needles were reduced to cinders in a matter of seconds, and the Flamethrower kept blasting towards Ariados.

Katie growled. "Ariados, Protect!" The Ariados was covered in a protective sphere of green energy, causing the Flamethrower to bounce off harmlessly.

"Cyndaquil, smokescreen!" Ash shouted, getting an idea. Cyndaquil opened his mouth and released a large plume of smoke, covering most of the Battlefield. "Now, finish this with Flame Wheel!"

Cyndaquil charged at the smoke and spun into a ball, his body covered in flames. Katie blinked in confusion. "Ariados, use Nightshade!"

The sounds of combat could be heard from inside the cloud, along with a few explosions, until everything got quiet. When the wind finally removed the smog, a defeated Ariados was lying on the field, Cyndaquil standing calmly a few feet away.

The Referee nodded. "Ariados is unable to Battle. Victory goes to Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town!"

"Yes!" Ash cheered, thrusting a fist to the air. "I'm in the next round!" Cyndaquil smiled and... fell asleep, probably to resume the nap he had been interrupted from. Ash sweatdropped. *'How enthusiastic,'* He recalled Cyndaquil back to his pokeball.

Katie returned her downed Ariados and bid Ash farewell. *"Congratulations Ash!"* Latias cheered, hugging Ash. He smiled.

"So, ready for the second round?" Brock asked, happy that his friend had passed.

"You bet I am!" Ash shouted eagerly... until his stomach growled loudly. Everyone facefaulted.

"Guess dinner comes first. Besides, it's still about two days until the start of the Second Round." Latios said. With that, the group headed to one of the many restaurants of Silver Town to grab a bite to eat, eagerly awaiting the second round of the tournament.

This Concludes Chapter 11, hope you all liked the preliminary battles... And Ash's cluelessness. **Review Please!**

Putting Out The Fire!

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

Three days had passed, and that was enough time to decide the fate of over two hundred trainers. The league never revealed the full number of trainer that participated from the start. There could even be over three hundred! But out of that unknown number, only forty-eight remained. One of them was our cap-wearing hero.

Currently, Ash and his friends were walking to the administrative area of the Silver Conference, where the matchups for the Second Round would be given out in a few minutes' time. "So Brock, how does the Second Round work?" Ash asked.

"Well, it's a block system. You see, only forty-eight trainers remain in the competition. These trainers are divided into sixteen groups of three trainers each. Out of each Block, only one trainer passes. Since there are just sixteen Blocks, the sixteen trainers that pass will go to the Final Rounds," Brock explained.

"Ah, but how do the battles occur inside the Blocks?" Ash asked.

"Each trainer fights the other two trainers in the Block in a three-on-three Pokémon battle. If you win a battle you get three points, if you tie the battle you get just one point, and if you lose you don't get any points at all. The trainer with the most points in the group passes to the Finals," Brock answered.

"That means that if Ash wins both battles he passes automatically because neither of the two other trainers will be able to catch up to him, right?" Latias asked telepathically. Larvitar, who was currently being carried in Latias' arms, wondered if Ash was going to use him in a battle.

"That's right," Brock answered her.

"Doesn't sound so hard," Ash commented.

"Don't get overconfident," Misty chided. "The Second Round has tougher trainers, since they all won their preliminary battles too."

Ash smiled. "I know."

After another few minutes of walking they entered the Pokémon Center. They noticed that there were a lot of trainers already inside, waiting for the announcement of the trainer blocks.

Soon, Mr. Goodshow appeared. "Greetings trainers, the blocks for the next round have been selected." He pointed at a large screen hanging from the ceiling in the center of the room. "Here are the results!"

Sixteen boxes appeared on the screen. Each box had three pictures displayed inside, with the name of the trainer below the picture. Ash smirked. "Great, I'm in block A, the very first. My opponents are 'Macey' and 'Jackson.'"

"Look Ash," Brock noted, pointing to one of the far off Blocks. "There's Gary."

"I'm not really surprised he passed," Ash deadpanned. Pikachu nodded in agreement.

Mr. Goodshow cleared his throat to get everyone's attention. "All the matches will be held in Silver Stadium, on the neutral field. Today we will start with the first matches of the A, B, C, and D Blocks.

Tomorrow we'll continue with the rest, and so on until all the battles are finished. Please go to the information desk to get your match schedules. Remember that you must have your team registered before each match. You can do that at the personal computers of your hotel rooms." With that said, Mr. Goodshow turned and left.

Ash walked over to the information desk Goodshow had indicated, his friends following him. The receptionist smiled upon seeing Ash walking up to her. "Hello, I assume you are going to check your match schedule, right?"

Ash nodded. Brock grinned and was about to sprint forward and beg for a date, but Latias restrained him psychically. This time her hold was so strong that Brock couldn't even blink or turn to look at her. *"No dates for you. Even if she was going to reject you anyway, at least this saves you the embarrassment."* Latias said telepathically.

Misty sighed. "I miss hitting him. Latias, you're too good at this."

Latias grinned. *"Don't worry, next time he's yours."* Misty nodded eagerly. Brock paled, utterly helpless under Latias' mental hold.

"Your first match is today, in two hours, against Macey," the desk lady informed Ash.

Ash nodded. "Thanks, miss." He turned and walked away. Latias released Brock and the group resumed walking.

Brock turned to Latias. "Hey! How am I ever going to get a girlfriend with you and Misty doing this to me!" he demanded while trying not to sound too offensive. He knew that getting on a Legendaries' bad side was a bad idea, especially one that had a very overprotective big brother. Brock felt a chill go down his spine when he thought of what Latias would do to him if he so much as yelled at Latias.

"I won't let you get on any woman's nerves," Latias replied coolly.

Brock sighed in despair. "What if a girl I try to get a date with actually likes me, but *you* interrupt it!"

Latias smiled. *"Don't worry, if you try to get a date with a girl that will accept your presence and actually like you, I won't intervene."*

Brock looked confused. "And how will you know that?"

Latias grinned. *"Remember, that's one of my abilities. I can sense the emotions of others. If I sense positive emotions coming from a girl you try to get a date with, I won't do anything."* Brock looked relieved, but Latias continued. *"In the meantime... I'm watching you."* He groaned.

"Is getting a girlfriend really that hard?" Ash asked curiously.

"Not really, depends on the situation, as well as both the boy and the girl," Misty answered.

"Ah. Think it'll be hard for me to get a girlfriend?" Ash asked curiously, hoping that he wouldn't have to go through all the problems Brock was having.

Both Latias and Misty paused and blushed a little before quickly resuming their walk. "Ash," Misty started. "You are just eleven, you shouldn't think about that too much right now. Wait a few more years."

Since Brock was a wannabe Casanova with years of experience on love matters-or so he claimed-he easily noticed Latias' and Misty's reaction to Ash's question. *'Weird...'* Brock noted mentally. *'Are they both interested in him? Aw man, that's so unfair!'*

"Yeah," Latias continued. *"Don't worry, I assure you you'll get a girlfriend easily, when the time comes."*

Ash lit up. "You think?"

" *Why not?*" Latias implied. She smiled at him. *'It probably won't be me, though...'*

Suddenly the group noticed a girl running up to them, a Vulpix at her side. She had a yellow shirt and long brown hair tied in two long pigtails. She stopped in front of the group. "Hello, my name is Macey of Mahogany Town, and I'm your opponent for the next match," She said, introducing herself.

Ash blinked a little at the straightforward approach, but was polite and returned the introduction. "Hi, I'm Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town, glad to meet you!"

"Mm, interesting." Macey muttered. She smiled. "It was a pleasure to meet you, see you for our match!" With that Macey turned and walked away, leaving the group quite confused.

"Okay," Ash said slowly. "What was that about?"

" *She wanted to see you before your match with her. She believes it's useful to get a good sense of her opponent before the match. That way she can plan her strategy better,*" Latias informed him telepathically. Everyone turned to look at her. She blushed at the sudden attention.

"Did you read her mind? Latias said that was rude!" Ash reprimanded her.

Latias shook her head. *"I read her thoughts. I was curious as to why she came here. Remember that reading someone's mind and thoughts are two different things. Besides, it's possible to read just part of a mind, not the entire thing."*

"Ah, I keep forgetting that," Ash muttered, chuckling Mareepishly.

Latias sighed. She paused, sensing a familiar mind entering Silver Town. It was the presence of a friend she had longed to see again.

Her face lit up in happiness and she dashed in the direction she sensed her friend was.

"Wait, Bianca!" Ash shouted, preparing to run after her. He paused and turned to his friends. "Could you two please go and check Macey's team, then register the team that would be best suited to fight her?" Ash asked.

Brock and Misty nodded. "Sure thing, Ash," Brock said.

"I wonder, what's gotten into Latias now?" Misty wondered.

"I'll go after her and find out for myself." With that, Ash took off after Latias.

Misty and Brock chuckled at his antics. "Leave it to Ash to dump everything on us," Misty muttered.

Brock laughed. "Yeah, I know. At least that shows how much he trusts us." With that, they resumed walking back to the hotel, ready to do what Ash had asked them to.

...

Bianca smiled as she entered Silver Town. It had been a nice trip from Alto Mare, albeit a lengthy one. Bianca looked around as she walked through the town. It had been an extremely long time since the last occasion she had left her home town of Alto Mare. Usually, whenever she did it, it was for artistic reasons such as art expositions or her trying to get her work be recognized outside of Alto Mare. This, however, was an extremely special occasion. She had come to see two of her greatest friends once again, and, hopefully see one of the battle. *'Alto Mare sure has been really quiet without Latias and Latios,'* she thought to herself, slightly dismayed. She was eagerly looking forward to the impending reunion with her two lifelong Pokémon friends ever since she had left her home town.

She glanced around a few times, quickly noting the large activity in the busy street. As she had expected, the town was brimming with people, and she could see massive activity whenever she looked. Be it trainers, friends and family members of trainers or general spectators, everywhere was overcrowded. She then remembered that the Second Round would be starting soon. She began walking around, scanning the crowds aimlessly. *'Now, how do I find Ash?'* she wondered.

Latias grinned, quickly singling Bianca out before walking towards her from behind. *"No need for that. I've already found you,"* she said telepathically.

Bianca jumped in surprise as she had not been prepared for the sudden voice speaking in her head. "Wow, Latias, you surprised me for a moment," Bianca whispered, looking around while trying to spot her friend.

"Hi! Bianca!" Latias grinned as she spoke, standing behind the young artist. She psychically nudged Bianca to turn around.

Bianca turned around and smiled. "Wow, you surprised me, Latias. It's good to see you again," she said, walking towards her. She paused and looked at the disguised dragoness awkwardly. "Huh?" she said in confusion.

Latias followed Bianca's stare and blushed in embarrassment. She realized that in her happiness to see Bianca again she had forgotten to return Larvitar to Ash. She lowered Larvitar to the ground. *"I'm sorry, Larvitar,"* she apologized before racing forward and tackle-hugging Bianca playfully. *"I've missed you!"* she chimed happily.

Bianca hugged her back tightly. "Hey, Latias. I've missed you too. How have you been?" Bianca asked gently.

Latias parted from the hug and smiled brightly. *"Yeah, I've been fine, everything has been okay. Ash has been doing amazing at the tournament."*

Bianca nodded. "That's good. It'd be a shame if I came all the way here only to learn he was defeated early on."

" *Aw, don't be that pessimistic,*" Latias chided, giving Bianca a teasing look.

Larvitar watched the scene with interest, wondering why Latias was being so affectionate to this human, and wondered even more why Latias' human form looked identical to her. "Who is she?" he asked, tilting his head.

Bianca looked at Larvitar, the sound of his voice attracting her attention. "Who's this little cutie?" she asked curiously, crouching down to pet Larvitar. Larvitar froze, not knowing how to react to Bianca, so he fell back on the only thing that occurred to him: to Screech.

Not wanting them to attract unnecessary attention, Latias decided to subtly intervene. " *Larvitar, don't screech, she's isn't going to hurt you, I promise,*" She telepathed kindly, adding an extra-sweet tone to her plea.

Larvitar didn't know what to do. He could listen to the instincts literally yelling at him to Screech and get away from this stranger, or to Latias' kind words. He decided to listen to Latias, he knew he could trust the dragoness. When Bianca petted him, he flinched and closed his eyes, but didn't scream. Bianca frowned at his reaction. She turned to Latias. "What's wrong with him?"

Latias smiled sadly. "*He is traumatized about a past event. Ash and I are trying to help him.*"

Bianca nodded. She stopped petting Larvitar and stood up. Larvitar relaxed visibly. "So, have you and Latios learned something new?" Bianca asked curiously, remembering that Latias and Latios had been under a trainer's care for all this time. She wondered what kinds of cool techniques they had learned. "Any new flashy attacks or abilities?"

Latias picked up Larvitar, gently accommodating him in her arms, lifting most of his weight psychically. He was very heavy for an infant. She flashed Bianca a grin. *"Of course we have!"*

Bianca smiled back, happy to see one of Latias' contagious smiles again. "Finally!" A voice interrupted them. They turned to see Ash and Pikachu walking up to them. "Latias, you shouldn't go off on your own like that." Ash said while walking up to them, freezing when he realized there were two of them. He blinked in confusion, until he saw that one of them had a bag strapped to her side and a beret, and the other was carrying a Larvitar. "Oh, hi Bianca, long time no see."

Bianca smiled. "Hello to you too, Ash." She walked up until she was just in front of him. She gave him a very fierce look. "You had better have taken good care of Latias and Latios, or else," she stated firmly. Ash gulped. He had to admit, Bianca was scary when she wanted to be, especially when it regarded the eon twins.

Ash took a small step back. "Of course I have! Why don't you ask Latias?"

Bianca turned to Latias. "So?"

Latias mentally giggled at Ash' thoughts regarding Bianca. *"Oh, he's been a real sweetheart to us. He takes care of us, and he and his friends have taught us a lot of useful things."*

Bianca smiled in relief, very happy to hear that her best friend was okay. She gave Pikachu a gentle rub on the head. "Hi, Pikachu." Pikachu returned the greeting with a squeal of delight. "So, how is life outside of Alto Mare?" Bianca asked Latias, wanting to hear what her best friend thought about finally leaving their home.

Latias smiled cheerily. *"Very fun. It's cool to visit all kinds of new places and stuff like that. And how has Alto Mare been? Since neither my Brother nor I have felt anything from the Soul Dew, I assume its fine?"*

Bianca nodded. "Alto Mare has been peaceful and quiet. Lorenzo and I tend to the Garden every once in a while, and guess what! I won an art contest! Now maybe my paintings might be sold to more museums." Bianca finished, clearly excited at the last part.

Latias smiled. *"Congratulations! But what was your piece about?"*

Bianca smirked. "Our dear Guardians of Alto Mare, of course. Even if you two aren't there anymore, you still watch over Alto Mare through the Soul Dew, and I know you well enough to draw you perfectly without a reference. So, where's Latios?" she asked, looking around, guessing that maybe he was invisible nearby.

"He's in his Pokéball," Ash answered.

"Can I see him please?" Bianca asked eagerly.

Ash shook his head. "Let's go to my Hotel room, I don't think Latios would enjoy such a crowded place like this."

Bianca nodded, understanding that Latios wasn't one for huge crowds. They started walking back to the Hotel. They received a few weird stares due to Bianca and Latias' identical looks, but many passed them off as twins. "I assume you passed your preliminary matches?" Bianca asked.

Ash nodded. "Of course, my first Second Round match is soon. It's against a trainer called 'Macey.'"

"Oh, going to use Latios in it?" Bianca asked curiously, wanting to see Latios battle soon. She knew that Latios and Latias were not experienced battlers, and wondered how much that had changed after spending about a month with a Pokémon Trainer.

Ash shook his head. "No, I'm keeping Latios a secret because he'll be my secret weapon in the final rounds."

"Assuming you pass," Bianca muttered. Ash sweatdropped, getting annoyed that he always got comments like that. Latias mentally laughed.

" *He'll win, I'm sure of it,*" Latias said telepathically. Ash smiled at her, glad that she always believed in him and always had confidence he would win.

The group reached the hotel room without anything particularly interesting happening. As Ash entered the room, he noted that Brock and Misty were still on the computer. "*Hello!*" Latias chimed happily.

Both Brock and Misty turned to greet them, but were momentarily stymied when they noticed a second Latias. When they noticed the beret, they realized it was Bianca. "Hello Brock and Misty, it's been a while," Bianca greeted with a smile.

"Hello Bianca," Misty replied. "What brings you here?"

Bianca smiled. "Like I'd miss the chance to see Latios battling live, it's better than TV! Speaking of which, can I see him now?"

Ash chuckled as he grabbed a Pokéball from his belt, proceeding to release Latios to the center of the room. "*Hey Bianca, long time no see,*" Latios greeted telepathically. Bianca walked up to him with a smile on her and hugged Latios, clearly glad to see the eon dragon again.

"Hi Latios, how have you been?" Bianca asked as she parted from his arms.

" *Fine, it's been entertaining to travel,*" Latios answered back.

As they caught up with each other, Ash walked up to Brock. "So, has my team been registered yet?"

Brock shook his head. "No, it's easy to choose a team to fight Macey, but look, she may have a trump card or something."

Ash peered over to the computer and saw his opponent's current team. There was a Quilava, Rapidash, Slugma, Flareon, Vulpix and an Electabuzz. "She has mostly fire-type Pokémon, and that Electabuzz must be to cover water types." Misty deduced.

Brock nodded. "I was planning on registering your Water-Types, but something's fishy. You don't have an all one type team without thinking of a way to cover their weaknesses."

"So," Misty started. "We were planning on registering Ground-Types as that covered all six of her Pokémon, but the problem is that you only have Phanpy."

"Why don't you register two Water-Types and Phanpy?" Ash asked. This seemed like the most obvious choice.

Brock looked back at the computer. "We already thought about that, but if Phanpy gets knocked out then the Electabuzz would be a problem, and it's obvious that if you used a Water-Type, she'll switch to it," Brock summarized. "It would be safer to have two Ground-Types, but you only have one."

"*Actually,*" Latias cut in. "*Ash has two Ground-types.*"

Everyone turned to her. Ash looked confused. "I do?"

She shifted her arms a bit, drawing everyone's attention to them... and Larvitar, who she was cradling. He paled. "Oh no," Larvitar muttered, attempting to shrink out of nervousness. Too bad that was impossible since he didn't know Minimize.

"Hey, that's right, and Larvitar should have a double advantage against Fire-types because he resists their attacks and can hit super-effectively! But... Larvitar hasn't been captured." Brock said. "But that can be changed easily enough."

Ash walked up to Larvitar. "What do you say Larvitar? You'll be traveling for a while with us, so... we might as well make it official

and make you my Pokémon so nobody else can capture you by mistake," Ash offered.

Larvitar hummed in thought. After a few seconds, he quietly said, "Okay, I'll help you, and I'll do my best in the tournament."

Ash smiled. "Thanks Larvitar!" He held up a Pokéball and gently tapped Larvitar with it. It popped open and a bright beam sucked Larvitar inside. It shook a few times, and then the button flashed red, indicating that Larvitar had been captured. "Yeah!" Ash shouted, thrusting the Pokéball into the air and posing dramatically. "I got... a Larvitar!"

"You've had that Larvitar for several days now," Pikachu pointed out.

Ash paused. "Well... yeah, but not *officially* ." Pikachu rolled his eyes.

The computer beeped and the page refreshed itself, now adding the information on Ash's newest capture. "Okay, I'll register your team Ash. You'll use Squirtle, Larvitar and Phanpy," Brock said.

Ash frowned in confusion. "Squirtle?"

Brock nodded. "Yes, Officer Jenny brought Squirtle here. We encountered them on our way here, they should be at the main area now."

Ash's face lit up, clearly eager to see one of his oldest friends again. "That's great! I wonder what he's learned after so much time being a fire-fighter?"

Brock clicked a few things. "There Ash, your team has been registered. The match should begin shortly. Let's go." With that done, they left the room.

" *Ash, can I watch the battles outside of my Pokéball please?*" Latios asked telepathically.

Ash shrugged. "Sure, just remain invisible."

Latios nodded gratefully. *"Okay, thanks."*

"You know Ash," Brock said. "Keeping Latios at your side in battles might be a good thing. He can help you by giving you hints about the opponent's Pokémon as well as calming you down in tough situations."

"Though I'm not entirely sure it's legal..." Misty said.

"Well, yeah," Ash agreed, recalling Latios' hints in his battles against Rhydon and Furret, as well as helping him calm down and think clearly on how to beat Furret. "Thanks Latios."

"*You're welcome Ash,*" Latios replied telepathically. By that point, everyone had exited the room but him. He looked at the door and sweatdropped, noting that it was smaller than the ones in Alto Mare. He doubted that he'd ever fit through it. Even Latias had issues fitting through and she was considerably smaller. *"Close the door, I'll exit through the balcony."*

Ash laughed as he closed and locked the door. "Meet you at the entrance of the hotel!" Ash called through the door as the others headed for the elevators.

Latios calmly flew to the balcony, opening the glass door with his mind. He turned invisible and flew out, closing the door the same way he opened it. A few minutes later, Ash and the group walked out of the hotel. Bianca looked around. "Where's Latios?" she asked.

Ash chuckled. "A few feet above us. I guess he doesn't want someone accidentally bumping into him." That was a good idea, seeing as how so many people were walking to the Silver Stadium, ready to watch the first battles of the Silver Conference Second Round.

Bianca looked at him in surprise. "You can tell where he is?"

Ash nodded Mareepishly. "Yep, I can sense Latias' and Latios' location anywhere as long as they aren't too far away from me."

"Wow..." was Bianca's only response.

Soon an Officer Jenny walked up to them. "Hello Ash, long time no see!"

Ash blinked in confusion. "Which Jenny are you?"

Brock was between Jenny and Ash before anyone could react. "You can't tell!" Brock reprimanded Ash, who took a step back in fright at Brock's sudden fury. "She's the one you trusted Squirtle with!" He turned around. "And you, my dear Officer Jenny, have you come to confess your feelings to me? Don't worry, they're mutual," Brock flirted. Jenny blinked in confusion.

" *Your turn*," Latias said in Misty's mind. She nodded and grabbed Brock's ear, dragging him away painfully.

"Don't scar Jenny for life please," Misty muttered, annoyed. "The only feelings she has for you are disgust, which I'm pretty sure aren't mutual... at least, not on your part!"

"No... right now I'm too busy feeling pain to feel disgust for anyone!" Brock squealed in agony.

Ash decided to end the awkward situation. "So, you brought Squirtle to see me?"

Jenny nodded, handing Ash a Pokéball. "Here you go Ash. He's wanted to fight by your side again for quite some time now. I'll let you two catch up, I have to go to the stands if I want to get a nice seat before it's too late. See you in the stadium." Jenny saluted and walked away.

Ash looked at the Pokéball in his hand. He opened it and released the turtle Pokémon inside. As usual he was wearing his extra cool

sunglasses that made everyone feel inferior and lame in comparison. Squirtle looked around and smiled when he saw Ash. "Hey there Ash, how have you been all this time?" Squirtle asked, glad to see Ash again after the fire-fighter competition that had separated them at least a hundred episodes-I mean, a few months ago.

Much to Squirtle's surprise, Ash answered him like he had understood him perfectly. "I've been well, thanks, enjoying the tournament. How's the Squirtle Squad?"

Squirtle looked at Ash skeptically. "Fine... we're now one of the best fire-fighter squads in the region!"

"That's great! I bet you've become quite famous," Ash exclaimed.

Squirtle blinked in amazement . *'He understands me now? How?'* the turtle Pokémon thought to himself. Pikachu jumped down from Ash's shoulder to greet him.

"Hey, good to see you again," Pikachu greeted.

"You too. Uh, what's with Ash understanding us?" Squirtle asked.

Pikachu sighed. " *Very* long story. Basically Ash messed with some Legendary Pokémon, again. And almost got himself killed. *Again* ! And as a result of the adventure, Ash got a few new abilities, such as being able to understand us."

"That's right, I can," Ash said, interrupting them. "Hey Squirtle, now that we can talk, there's something that's been bothering me ever since I first met you. What's with the Sunglasses?"

Squirtle smiled proudly. "First of all, they're called shades, and I wear them because they make me look cool!" Ash sweatdropped.

" *They are very cool, I admit,*" Latias mused telepathically, an impressed tone in her voice.

" *Yeah, maybe I should get a pair, I'd look cool too,*" Latios agreed.

" *You should, maybe you'd look decent then,*" Latias teased playfully.

" *Hey!*" Latios exclaimed. Everyone sweatdropped collectively at the eon twin's argument.

Squirtle tapped his head several times. "What's with the voices in my head?"

Pikachu laughed. "That's the Legendaries Ash caught. It's thanks to them that Ash understands Pokémon now."

Squirtle was impressed. "Ash got around to catching a Legendary? Nice... but where are they?"

Pikachu laughed again. "You'll meet them later in a less public place. They're Latias and her brother Latios."

"Okay voices in my head, meet you later," Squirtle joked. Latias giggled.

"Squirtle, for now return, we'll fight shortly," Ash said pointing the Pokéball at Squirtle and recalling him. Ash turned around and noticed that Misty was still dragging Brock around. He shivered and continued walking. "Hey Latias, I thought that you said your telepathy works only on friends and relatives. How did Squirtle hear you?" Ash asked.

" *Well, he's a good friend of yours. I guess that's why,*" Latias answered.

"Can that telepathy limitation be avoided?" Ash asked again.

" *I don't know. Can it, brother?*" Latias redirected the question to her brother.

" *Yes, but for us to telepathically communicate with anyone, even if we have never met them before, we must be more experienced psychics. When our minds are stronger we'll be able to do that,*" Latios answered. Latias and Ash nodded.

The group reached Silver Stadium. There were a lot of people outside, most of them slowly entering the large structure to watch the battles that were about to start. Ash and his group walked to the side entrance, the one that led toward the battlefield. A Guard was blocking the way. "Are you a trainer for the upcoming match?" The guard asked.

Ash nodded and showed his Pokédex, opening it and showing his Trainer registration. "They're with me," Ash said, motioning to his group of friends.

"Very well," the guard said. He stood aside and let Ash's group walk in.

They walked until they were almost at the end of the access tunnel. "Finally, the true competition begins now..." Ash said.

Abruptly, Latias burst into a shower of blue light, startling everyone as she regained her true form. Just as suddenly, she became invisible, like Latios. "Why the change?" Brock asked.

" *Since Bianca is going to come with us, I don't want weird comments regarding our identical looks,*" Latias replied.

"Okay," Ash said, not really minding.

Ash stepped out into the arena to the cheers of the crowd. He looked at the stands, noticing that they were almost filled with screaming Pokémon fans. He walked to one side of the field, his companions going to sit at the bench behind the trainer box. Latias and Latios hovered at each side of him, masked to everyone by their invisibility.

"Well folks, Ash Ketchum has entered the field!" The unseen MC shouted. "His opponent, Macey should enter shortly too, and then the Second Round of the Silver Conference will begin!" The crowd cheered ecstatically.

Latios looked rather nervous. " *Ash, how am I supposed to fight with so many people around!*"

Pikachu beat Ash with his reply. "It's not that hard, all you have to do is ignore everyone, just concentrate on the Pokémon your opponent sends and nothing else."

Latias giggled and flew to Latios' side. She nudged him playfully. "*Nervous, are we?*"

" *Maybe,*" Latios replied. Latias laughed.

Soon, Macey entered the battlefield from the other side of the stadium. She faced Ash, each trainer on their corresponding Box, ready to begin the fight.

"Today the Second Round begins!" The MC declared, voice booming all over the stadium. "The first match of Block A, Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town versus Macey of Mahogany Town!"

A Referee stepped into the field. "This will be a three-on-three Pokémon battle. The winner is declared when the opponent's three Pokémon are unable to battle."

The Stadium's big screen flashed on, showing Ash's and Macey's pictures with three blank squares beside each of them. The same red and green wheel from the preliminaries appeared, Ash's color was red, Macey's was green. The wheel started flashing in a circular pattern. After a few laps, it stopped on a red segment, meaning that Ash went first. He smirked. '*I'll use a Ground-Type,*' he thought to himself.

" *At least it's not that hard to make a choice,*" Latios telepathically mused.

' *Yeah,*' Ash thought. He was by now used to this 'mental openness' he shared with Latias and Latios. It made him feel like he had a special bond with them.

" *Want me to read her mind and tell you her planned team?*" Latios offered.

' *Isn't that cheating? And besides, the last time you read someone's mind, they ended in paralysis for life,*' Ash refused, wanting to win honorably. He reached for his first Pokémon, in this case Phanpy. He took the Pokéball from his belt.

" *Actually, I can read minds without the target person even feeling anything, or even knowing I intruded into their minds,*" Latios telepathed Mareepishly.

' *Then why did you leave them crippled instead of reading their minds without harming them?*' Ash asked.

Latios shrugged. "*Because I wanted them to suffer.*"

Ash paled and pushed the matter aside for later. "Phanpy! I choose you!" he shouted, throwing the Pokéball to the field. The small blue elephant Pokémon appeared in the field, his image appearing in the first empty square besides Ash's photo.

"I'm up now Daddy? I'll do my best!" Phanpy cheered loudly.

Ash smiled. "I know you will."

Macey frowned. She'd expected a Water-Type. It didn't matter much, though, she was also experienced fighting Ground-Types. She grabbed a Pokéball and threw it. "Rapidash! Let's Go!" A large horse Pokémon appeared, with fire replacing the mane, tail and the backside of the hooves. Rapidash's image appeared beside Macey, on the top square.

" *Ash, don't charge head-on with Rollout or Takedown or any related attack, if you do, Phanpy will lose to Rapidash's superior physical strength,*" Latios advised. Ash gave a small nod, acknowledging Latios' advice.

"The first battle of the Second Round will be Macey's Rapidash against Ash's Phanpy!" the MC announced.

The Referee raised both Flags. "Begin!"

"Rapidash, use Flamethrower!" Macey shouted. Rapidash quickly opened its mouth and released a powerful stream of fire at Phanpy.

"Phanpy use Rollout to Dodge!" Ash ordered, getting an idea. Phanpy complied and curled into a tight ball. He started rolling, effectively getting out of the way of the flames as they struck where Phanpy had been just a second before.

" I thought I said not to use Rollout," Latios said.

" You said not to charge head-on, not use it to dodge," Ash reminded him.

" Ah, good point," Latios conceded.

"Rapidash, use Fury attack!" Macey ordered. Rapidash started running at Phanpy at incredibly high speeds, lowering its horn until it was at Phanpy's height.

"Phanpy, stop rolling!" Ash ordered quickly. Phanpy stopped rolling like Ash had ordered, the momentum of the brake flinging Phanpy rather forcefully out of the way of Rapidash's attack. "Use Earthquake as you land!" Ash shouted.

Phanpy quickly adjusted himself in mid-flight and stomped on the ground hard as he landed, sending a powerful tremor across the battlefield. Rapidash did not have time to jump out of the way as the ground underneath it trembled, causing a lot of damage.

"Impressive folks, a great maneuver from Ash's Phanpy, and now Rapidash takes the damage!" the MC shouted. The crowd cheered at Ash's maneuver.

Macey growled slightly, not expecting such a counter. "Rapidash, Fire Blast!" Rapidash took in a rather large amount of air, then exhaled a potent five-pointed fire star directly at Phanpy.

"Phanpy, counter with Hidden Power!" Ash shouted. Phanpy complied and focused (with some effort considering he was still a kid that acted like he had a permanent sugar high) as a small glow surrounded him. Soon, several white spheres of energy began floating around him. He flung the spheres at the incoming Fire Blast, colliding and creating a rather large explosion, flinging back both Rapidash and Phanpy and covering the field in a thick layer of smoke.

"The collision between those two powerful attacks has covered the field in smoke!" the MC redundantly bellowed on the stadiums speakers.

Phanpy stared blankly around. Ash closed his eyes and tried to sense the world around him. He quickly detected Rapidash and Phanpy's locations inside the smoke. "Phanpy, use Hidden Power a little to the right!" Ash called.

"What!" Macey cried . *'Why would he order such a specific attack with all that smoke? It will be impossible to land a hit!'* Much to her complete and utter surprise, she heard her Rapidash cry out in pain as several energy spheres struck it. Macey growled as the smoke cleared, revealing a panting Rapidash and a calm-looking Phanpy. Latios smiled, proud that Ash had easily detected the battling Pokémon without him telling him to do so in the first place.

"Impressive, Ash Ketchum was able to score a direct hit even with the smoke!" the MC declared unnecessarily. The crowd cheered.

Ash smirked. "Phanpy, let's finish this! Use Take Down!" Phanpy nodded and started running toward Rapidash.

"Rapidash, use Flame Wheel!" Macey countered. Rapidash quickly sprinted at the incoming Ground-Type while coating itself in a wheel

of fire. Rapidash collided into Phanpy before Ash could react and change tactics, knocking the elephant away.

"Phanpy, are you alright!" Ash cried.

Phanpy stood up, panting. "I'm okay daddy, I can still fight!"

Rapidash blinked in confusion, but was distracted by Macey's next order. "Use Flamethrower!"

Rapidash exhaled a potent stream of fire. Noting that Phanpy couldn't get out of the way in time, Ash changed to a defensive tactic. "Phanpy, use Defense Curl!" Phanpy quickly turned into a compact ball as the flames washed all over him, his curl greatly reducing the damage he would have taken from the attack.

"Rapidash, finish this with Bounce!" Macey ordered. Rapidash complied and with a powerful push from its back legs, it was sent flying about ten meters in the air.

Ash looked up. "Phanpy, intercept that with a Hidden Power!" Phanpy nodded and began emitting a faint glow. Several energy spheres were sent upwards at the incoming Rapidash.

"Rapidash, add a Flame Wheel to the attack!" Macey countered. Rapidash immediately turned into a living fireball as its body was covered in a layer of flames. All of Phanpy's Hidden Power energy spheres were deflected by Rapidash's flame shield. Rapidash slammed into Phanpy hard, throwing up a large cloud of dust. When the dust settled, Rapidash was standing there, looking quite tired and panting heavily. Phanpy was lying on the ground with his eyes turned to swirls.

"Phanpy is unable to Battle!" The Referee called.

"Impressive folks, that powerful Bounce/Flame Wheel combo knocked Phanpy out!" The MC cried. On the main screen, Phanpy's icon turned into a black outline, denoting his defeat.

" *Ouch*," Latias commented telepathically as Ash returned Phanpy.

"You did a great job, Phanpy," Ash whispered to the Pokéball.

" *That Rapidash is tired*," Latias noted.

' *I know, better knock it out fast!*' Ash thought as he grabbed his next Pokéball. "Squirtle, you're up!" Ash shouted as he threw the Pokéball. The turtle Pokémon appeared, still wearing his sunglasses. The Rapidash thought that Squirtle looked utterly cool with those shades and wondered how a pair of sunglasses would look on a Rapidash.

"Looks like Ash's next choice is a Squirtle, and a very cool one at that!" The MC shouted, his voice booming all across the stadium. On the screen, the second square filled with Squirtle's icon, minus the sunglasses, much to the turtle's irritation.

Macey grabbed a Pokéball. "Rapidash, return!" The Pokéball shot a thin red beam, returning Rapidash inside. She grabbed another one. "Electabuzz, you're next!" A large humanoid yellow and black-striped Pokémon appeared.

"And seeing the Type disadvantage, Macey changes Pokémon," the MC narrated.

"Electabuzz, use Thun-" Macey started.

"Squirtle, return," Ash said, recalling Squirtle back into his Pokéball. He grabbed another Pokéball. "Larvitar, you're up next!" Ash shouted, throwing his Pokéball to the field.

"And Ash Ketchum also switches Pokémon," the MC narrated again. Larvitar's icon appeared in the last square in Ash's side.

Macey looked surprised. She hadn't expected Ash to use two Ground-Types. "Electabuzz, Thunderbolt!" The Electabuzz generated a rather large amount of electricity in its antennas and

fired it in the form of a bolt heading directly in Larvitar's direction, who didn't really care and didn't move an inch. The Thunderbolt struck him and didn't do anything.

"And unsurprisingly, that Thunderbolt has zero effect," The MC commented flatly.

Macey growled slightly. "Electabuzz, return." She recalled the Electric-Type back into its Pokéball and grabbed the same Pokéball from before. "Rapidash, go!" She hurled the Pokéball and the large fire horse Pokémon reappeared.

Ash smirked. *'I still have the advantage.'*

"Rapidash, use Flame Wheel!" Macey ordered. Rapidash started running toward Larvitar at high speeds while a cloak of fire surrounded it.

Ash covered his ears with his hands. Picking up his thoughts, Latias and Latios did the same. *"You should do it too,"* Latias advised the confused group that was seated behind Ash. Trusting the she-dragon's advice, Brock, Pikachu, Misty and Bianca covered their ears as well.

"Larvitar, use Screech!" Ash shouted, pressing his hands against his ears tighter. Larvitar took a deep breath and gave one of his signature ultra-powerful Screeches. Rapidash stopped in its tracks and staggered, around shaking its head in pain as his eardrums were bombarded by the scream. And to make matters worse, a Rapidash can't cover its ears.

Larvitar stopped screeching and looked at the dazed Rapidash. "Larvitar, use Hidden Power!" Ash commanded. Larvitar gathered his power and unleashed several white energy spheres at the Rapidash, who couldn't even move because of the splitting headache it got from Larvitar's screech. The energy balls struck Rapidash's side and effectively knocked it out.

Thankfully, the Referee was well-prepared for a situation like this and thus had conveniently taken out a pair of earmuffs. "Rapidash is unable to continue battling! Larvitar is the winner!"

It took Macey about a minute to return Rapidash, mainly because she was busy recovering from the Screech. She returned her downed Rapidash, its image fading from the screen atop the stadium. She grabbed another Pokéball. "Quilava, you're next!" She hurled it, releasing her Quilava.

"Macey switches to Quilava. How will the match work out? Both trainers are tied with one Pokémon down," The MC announced dramatically.

"Quilava, use Flame Wheel!" Macey ordered. Her Quilava started running toward Larvitar while his back flames erupted to the point that they covered the Fire-Type completely.

"Larvitar, use Dig," Ash commanded calmly. Larvitar took a small 'dive' toward the floor and dug, easily getting underground and avoiding Quilava's Flame Wheel. Soon after Quilava's Flame Wheel ended, Larvitar attacked him from below, giving Quilava a powerful punch to the gut.

Quilava stumbled back a bit. "Quilava, Flamethrower!" Macey ordered. Quilava recovered quickly from the blow and spat a large stream of fire directly at the Rock Skin Pokémon.

"Larvitar, use Dig again!" Ash commanded. Larvitar burrowed underground again, dodging the stream of fire.

"When he comes out, dodge, Quilava!" Macey ordered, not wanting to take another super-effective attack. The second Larvitar emerged from underground to strike Quilava, the Volcano Pokémon quickly dodged to the side, getting out of the way of Larvitar's attack.

"Larvitar, use Bite!" Ash shouted. Larvitar quickly twisted around and bit Quilava's arm, who cried in pain.

"Quilava, use Flame Wheel!" Macey retorted, seeing that Quilava was in trouble. Quilava's body was covered in a thick layer of fire, along with Larvitar, but Larvitar's rock-like skin easily resisted the flames. If anything, it only made Larvitar bite even *harder*, drawing a small drop of blood from Quilava's arm.

"Larvitar, hang in there, use Hidden Power!" Ash shouted. Larvitar's body emitted a faint outline as several white spheres appeared, quickly attacking Quilava, sending the Volcano Pokémon flying from the sheer force of the attack.

"Oh no," Macey muttered. "Quilava return!" She held out her Pokéball and recalled Quilava after seeing that the Fire-Type had taken a very hard hit.

"And after some close combat, Macey decided to give Quilava a rest!" The MC shouted. The crowd cheered.

Macey grabbed a Pokéball. "Electabuzz, go!" Macey shouted, releasing the Electric-Type again.

"How will Macey deal with the tough situation she's in?" The MC wondered.

"Electabuzz, use Iron Tail!" Macey shouted. The Electric-Type rushed at Larvitar, its tail beginning to shine a bright white as it hardened to steel.

"Larvitar, catch it with Bite!" Ash shouted, getting an idea. Larvitar shrugged and just as Electabuzz swung around in an attempt to ram its tail against the Rock skin Pokémon, Larvitar quickly opened his mouth and caught the tail easily. Since he was very heavy, the momentum was unable to push Larvitar back even an inch.

"Hit it with a Thunder Punch!" Macey ordered desperately. Electabuzz swung its fist as a large amount of electricity accumulated there. The Punch struck Larvitar dead in the chest...

and did nothing. Again, Larvitar was too heavy for that, and the electricity didn't even faze Larvitar since he was a Ground-Type.

"Larvitar, Hidden Power!" Ash shouted. Larvitar once again glowed as several white energy spheres appeared beside him. He launched them at the Electabuzz at close range, and the Electric-Type couldn't even hope to dodge because its tail was still in Larvitar's mouth. The Hidden Power spheres collided forcefully against Electabuzz's chest, sending him flying back. "Finish this with Dig!" Larvitar nodded and quickly burrowed underground.

"Electabuzz, watch out!" Macey warned, but it was too late. By the time Electabuzz recovered from the close-range Hidden Power, it was struck from below by Larvitar. Electabuzz toppled over, his eyes two swirls.

The Referee nodded. "Electabuzz is unable to battle! Larvitar is the winner!"

"That is one strong Larvitar, folks," the MC commented, impressed by the Rock Skin Pokémon.

Macey growled. She reached for her remaining Pokéball. "Quilava, you're up!" The Volcano Pokémon was released again.

"Larvitar, return!" Ash shouted, recalling the Rock Skin Pokémon back to his Pokéball. "You were terrific," Ash praised, knowing that Larvitar could hear him. "Squirtle, you're next!" Ash shouted, once again releasing the cool turtle Pokémon.

Squirtle appeared on the field, adjusting his shades slightly. Quilava blinked in confusion. "Those are some cool shades," the Quilava admitted. "Maybe I should get a pair."

"Thanks!" Squirtle said.

"Quilava, use Swift!" Macey shouted. Quilava snapped out of his admiration for Squirtle's shades and fired a volley of star shaped

projectiles at him.

"Squirtle, use Bubble!" Ash shouted. Squirtle took a deep intake of air and fired a large amount of bubbles. The attacks collided and canceled each other out.

"Squirtle, use water gun!" Ash commanded. Squirtle complied and spat a powerful stream of water.

Macey saw that the attack was too fast to dodge, so she did the next best thing. "Quilava, use Flame Wheel!" Quilava coated himself in a layer of intense fire, but didn't charge at Squirtle. He stayed put, the Water Gun colliding with the flame shield and surprisingly vaporizing on contact with the flames.

Ash's eyes widened. "What!"

" *That's a very good defense,*" Latios commented.

"And Macey's Quilava performs a very original defense maneuver!" The MC cried.

"Quilava, Flamethrower!" Macey ordered. Quilava opened his mouth and shot a strong jet of fire at Squirtle.

"Counter with Water Gun!" Ash shouted. Squirtle shot another stream of water. The attacks collided and created a heavy cloud of steam.

"Great, now I can't see," Macey muttered.

"Water Gun!"

"What?" Macey got no time to issue an order to Quilava as he was struck in the chest by a powerful water stream. He barely got to his feet, panting heavily. *'Great, Quilava is tired, that Larvitar dealt too much damage,'* Macey thought, desperately trying to find a way to turn the match around.

"Let's finish this, use Hydro Pump!" Ash shouted. Squirtle nodded and tucked all his limbs into his shell. He then expelled a large amount of water from his sides as he span directly towards the startled Quilava.

"Stop that Squirtle with Flamethrower!" Macey cried desperately. Quilava mustered what little strength he had left and fired a potent jet of fire, but the flames were extinguished as soon as they came in contact with Squirtle's attack. Squirtle rammed into Quilava *hard*, sending the Volcano Pokémon back from the sheer force of the blow and knocking him out.

"Quilava is unable to battle. The winner of this match is Squirtle!" The Referee shouted.

"And the attack was too much for Quilava. We have a winner, Ash Ketchum!" The MC shouted. The crowd cheered loudly.

Macey smiled as she returned her downed Pokémon back to the Pokéball. *'That's one strong trainer,'* she thought with clear admiration. She walked to where Ash was jumping in joy with Squirtle. She held up her hand, getting Ash's attention. "Thanks for that impressive battle."

Ash smiled and returned the handshake. "You're welcome."

Macey turned around and walked to the exit, a small blush covering her cheeks. *'He's so strong,'* she thought dreamily.

Ash soon walked to the exits, his friends following him. "So, that means I have three points now?" Ash asked, just to confirm.

"That's right," Brock answered.

" *Congratulations!*" Latias chimed telepathically.

"I'm one step closer to winning the Silver Conference," Ash muttered proudly, a fiery look of determination in his reddish eyes.

Elsewhere...

Giovanni walked down the corridors of the top secret Team Rocket base under the Viridian Gym, about to check up on the progress of Team Rocket's next plan for world domination. He walked to a double door guarded by a pair of Team Rocket Grunts. They saluted and allowed Giovanni inside.

Giovanni had now entered a colossal laboratory. Shelves upon shelves of incredibly expensive equipment lined the walls. In the center of the lab were huge reactors of some sort. There were at least two dozen or so scientists working in the lab. One of them broke away from his current task and walked up to Giovanni.

"Greeting, Master Giovanni," Professor Sebastian greeted. He was one of Team Rocket's best inventors, a tall man with a bowl-shaped gray hair, big square glasses and a goatee. He was wearing a rather long lab coat.

Giovanni grunted and glanced around. "What's the progress on our ultimate weapon?"

Prof. Sebastian looked around. "Fairly well. However, we are experiencing some difficulties."

Giovanni looked visibly angered, but he tried to remain calm. "Difficulties, you say? Can the project even be created as per my specifications?"

Prof. Sebastian nodded. "Yes sir, it can. However, if I am to successfully design and create the base for this Project, I need more personnel, and funds."

Giovanni pondered this. "You want more personnel and funds? If I give you that, can the project be finished successfully and with no setbacks?"

Prof. Sebastian nodded without hesitation. "Yes, sir."

"This project is will be Team Rocket's greatest achievement," Giovanni muttered. "I'll assign Professor Napda and his scientist crew to help you."

"... Who's that?" Prof. Sebastian asked, clearly confused.

"I'm wondering the same thing..." Giovanni muttered.

"Don't you mean Prof. Namla?" Prof. Sebastian asked. He paused. "No, that's not it either..."

"You know who I mean. Tell him that he and his entire crew is to work in collaboration with you to achieve our greatest weapon," Giovanni ordered strictly.

"Very well," Prof. Sebastian said with a nod.

"Do you need more field agents?" Giovanni asked.

Prof. Sebastian shook his head. "No, I already command and receive support from Hun and Attila. With the addition of agents Annie and Oakley, I should be fine."

Giovanni sighed. "I already gave you ten percent of Team Rocket's funds. That's several million PokéDollars, and you still need more?"

Prof. Sebastian nodded. "While I'm making progress with the Project, it's proving to be extremely expensive. I have sent full reports on what I have used the funds on."

"I'll sigh an order to give the Project another ten percent of Team Rocket's funds. However, with Prof. Namba's-or whatever his name is-help and the funds, I expect this to be finished soon, or else," Giovanni said darkly. With that, he turned and walked out.

Sebastian smirked and returned to working on his project.

Hope you all like chapter 12 a lot!

What's team Rocket planning? Only I know!

Stay tuned until next chapter!

Reaching The Finals

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

And here's Chapter 13! Hope you all enjoy this chapter!

The past day had been amazing. With his victory over Macey, Ash had taken a huge leap toward the Final Rounds of the Silver Conference. Now all he had to do was wait and the results of the battle between Macey and Jackson to know what he needed to do to pass.

Now in the early morning, we find our little group in the hotel room eating breakfast. The prospect of eating usually cheered Ash up, but...

Ash sighed in boredom. Yes, it had been fun to fight in the first battle of the Second Round, but he had never expected that fighting so soon meant he'd have to wait longer for his next battle. To make matters worse, the second battle of block 'A' was between Macey and Jackson, so he had to wait until all the other groups finished two of their battles before he could compete in the last one. This meant about a week or so without battles... what fun. "I fought yesterday and I want to battle again now!" Ash whined.

"Can't you learn how to wait!" Misty yelled in exasperation from the other side of the table. Latias laughed. She was eating Brock's special healthy poke-food with all the pokemon at the sides of the table.

"Is he like this all the time?" Bianca asked curiously.

"Yes," Misty replied flatly. Ash made no comment and preferred to keep eating.

Brock laughed. "Well, we can do something constructive with that time."

"Like what?" Ash asked.

"We could train your team a bit more," Brock suggested. Latios and Pikachu groaned while getting a sick feeling in their stomachs, which was bad considering they were also eating breakfast. Ash's ears perked up.

Latias laughed and floated to her brother. "What's up bro? Can't take a few days of training?"

"I hope you want to learn Steel Wing sis. It was torture." Latios muttered. Latias laughed again.

"Yeah," Pikachu agreed dryly, rubbing his tail unconsciously. While he did this, Larvitar stole a bit of food from his plate.

"But cheer up! Training might be tiring but at least it'll help us get better attacks and become stronger," Latias chided. Even if she didn't train as much as Latios did, she knew four attacks, but they were mostly for self-defense, which was something that she didn't really need considering that Latios would probably send anyone who dared hurt her to the emergency room of the hospital (if not to the grave...).

"I guess she's right there," Pikachu muttered, looking at the eon twins. Larvitar stole a bit more of Pikachu's food and quickly returned to his plate. "Wonder what move we'll have to learn now?" Pikachu turned back at his plate and resumed eating. He wondered why there was less food in it.

Brock ignored them because all he could hear were squeals and coos and Pikachu saying his name. He wondered how Ash could make words out from that. "Well Ash," Brock started. "I suggest various exercises to make them faster, stronger, and teach a new attack to those that need one," Brock finished.

Pikachu and Latios glared daggers at Brock, and Latios contemplated giving him a headache. Thankfully, Brock was too busy looking in his Pokemon Breeding book to notice. Larvitar took advantage of Pikachu's distraction and took another bite from the electric-type's plate.

Latias looked at them in amusement. "It's not *that* bad."

Latios and Pikachu sighed. "Like we have a choice," Latios muttered.

"So Brock, what will they learn?" Ash asked, mentally laughing at his pokemon's complaints.

"I remember that Latias and Latios mentioned something about needing to develop their minds a bit more to be able to freely speak telepathically to anyone. I was checking if there were any mental exercises for Psychics," Brock said, not taking his squinty eyes off the book. Seeing that the talk was about them, both eon dragons listened closely.

" *This sounds interesting,*" Latias telepathed.

"Well, according to this, to help a psychic develop stronger minds, they can lift heavy things telekinetically. That way, said Psychic would gain greater mental capabilities and use Psychic attacks with much stronger force," Brock read from his book.

Latias looked confused. "*I thought meditating was a better way to do that.*" This comment just reminded her how much she hated meditating, it was so boring.

" Depends," Latios answered her. "Meditating helps make our minds more focused, concentrated, sharper and faster. Lifting heavy things helps makes our minds stronger and gives us more endurance, enabling us to use our psychic powers with greater ease and for longer periods of time without tiring so easily."

Brock nodded. "So you two could do a combination of both. It will help improve your development as psychics."

Latias groaned. *"I hate meditating, it's so boring."* It was now Latios' turn to laugh. Larvitar tried to grab a bite from Latias' plate, but the plate moved out of his reach on its own. He shrugged and returned to his plate.

Brock continued. "As for the rest of your team Ash, we'll be helping them in their endurance, speed, or attack power, depending on the case."

Ash nodded. "Sure, let's go now!" he said eagerly, then paused. "But first let's finish breakfast!"

"You wouldn't be so eager if you were the one working out," Pikachu deadpanned.

"Hey! I always train alongside you guys!" Ash countered. Pikachu chuckled. With that the group finished breakfast... and Pikachu found himself puzzled that more than half his plate of food had apparently 'eaten itself.' Well, at least Larvitar got a double fill.

Soon, the group exited the hotel. Latios had to exit to through the balcony again. They started walking to the forest near Mt. Silver, their usual training place. From where they were, still in the main district of Silver Town, they could hear small explosions, the roar of the cheering crowd, and the MC's commentaries on the battles that were occurring right then.

It was the second day, so Blocks E, F, G, and H were having their first battles. Ash didn't care, because his next battle wasn't for a

while. At least his team could get some training in before his next match. Soon they entered the forest, heading down the path to the same spot they had used before the Silver Conference began. It was a perfect place to train as it had a bit of every terrain, and it was also a large clearing.

As they headed toward the clearing they discussed what to teach Ash's team. "So, Latios and Latias are doing exercises to help make their minds stronger?" Ash began, glancing at Brock.

"Do I have to?" Latias whined. She was floating in her true form behind Bianca.

"Yes, sis," Latios said. "This is going to be useful for both of us."

Latias pouted but kept quiet. The tone in Latios' voice told her that she wasn't getting away from this. "What about the rest of my pokemon?" Ash asked.

Brock hummed in thought. "Pikachu is fine overall, so he's just doing some exercises to improve his reflexes and speed. Larvitar will learn a new attack, he really needs one. Squirtle, Cyndaquil and Bayleef don't need new attacks, but they should do different exercises for improving attack power," Brock finished.

Ash nodded. Pikachu sighed in relief. "At least there's no more rock lifting," He muttered.

Latios grimaced. "Say that to yourself. I and my sis are lifting rocks."

Pikachu laughed. "It doesn't sound so hard to lift rocks with your mind. I mean, all you have to do is think to lift them, right?" Pikachu queried, turning to look backwards at the eon siblings, who were hovering just behind Ash.

Latios sighed. "You have no idea how hard it is. It's just as tiring as doing it physically. I can easily lift light things without tiring me, like you for example, but lifting a medium-sized rock is harder as I have

to exert more mental power to pick it up, and lifting a big boulder could really tire me out quickly. The heavier the object, the faster it tires me mentally," Latios informed the electric mouse.

"Ouch," Pikachu commented. At least his training didn't include rocks.

"You have no idea..." Latias muttered, not really looking forward to the training session.

Brock looked at Ash. "What are they arguing about now?"

"Latias and Latios don't want to lift rocks," Ash translated. Brock laughed, until Latios and Latias got annoyed and gave him headaches. Then he shut up.

Soon the group reached the clearing. Once inside, Ash proceeded to release his current Pokemon team. Bayleef tackled and nuzzled Ash affectionately, and it took a full minute to get the zealous Grass-Type off of Ash. Latias giggled. She wondered what it would be like if she tackled and nuzzled Ash so affectionately. *"Don't get any ideas..."* Latios said flatly in her mind. She giggled in reply. He sighed.

Brock looked over to them. "Okay, Latias and Latios, you should start your training," Brock started. Latias groaned, but followed Latios as they hovered to the rocky area of the clearing.

"Good luck!" Ash called to the retreating dragons.

"Thanks!" Latias called back.

"Who are they again?" Squirtle whispered to Pikachu.

"Those are the two Legendaries that travel with us now, Latias and Latios," Pikachu informed him. "They're the mental voices you heard earlier. They're psychics."

"Ahhh," the Water-Type muttered in comprehension.

"Okay, Larvitar," Brock started. "Let's work on Rock Smash today. That's an attack that will be useful for you, and if you can learn it, we'll teach you a Rock-type attack later." Larvitar as usual ignored him.

"Larvitar!" Ash scolded. Larvitar grunted and awaited instructions.

"To learn Rock Smash, all you have to do is make sure you can punch strong enough to tear rocks apart. After you master Rock Smash, we'll see if we can teach you Rock Tomb," Brock finished. Larvitar nodded and walked to the rocky area of the clearing, where Latias and Latios were. He looked at the eon twins, shrugged, and proceeded to beat the crap out of some rocks (Not that they had any).

Latias stared at the boulder in front of her. It was a little bigger than her. "Brother... do I really have to lift this? I've never tried lifting something *this* heavy! I don't even know if I can."

Latios chuckled. "It's not that hard sis, your mind is stronger than you think." He gently nuzzled her. "If you want, I'll go first." She smiled and nodded. Latios turned to a slightly larger boulder. This one was even larger than him. Latios' eyes shined a bright white as he exerted a large amount of his psychic powers. A faint blue outline surrounded the large rock as it slowly lifted off the ground. Latios gave a small pant, the rock was heavy! That and he wasn't used to lifting such heavy objects, but this was why he was doing this exercise: to help him lift heavier objects, and to gain superior mental endurance, as well as boost his psychic powers. Latios lowered the boulder back to the ground and gave another pant. "See sis, you can do it. Yours is smaller."

Latias nodded. "Okay, Latios!" Latias looked at her boulder. It was about half the size of the one Latios had lifted. Her eyes shined brightly as she exerted as much of her psychic abilities as she could. Slowly, the boulder was lifted off the ground. After keeping the boulder floating for a few seconds, she lowered it back with a thud. She grinned happily. "I did it!"

Latos smiled at his sister's enthusiasm. He always loved seeing her smiling and happy. Before he could react accordingly, she tackled him affectionately. He hugged her back gently. "See, I told you it was easy. But we have to continue."

"Brother, after we finish lifting rocks, what are we going to do?" Latias asked.

"Meditate. It will help us see how much we have improved. And it's pretty good training too," Latios answered. Knowing that she couldn't deny it, Latias nodded, and together, the eon twins continued their training.

Meanwhile, Brock was explaining what the others are going to do. "As for the rest of you," Brock said, turning to Bayleef, Squirtle, Cyndaquil and Pikachu. "We'll be working on the strength of your attacks, as well as your aim and ability to maintain attacks consecutively, except Pikachu, we're working on his speed and reflexes."

Pikachu shrugged, but then connected the dots. He paled and turned to Brock. "You aren't going to-"

"Sorry, Pikachu," Brock started. "I can't understand you."

Pikachu sighed. "Why is it always me?"

Bayleef giggled. "You should start running," she said happily. Pikachu quickly took off with Quick Attack, and not a second too soon because a Flamethrower courtesy of Cyndaquil slammed into where he had just been standing. Squirtle proceeded to fire a series of quick Water Guns. With all his training as a fire-fighter, they were extremely precise. Pikachu barely dodged them, even using a combination of Agility and Quick Attack.

' *This is going to be hard, Squirtle's aim is almost perfect,* ' Pikachu thought.

Ash looked as Pikachu dodged Squirtle, Bayleef, and Cyndaquil's attacks. Apparently Pikachu was having a hard time evading Squirtle's attacks. Ash chuckled. "I'll go check on Latias, Latios and Larvitar," he said to Brock.

Brock nodded. "Okay Ash, I'll keep an eye on Pikachu." Ash nodded and walked to where the eon dragons were.

Misty laughed as she saw Pikachu frenetically dodging the attacks. "He's going to end up tired." Brock nodded in agreement. The both took a seat and watched Pikachu and the others train. Pikachu jumped over a Solar Beam and then disappeared with a burst of speed from his Quick Attack, easily dodging a Flamethrower, but just as he landed he ran again using Agility, sidestepping Squirtle's Water Guns.

Bianca looked around and smiled. The view was quite beautiful; from the clearing she could see Mt. Silver and much of the surrounding forest. *'It's a good thing I brought these with me,'* she thought as she took out a sketch book a pencil, and some coloring pencils. While the others were training, she was sure she could draw a good number of things. That and she was eager to show Latias and Latios how much her painting has improved. She took a seat at the base of one of the trees and looked for something to draw. In the distance she spotted Latias, Latios and Ash. She smiled, pictured the scene in her mind and began to draw.

Meanwhile, a few dozen feet from Bianca, Ash was looking at how Latias and Latios kept two rocks floating. "Amazing," Ash muttered. He turned to look at Larvitar and walked over to him. Larvitar had a rock about the same size as him in front of him. He took a step back and threw a punch at the rock with all his might. The rock cracked, but nothing else happened. Larvitar sighed. Ash smiled, crouched, and patted him on the back, letting him know he was there to help. Larvitar smiled and began again.

With that the hours passed by and the group kept training. All the pokemon knew that this training would be useful in future battles at

the Silver Conference. The toughest battles were surely about to come. Latios and Latias spent most of the time rock-lifting and meditated for about half an hour. Their minds were a bit weary from exerting their psychic powers so much, but they were fine in other ways, and felt their psyches getting stronger.

Larvitar hadn't mastered Rock Smash despite Ash's cheers and encouragement. There was a time where Ash was about to try Rock Smash himself to cheer Larvitar up, but Latias stopped him, not wanting Ash to break his hand punching a rock.

As for Pikachu... he could barely stand after all his running around, so he was in his favorite resting spot, Ash's shoulder. Surprisingly, he had been hit a very small number of times.

For now the group was heading back to Silver Town, their training at an end for the day. The sky was already starting to darken a bit.

"Man... I'm beat," Pikachu complained. Ash smiled and patted Pikachu's head affectionately, earning him a comforted 'Chaaa'. Latias and Latios didn't seem physically tired, but everyone knew that their minds were probably exhausted.

Ash noticed Bianca looking at her sketchbook. "What's that?" Ash asked.

Bianca looked at her hands. "This? It's my sketchbook; I always have one with me."

Ash looked at her in surprise. "Did you draw all day?"

Bianca nodded. "Yes, feel free to look." She handed Ash her sketchbook, opened to the current page. Latias and Latios hovered closer to Ash and looked over his shoulders, clearly interested in Bianca's art.

Ash looked at the book. On the first page was a drawing depicting Latias and Latios hugging each other. Ash smiled. "Awww, they look

so cute here."

Latias' jaw dropped. She was clearly impressed, and not just because of the scene her best friend had drawn. It was the quality of the picture that really stunned her. She had captured a nice moment in the drawing, it was so real, almost like a photo. All the colors were perfect, her and Latios' feather patterns and other small details, and both her and Latios' bodies were perfectly proportioned. She also captured the emotion quite well, in the drawing Latios had a gentle smile as he hugged her while Latias was, as usual, grinning broadly. "*Bianca...*" Latias started. "*How did you get so good? Now I'll never catch up to you!*"

Bianca laughed. "Well, ever since you two left, I didn't have anything to do aside from tending to the garden every day. Don't worry you two; I've made sure it's still as lovely as ever. Anyway, I had a lot of free time, so I practiced my drawing."

Latias smiled. "*The drawing is beautiful. It's so real! Good work!*" She praised, flying closely and nuzzling Bianca affectionately. Bianca giggled, getting tickled by Latias' very fine feathers.

Latias returned to hovering behind Ash as they kept looking at Bianca's drawings. There was one of Mt. Silver, one of Larvitar, another of Pikachu dodging a combination attack from Bayleef and Cyndaquil, and about three different drawings of Latias and Latios, all of perfect quality. Latias was the most impressed by her friend's technique.

Soon after, the group reached Silver Town. It was still clear, though the sky was a bit darkened. Ash turned to Brock. "So, are we going to train my team for the rest of the days I don't have battles?" Ash asked. Pikachu prayed that Brock would say no, but he already knew the answer.

"Yes Ash, we are going to train until you battle again, but we'll give your team a day off before the match so they can rest. We'll also alternate the Pokémon a bit so more of your team gets training. The

only ones that are going everyday will be Latios and Pikachu," Brock answered. Pikachu wanted to use Thunder on the pervert, and Latios was contemplating giving him another headache.

"Wow, how is it that you're always prepared for these training schedule things?" Ash asked, impressed that Brock always knew who to train, what to train, and how to train.

"A pokemon breeder always has to be ready!" Brock said proudly. "Helping you is a great way to practice. That, and without my help you'd be toast."

"Hey! That's not true!" Ash yelled.

"I was joking, but it's always nice to help," Brock replied kindly.

"Thanks," Ash thanked him. Latias smiled. This was one of the only things she accepted Brock's presence for. If only he weren't a complete pervert... As they were walking, a pair of young girls passed beside them. Brock turned around to walk towards them... but came face to face with Latias' human form. Brock sighed and didn't make a comment.

Bianca laughed. She was actually enjoying her stay with Ash's group. It looked like Latias and Latios found an interesting group of trainers to be with. "I'll go get a drink, I'm thirsty," she said, walking to a nearby stand.

Ash took a few steps forward, taking in the sights of Silver Town, when suddenly Macey appeared in front of him. "Hi!"

Ash blinked in confusion at her sudden appearance, but still returned the greeting. "Uh, hello Macey."

Macey smiled broadly. "Thank you so much! A little after our battle, my dear Quilava evolved into a Typhlosion!"

Ash smiled. "Congratulations!"

"I wanted to ask you if you'd like to have dinner with me to celebrate!" Macey asked, a lovesick gleam in her eyes. The second she said that, for some *unknown* reason, Latias and Misty felt a sudden stab of jealousy. They glared at the girl, but she didn't notice.

"I don't know... I usually have dinner with my friends," Ash argued.

"Awww, come on! It'll be like a... *date*," Macey implied, grabbing Ash's hand. She looked into Ash's confused eyes, and immediately thought that he had the prettiest eyes in the world, those dark red eyes were so dreamy... well, at least to Macey.

Latias and Misty were fuming by now. Brock exploded in tears. He saw Latias and Misty's reactions of clear jealousy, meaning that they were interested in Ash, and not only that, but a girl was asking the younger trainer out on a date! Brock had always wanted that! *'How! What's Ash's secret to getting girls to like him? I must know!'* He began crying in a lonely corner.

Latias was highly amused by the feelings he was sensing in his sister's mind through their link. He chuckled. *'This is going to be good.'* He was as usual floating a dozen feet in the air, but descended a little to get a closer look at the scene.

Ash blinked in confusion. "What's a date?" he asked. Pikachu facefaulted, causing him to fall off Ash's shoulder and hit the pavement with a loud thud.

Macey smiled mischievously. "Don't worry, I'll explain step-by-step what a date is... once we're on ours, that is."

Latias and Misty couldn't take it anymore. The look on their faces promised pain and agony for the younger trainer. Misty stepped forward and grabbed Ash's other hand. "Sorry, but Ash is... busy!" Misty declared.

Macey blinked. "And who are you? His girlfriend or what?"

Misty blanched and shook her head rapidly. "N-No, I'm his... coach during battles."

Macey glared back. "Then that doesn't give *you* the right to interrupt his personal life!"

Both let go of a very confused Ash's hands and glared at each other... and failed to notice Latias pushing Ash and walking off with him. *"Hey Ash, why don't you go and order dinner for us at the hotel? That way it'll be there when we arrive, so we can eat sooner."*

Ash's stomach growled. He grinned. "Great idea! Thanks." He took off running toward the hotel, completely oblivious to what was happening in his wake.

"That was a good one," Pikachu commented to Latios, who was hovering behind him invisibly.

"I agree, this is getting good," Latios telepathed in reply.

Latias walked to the still glaring Macey and Misty. She smiled and waited for them to notice her. When they did, they looked around in confusion. "Where's Ash?" Macey asked, glaring at the Bianca-disguised Latias. "What did you do to him? Are you his girlfriend now or what!"

Latias blushed a bright red. She quickly shook her head. Macey looked around and sighed. "Too bad, Ash left already. Anyway, I'll see him later. I have to go." With that said, Macey turned around and walked away.

Latias and Misty sighed in relief. They glanced at each other. "Why did you react like that?" they questioned each other, one vocally and the other telepathically. They stared into each other's eyes, both filled with suspicion.

They couldn't make any further accusations because Brock appeared beside them. "Why!?" he yelled at them. Latias and Misty

started at him in confusion. "What's Ash's secret!? That girl wanted a formal date with him and you two are obviously interested in him! Why!?"

"Hello, did I miss anything?" Bianca asked casually as she walked back to the group, holding a can of soda. "Where is Ash? Why is Brock crying?" she asked, confused.

Misty and Latias looked at each other and shrugged, trying not to laugh. "I'm hungry, let's go to the hotel," Misty said.

" Yeah," Latias agreed. With that, they walked toward the hotel. Bianca looked at them oddly and followed after a moment.

Pikachu and Latios laughed themselves silly, though Latios did it a few hundred feet in the air so no one could hear him. After he finally regained his breath, he descended until he was above Pikachu. "Let's go back to the hotel too," the mouse muttered, walking after Misty, Latias and Bianca.

" Sure," Latios agreed. He followed, hovering above the Electric-type.

Pikachu glanced up. "Latios?"

" Yes?" Latios replied.

"What about Brock?" Pikachu asked, looking back at the former gym leader.

" *He'll be fine, " Latios said. "He'll notice we're gone and head to the hotel after some time."*

"Okay," Pikachu replied with a shrug.

The group later reunited at the hotel and had a really nice dinner. The Pokemon enjoyed the meal the most, as they were quite tired from all the training. Thankfully, after a quick peek at his thoughts, Latias found out that Ash thought that all that Macey wanted was to

thank him for her Quilava's evolution. He didn't have a clue that Macey wanted him as a boyfriend. For once, Latias blessed Ash's cluelessness.

Brock barely talked through the whole meal because he was still full of jealousy towards Ash. He was *still* questioning Ash's 'secret' to attracting girls. The only time he tried to ask Ash about that topic, he was driven off by a subtle glare from Misty that clearly said 'pervert him and I will kill you'.

Soon after that, the group went to sleep.

As the days passed, Ash kept on training his Pokemon team. He alternated every day so that most of his pokemon got some decent training. The only ones that were always present were Latias, Latios, Pikachu and Larvitar. By the end of the week, the little Rock and Ground-type had learned both Rock Smash and Rock Tomb, and Latias' and Latios' psychic abilities had improved greatly. Now they could both lift large boulders with ease for long periods of time. They were very proud of themselves.

The only day they hadn't trained much was the day they went to Silver Stadium to watch the battle between Macey and Jackson. It had been a really intense match, but at the end, Macey's Typhlosion proved to be too much for Jackson, earning Macey her first Second Round victory.

This was very good for Ash. It meant that with him and Macey tied at the lead with three points, all Ash had to do was either defeat or tie with Jackson to pass to the Final Round, and as usual he was very confident he would win.

On the last day before Ash's battle with Jackson, everyone enjoyed themselves in Silver Town. The pokemon had a 'day off' so they could be at their best when the battle came. Latias, Misty and Bianca had gone shopping (Ash wondered what was so special about that,

but Latias had said it was a girl thing). Latios quietly followed them, most likely keeping an eye on his sister.

Brock and Ash registered Ash's team for the match and talked about what Ash should do to battle better. They also looked at Gary's record. Both were impressed by the sheer number of Pokemon Gary had. They later went to the souvenir area to see if there was anything interesting for sale. Brock was itching to talk to Ash about girls, but before Latias left, she had told Brock that when she returned she was going to peek at Ash's thoughts and if she found any memory of a talk with him about that, Brock would suffer, so he didn't push his luck.

After everyone returned and had a nice night's rest, the day of Ash's second battle finally arrived. After a quick breakfast, Ash set out for the stadium. Soon, they arrived at the entrance to the Silver Stadium battle arena. "Your trainer ID, please?" the guard said. Ash took out his Pokedex and showed it to the guard. After verifying that Ash was registered for the next battle, the guard moved aside and let Ash pass.

"They're with me," Ash told the guard, motioning to his friends. The guard nodded and allowed them to pass as well. Latias was in her Pokémon form, invisible.

Once the group entered, Ash stood at the trainer's box, Latias and Latios beside him, as usual, masked by their invisibility. His friends took seats at the bench behind Ash. Ash looked across the field and noted that Jackson was already present. He had a green shirt with white shorts and clear brown hair with a strange haircut.

"Ash Ketchum has arrived to the field!" the MC boomed over the speakers. "Block 'A' is currently led by Ash and Macey with three points each. A victory for Ash or a tie will make him the winner of Block 'A'!" The MC informed the crowd. They cheered loudly, expecting another great battle.

The referee nodded to both trainers. "This will be a three-on-three Pokemon battle. The winner will be declared when a trainer losses all three Pokémon. Substitutions are allowed to both trainers."

On the huge screen atop the stadium, Ash's and Jackson's photos appeared, along with the usual spinning red and green circle. Ash was on the red side and Jackson on the green. The segmented wheel stopped spinning and landed on a green segment, meaning that Jackson went first, a good thing for Ash.

"Well, looks like first move is for Jackson of New Bark Town!" the MC announced.

Jackson looked in Ash's direction. "Let's have a great battle!" he called. Ash nodded back. Jackson grabbed a Pokeball. "Golduck! I choose you!" He hurled the Pokeball, releasing a mid-size blue duck like Pokémon. On the screen atop the stadium, Golduck's icon appeared in the first slot for Jackson's team.

Ash smirked. "Pikachu, let's go!" Pikachu nodded and hopped off Ash's shoulder, entering the battlefield. Pikachu's icon also appeared on the screen, in the first slot on Ash's side.

"The first battle will be Jackson's Golduck versus Ash's Pikachu," The MC said unnecessarily.

The Referee nodded. "Begin!"

"Thunderbolt!" Ash shouted quickly. Pikachu's cheeks started releasing sparks and fired a large bolt of electricity at the Golduck.

"Golduck, turn that attack back with Psychic!" Jackson ordered. Golduck's eyes glowed a little as it tried to grab Pikachu's thunderbolt. Surprisingly, the attack broke the Psychic hold and kept coming. "Shield with protect!" Jackson cried, improvising on the fly. Golduck was quickly surrounded by a green shield, effectively blocking the electric attack.

' Why did that Psychic attack fail to block Pikachu's Thunderbolt?'
Ash thought.

" That Psychic attack was too weak, and Pikachu's attack too strong. Besides, a Golduck is no Psychic-Type, so any Psychic attacks from it are pretty weak. Latias or I could have turned that Thunderbolt around," Latios answered telepathically.

' Thanks,' Ash thought. "Quick attack!" he shouted. Pikachu began running at an impressive speed, and just as Golduck's Protect shield dropped, Pikachu crashed into his chest. The Golduck cried in pain, the force temporarily knocking the wind out of it and causing it to stagger back a few steps.

"Ouch, that was a rather hard blow!" The MC cried dramatically.

"Golduck, hang in there! Use Hydro Pump!" Jackson countered. Golduck quickly opened its beak and fire a potent blast of water at Pikachu.

"Get out of the way with Agility!" Ash ordered. Pikachu suddenly disappeared from view, evading the Hydro Pump. "Iron Tail!" Ash shouted, wanting to take advantage of Pikachu's speed burst.

"Golduck, let's get up close, use Scratch!" Jackson ordered. Golduck brought up its arms, blocking Pikachu's Iron Tail swing. Golduck did a horizontal swipe, but Pikachu quickly twisted his body, effectively avoiding the Scratch. He continued the spin, hitting Golduck's chest with his still glowing tail.

"Impressive show of Close combat!" The MC announced excitedly. The crowd cheered.

"Thunderbolt!" Pikachu's cheeks sparked and a powerful bolt of electricity was fired directly at Golduck, who was too close to move out of the way. Jackson was not out yet, though.

"Amnesia!" Jackson ordered frantically. A completely blank look appeared on Golduck's face as he was hit by the electricity, sending hundreds of volts across its body. Once the electroshock ended, Ash was surprised to find his attack hadn't done as much damage as he had expected.

"What the... shouldn't that electric attack have done more?" Ash asked in confusion.

"Amnesia is an attack that, by making the user forget things, raises its defense against special attacks," Latias informed him.

Ash got even more confused. *'How does forgetting things make your defense against special attacks stronger?'*

"..." Latias blinked. *'I have no idea, Brother?'*

"Honestly, I don't know..." Latios replied telepathically.

They were interrupted by Jackson's voice. "Ice Beam!" he shouted.

Golduck opened its beak and a power blast of freezing energy was fired, causing the temperature to drop a few degrees. Latias and Latios flew back a few feet, not wanting the cold to make them lose their concentration and become visible.

"Pikachu, dodge with Quick attack!" Ash cried. Pikachu began running around, easily dodging the Ice beams.

"That's some acrobatic dodging folks!" The MC shouted, astounded.

'Squirtle's Water Guns are harder to evade,' Pikachu thought smugly as he ran back and forth, easily dodging the beams. Soon, Golduck ran out of power and closed its beak with a small pant.

"Now, use Iron Tail on the ice!" Ash shouted. Pikachu's tail glowed a bright white as he charged at one of the ice trails that had formed from the Ice Beam. With a powerful swing of his tail, Pikachu shattered the ice, sending a barrage of ice shards at Golduck. The

Water-type had no time to dodge as its body was hit by the frozen barrage.

"That's an impressive way to turn an opponent's attack against him!" The MC shouted. The crowd cheered. In the stands, Macey had hearts over her eyes.

"Pikachu, finish this with Thunder!" Ash shouted. Pikachu's cheeks sparkled violently as a colossal column of electricity was sent toward the Water-Type, who was too stunned by the ice needles to get out of the way. The blue duck cried in pain as a tremendous amount of electricity coursed through its body. Unable to keep up with the damage, the Water-Type fainted.

"Golduck is unable to continue battling!" The Referee shouted. Jackson sighed and returned his downed Pokémon. On the screen, Golduck's image turned gray, denoting its defeat.

Jackson grabbed another Pokeball. "Magnetron, you're up!" Jackson threw the Pokeball and a mid-sized Pokémon appeared. It looked like three Magnemite locked together. However, the color of the magnet ends was black and gray instead of the usual blue and red, indicating that this was a shiny Pokémon. On the screen, Magnetron's icon appeared on the second slot in Jackson's side.

Ash was just about to continue battling with Pikachu until Latios interrupted him. *"Ash, switch Pikachu out,"* he suggested telepathically.

Ash paused. *'Why?'*

"Magnetron is a Steel and Electric Type. Pikachu only has Normal, Electric and Steel-Type Attacks. None of them do much damage to a pokemon with Magnetron's type combination," Latios informed him.

'You're right, thanks Latios ,' Ash said.

'You're welcome,' Latios replied.

"Pikachu, return!" he shouted. Pikachu gave him a puzzled look.
"Just get back here, okay?" Pikachu shrugged and obeyed.
'Magneon is a Steel-Type, so...' He grabbed a Pokeball.
"Cyndaquil, I choose you!" The small Fire-Type appeared... and yawned. "Now's not the time for a nap!" Ash yelled.

"Alright..." Cyndaquil muttered. Meanwhile, the orange surrounding Pikachu faded, but his icon remained, indicating he was still a battle-capable Pokémon. Cyndaquil's icon appeared on the second slot.

"And Ash makes an intelligent switch!" The MC Bellowed.

"Cyndaquil, use Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. The flames on Cyndaquil's back burst to life as he fired a large stream of fire at the magnet Pokémon.

"Magneon, counter with thunderbolt!" Jackson said. Magneon's magnets began to emit a buzzing sound as they all fired a large cluster of electricity at the incoming flame stream. The attacks collided and exploded.

"Thunder!" Jackson shouted. Out of the smoke a colossal lighting bolt was fired at Cyndaquil.

"Cyndaquil, use Flame Wheel to protect yourself!" Ash ordered, recalling Macey's maneuver. The flames on Cyndaquil's back lit up vividly and expelled a large amount of fire, covering Cyndaquil completely. The Thunder struck the flame shield but was unable to penetrate it, the intensity of the flames successfully stopping the attack. After Cyndaquil had successfully shielded himself in the flames, he charged at the Magneon.

"And Cyndaquil is charging at Magneon. That Fire-Type attack can be dangerous..." The MC muttered dramatically.

"Magneon, use Magnet Raise!" Jackson shouted. Several magnetic rings appeared around Magneon and it elevated off the ground. Cyndaquil jumped to compensate, but he was unable to reach it.

"Now, use SonicBoom!" Jackson commanded. Magneton started emitting a faint white glow, and then a loud metallic clang was heard as a shockwave was fired at Cyndaquil. The small Fire-Type was unable to react as the shockwaves struck him, knocking him back.

"Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Cyndaquil opened his mouth and fired a large stream of fire directly at Magneton.

"Dodge it!" Jackson called. Magneton descended until he was at ground level, causing Cyndaquil's attack to fly overhead. Jackson smirked. *'Now's my chance!'* "Thunder wave!" The magnets around Magneton's body started emitting blue lightning that hit Cyndaquil, giving him a small shock and causing him to feel a little... numb. He had just gotten paralyzed. "Now, finish this with Try-Attack!"

The top and two bottom screws of Magneton's body started emitting various forms of energy. The top one started gathering electricity, the bottom left one generated cold energy, and the one to the right started gathering heat energy. A thin white line joined all three spheres and the energies started mixing, forming a bright white triangle with a different energy ball on each tip. The triangle was fired directly at Cyndaquil.

"Cyndaquil, counter with Flamethrower!" Ash shouted, knowing that the incoming attack was powerful. Cyndaquil tried to move, but a quick jolt of electricity shot through his body. He was still paralyzed. With no way to dodge or counter, Cyndaquil braced himself for impact.

"Cyndaquil can't move. This could be the end!" The MC cried dramatically.

Cyndaquil was struck by the attack, the impact sending him flying into the wall of the arena. The attack dissipated in a triangular pattern and Cyndaquil fell to the ground, his eyes turned into swirls. "Cyndaquil is unable to continue battling!" The Referee called. Up on the screen, Cyndaquil's icon faded completely.

Ash growled slightly as he returned Cyndaquil and grabbed his next Pokeball. "Bulbasaur, let's go!" He threw the pokeball and a small four-legged Pokémon with a bulb on his back appeared. On the top of the screen, Bulbasaur's icon appeared.

"And after a surprising defeat for his Cyndaquil, Ash's next choice is a Bulbasaur!" the MC announced the obvious.

"Be careful Bulbasaur, that Magneton is tough!" Ash warned.

Bulbasaur nodded. "Anything I should watch for?" the seed pokemon asked. He already knew that Ash could understand Pokémon, as the previous day he had been called before his registration and thus got the chance to talk to Ash a bit.

"Watch out for Thunder Wave. Magneton will try to paralyze you and then finish you with Tri-Attack," Ash warned.

Bulbasaur nodded and faced Magneton. Jackson chuckled. "Let's make a quick win. Hit that Bulbasaur with Thunder Wave!" Magneton's magnets buzzed as they emitted the same odd blue electricity that had paralyzed Cyndaquil.

"Bulbasaur, use Tackle!" Ash shouted, getting an idea.

Bulbasaur was confused as to why Ash would want him to charge at the Thunder Wave, especially when Ash had warned him to be careful with it, but as usual he trusted Ash and began running directly at Magneton and the Thunder wave. "Jump with the help of Vine Whip!" Ash shouted.

Bulbasaur smirked, getting Ash's plan. He extended his vines from the base of the bulb on his back and hit the floor hard with them, using them to jump over the Thunder Wave. "Now, Use Leech Seed!" Bulbasaur adjusted himself in midair as a seed appeared on the tip of his bulb.

"Oh no you don't! Thunder!" Jackson shouted, Magneton aimed and fired a large electric blast at the airborne Bulbasaur. Just before the thunder struck, Bulbasaur fired his Leech Seed. The small seed flew upward, evading the Thunder and landing on one of Magneton's screws. The Thunder struck Bulbasaur, knocking him to the ground. Fortunately, electricity didn't damage Grass-Types that much, so he was okay.

The seed in Magneton's top screw opened and several vines sprouted and wrapped around Magneton, glowing as they drained its energy. It sagged, losing power. "This is a very intense battle folks!" The MC commented excitedly. The crowd cheered.

"Bulbasaur, use Razor Leaf!" Ash commanded. The Grass-Type nodded and fired several sharp spinning leaves at the Magnet Pokémon.

"Magneton, use discharge!" Jackson shouted. Magneton began emitting an uncontrollable buzz as it fired electric bolts in all directions. Most of the Razor leaves were destroyed on contact. Bulbasaur began to dodge frantically as the lightning bolts struck everywhere, some managing to strike him. He panted tiredly. This was a strong Magneton, even with the Leech Seed, it wasn't going down.

"Solar Beam!" Ash shouted once Magneton's Discharge attack had stopped. Bulbasaur began to draw the Sun's rays into the bulb on his back.

"Magneton, Tri Attack!" Jackson countered. Magneton began charging the same attack that had knocked out Cyndaquil.

"Looks like this will be a very powerful clash! Everyone get ready!" The MC warned excitedly.

After a minute of charging their attacks, with a loud battle cry Bulbasaur fired the Solar Beam, a bright white energy beam that shined with the sun's power, and Magneton buzzed and fired the

triangle-shaped attack. The attacks clashed in the center of the arena and released a very powerful explosion. Everyone in the stadium was pushed to their seats as the shockwaves from the blast reached them.

"What a powerful clash!" The MC cried. The explosion petered out, leaving a cloud of smoke. When the smoke finally cleared, both Magnetron and Bulbasaur were knocked out.

The Referee nodded. "Both Bulbasaur and Magnetron are unable to continue battling!" Both Pokemon's icons faded off the screen, leaving only Ash's Pikachu in the first slot, and a last unused slot in Jackson's party. Both trainers returned their Pokémon.

Ash looked at Pikachu. "Good luck buddy, it's all up to you now."

Pikachu nodded and jumped off Ash's shoulder, entering the field. *"Don't mess up!"* Latias telepathed playfully to Pikachu.

' Why have you two been so quiet lately?' Ash thought.

" Err... we haven't had anything to comment about?" Latios responded.

Jackson grabbed his last Pokeball. "Meganium, You're up next!" The large Grass-Type, a large pale green dinosaur like Pokémon with a large pink flower around its neck appeared. Jackson smirked. "Meganium is my strongest Pokémon. You can't beat it!"

"I don't think so! Pikachu, get ready!" Ash countered.

"The last battle! Who shall win!" The MC bellowed. Up on the screen, Meganium's icon filled the last of Jackson's slots.

' That Pikachu is very fast, I need to be careful,' Jackson thought. "Meganium, use Razor leaf!" A large flurry of leaves was shot from the back of Meganium's flower, heading directly at Pikachu.

"Pikachu, dodge with Quick attack!" Ash shouted. Pikachu began running at the Razor leaves, easily side-stepping to dodge them, each leap and bound getting him closer to Meganium.

"Stay in one place you little Rattata!" Meganium shouted in frustration as Pikachu evaded the Razor Leaves.

"Tangle him up with vine Whip!" Jackson shouted. Meganium slid two vines out from the sides of his neck flower and shot them in Pikachu's direction.

"Let him hit you, but grab on to the vines!" Ash shouted, having, as usual, some very weird but very effective ideas. Pikachu looked confused, but knew Ash was good when it came to unusual tactics. He stopped and braced himself. Both of the vines struck him and pushed him back, but he managed to grab onto one of them. "Now, use Thunder!"

"Ha! Take this!" Pikachu bellowed as he released a colossal amount of electricity, which surged up the vine and shocked Meganium. He cried in pain and gritted his teeth, spinning about and sending Pikachu flying. The mouse flipped through the air and landed safely a few dozen feet away from the Grass-Type.

"Meganium, use Earthquake!" Jackson shouted. Meganium grinned as he stood on his two hind legs and stomped on the ground, sending a powerful tremor across the battlefield.

"Pikachu, use your tail to jump!" Ash shouted. Pikachu nodded and struck his tail on the ground as hard as he could, using the recoil to jump over the Earthquake.

"Pikachu can't move in the air, use Body Slam!" Jackson shouted. Meganium began to run towards the falling Pikachu, hitting him in the chest rather hard. Pikachu, guessing Ash's next order, rode it out and grabbed onto Meganium's head.

"Thunder! Ash shouted. Pikachu's cheeks sparked as he released a tremendous amount of electricity, shocking the Grass-Type. With a swing of his head, Meganium managed to pry off Pikachu and fling him away.

"Solar Beam!" Jackson shouted. Meganium's neck petals began to shine brightly as he absorbed the sun's rays. Pikachu landed, looking at Meganium.

"Quick, use Thunderbolt!" Ash shouted. Pikachu's cheeks sparkled as he fired a lightning bolt at the Grass-Type... several seconds too late. Meganium had already finished charging up. With a mighty battle cry, he fired the Solar Beam. The white beam crashed against the Thunderbolt. Even though Pikachu was pumping as much electricity as he could into it, his Thunderbolt gave in and was torn apart by the Solar Beam.

"Pikachu, use Agility!" Pikachu cut off the feed to his Thunderbolt and quickly jumped to the side, the Solar Beam striking where he had just been a second ago, causing an explosion that sent Pikachu flying.

"And another intense battle! Ash and Jackson have surely given us one of the best Second Round battles of this year's Silver Conference!" The MC shouted. The crowd cheered in agreement.

"That's it!" Jackson shouted. "Let's finish this with Hyper Beam!" he bellowed.

"You're toast you little Rattata!" Meganium shouted as he opened his mouth and started gathering a sphere of volatile orange energy. Pikachu stood up and tried to move away, but he flinched in tiredness, panting for breath.

' Oh great, Pikachu is too tired! I have to think of something!' Ash thought frantically as he saw the energy orb in Meganium's mouth get bigger with every passing second. Suddenly, he got an idea. '*Latios, will this work?*' Ash thought.

Latos scanned Ash's thoughts. " *I'm not entirely sure, but it's worth a shot,*" he telepathed.

"Pikachu, use Iron Tail as a shield!" Ash shouted just as Meganium fired the potent Hyper Beam. Pikachu nodded as he concentrated what little energy he had left, momentarily forgetting his tiredness as the orange energy beam got closer by the second. His tail glowed a bright white as it acquired steel-like properties.

Pikachu swung his tail so it was in front of him not a second too late, because the Hyper Beam crashed against his hardened tail, pushing him back, but Pikachu held strong. The Hyper Beam got split into many smaller beams by Pikachu's tail as they flew past him, shattering the earth behind. Seeing this, Ash got an idea. "Return it!" he shouted.

Pikachu smirked and swung his tail widely, deflecting the last remnants of the Hyper Beam back into the stunned Meganium. The last fragment of the Hyper Beam struck Meganium in the chest, creating a small explosion and pushing him back. He grunted in pain, looking down he saw several burns left on his skin.

"WHAT!" The MC cried, impressed. "I've never seen anything like this before!" The entire stadium burst into cheers.

"Now, end this Pikachu!" Ash encouraged. Pikachu nodded and mustered as much of his energy as he could. With his still-glowing tail, he charged at Meganium.

"Oh no," Jackson whispered. "Get out of the way!" he shouted. Meganium tried to move, but a spasm of exhaustion ran through his body. A Pokémon must rest a few seconds after using a move as powerful as Hyper Beam.

"Take this!" Pikachu shouted as he leaped and struck Meganium on the side with a swing of his Iron Tail. Meganium cried in pain as he toppled over, and fainted. Pikachu landed and gave a series of shallow pants; he was tired as hell.

"Meganium is unable to continue battling! Victory goes to Ash of Pallet Town!" the referee shouted.

"And Ash Ketchum has won Block 'A' Folks! He is moving to the Final Rounds and the top 16 Trainers of this Silver Conference!" The MC informed. The crowd cheered. Again.

"YES!" Ash shouted, running to the field and lifting up the tired Pikachu in a hug as Jackson returned his Meganium.

"You were great," Jackson whispered to the Pokeball as he left the arena. In the meantime Ash kept jumping up and down happily as he celebrated his victory.

" *Congratulations!*" Latias cheered, hovering over and giving Ash a quick hug. She pulled away quickly, not wanting Ash to make an awkward movement because of her hug.

"Thanks," Ash thanked. He rubbed Pikachu's head affectionately, "Thanks to you too buddy, you were impressive!" Ash praised. Pikachu smiled happily.

Meanwhile, up in the stands, a certain trainer smiled. "Impressive Ash," Gary whispered. He stood up and walked to the exit. "Enjoy your victory now, because no matter what happens, I'm winning the Silver Conference, even if I face you."

He wasn't the only trainer who was smiling. "I'm SO gonna marry him!" Macey squealed.

And this concluded chapter 13! Hope you all like this chapter!
REVIEW PLEASE!

On a separate note, anyone that wants to battle me on Pokemon Battle Revolution or Super Smash Bros. Brawl feel free to ask me my friend codes in a Private Message, I'm waiting for any potential challenger!

Clash Of Rivals

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

And here's Chapter 14! Enjoy!

"Finally!" Ash exclaimed happily. Everyone smiled, understanding his good mood. He had made it to the top sixteen trainers in the Johto League Silver Conference, a very impressive feat. After a wait of a few days while the rest of the Blocks finished their battles, and a rest day between the Second Round and the Finals, today our heroes were going to the administrative area to learn about Ash's first Final Round battle.

Bianca smiled. "So, you actually made it to the finals..."

"Of course I did!" Ash exclaimed cheerfully. He paused. "So, how do they work?"

Brock took out his Silver Conference Guidebook. "Well, according to this, the last sixteen trainers are sorted out into direct battles. The battles are full six-on-six Pokémon, and for the first sixteen trainers, they're divided into eight matches. The winners of those matches are then divided into four more matches and so on. The matches follow a certain order, like the winner of match one goes up against the winner of match two, and so on."

"Six-on-six battles, huh? Those are pretty challenging," Ash said. "So, should I use Latios for those?"

Bianca perked up a little, excited at the prospect of seeing Latios battle. "Yeah, that would be interesting," she commented.

"That depends," Brock answered. "We'll check the trainer records. If the opposing trainer has a powerful team, we'll include Latios."

Ash nodded. "Alright. And if I fight Gary, then Latios goes in for sure!"

" *Great, now it's finally my turn,*" Latios said, as usual hovering above the group, invisible.

"Together we'll win the conference!" Ash shouted enthusiastically. Everyone smiled, glad that he was so motivated.

" *I'll do my best,*" Latios telepathed, letting Ash know that he supported him.

" *Me too!*" Latias telepathed cheerfully.

Everyone sweatdropped. "Err, Latias," Misty began. "You don't battle."

" *I might not, but I help clear things up for Ash sometimes, and I cheer them on!*" Latias telepathed, her sweet and happy tone making everyone smile for some reason.

" *That she does,*" Latios commented.

Misty looked forward. "Hey Ash, isn't that your mom?" she said, seeing Ash's mother in the distance.

" *And the two weirdos,*" Latios added.

"Those are the professors," Misty clarified.

" *I think that's why he said weirdoes,*" Latias telepathed. Misty sweatdropped.

Ash ran forward eagerly. "There he goes again, can't he just walk!" Misty yelled in exasperation. Bianca looked at the boy oddly.

Brock chuckled. "Don't worry, he's always like this," he said, seeing Bianca's stare. She shrugged and kept walking.

In the meantime Ash kept running until he reached his mother, walking around Silver Town with Professors Oak and Elm towards the administrative area in the Pokemon Center just like him. "Hi, Mom!" he shouted.

Delia turned around and smiled fondly. "Hello dear!" she cooed, hugging Ash. "Congratulations on making it to the finals!"

Ash parted from the hug. "You know about that?"

Delia smiled. "Of course I do! We watched you and Gary's Second Round battles on TV along with all of Pallet Town. According to Tracey, the whole town is cheering for you and Gary."

Ash smiled. "Thanks." He turned to the professors. "Hi Professors!" Both scientists politely returned the greeting. "So, how did I do in the battles?"

"Impressive," Delia said at once, no doubt in her voice.

"Indeed," Professor Oak agreed. "Especially the last one against that Jackson kid, the way you returned his Meganium's Hyper Beam was brilliant."

Professor Elm sulked in the back; Jackson was one of his New Bark Town trainers. "Too bad..." he muttered.

"Thanks," Ash said gratefully. "So, how long have you been in Silver Town?"

"We arrived about an hour ago," Delia replied.

"Don't run off like that!" Misty yelled in frustration from behind Ash. He leaped in surprise, causing everyone to chuckle.

"Hello everyone!" Delia said happily. Everyone returned the greeting. Surprisingly, she heard two voices in her mind, and she fidgeted a little.

"Is something wrong?" Brock asked.

"I think I heard a voice in my head," Delia replied.

One of the two identical girls grinned widely. "*That was me!*" Latias informed her cheerfully. "*I'm Latias, remember?*"

"Oh, I remember now, Ash told me you could speak mind-to-mind," Delia said, in relief. It wasn't an everyday thing to hear voices out of nowhere in your head.

"*It's called telepathy,*" Latios informed her.

"Are you sure Delia?" Professor Oak asked. "I don't hear anything."

"Me neither," Professor Elm said.

"That's probably because Latias and Latios can only speak telepathically to friends. They've been training to speak freely, though," Ash told the Professors. "I guess my mom can hear them because she's my mom, and Latios and Latias have been training a lot since the last time they saw her."

"Ah." Both professors nodded in comprehension. But still, why could Delia hear the Legendaries and they couldn't! It was a Pokémon professor's dream to speak to a Legendary! Latias and Latios sweatdropped as they picked up those thoughts.

"I guess they need a bit more training for us to hear them," Professor Oak muttered.

"And who is she?" Delia asked, looking at Bianca. "She looks like Latias."

Bianca stepped forward. "I'm Bianca, I was the one that took care of Latias and Latios before Ash befriended them. I came to Silver Town to see them again."

"Oh, I'm Delia, Ash's mother, and I guess you've heard of Professors Elm and Oak," Delia said, introducing herself and the others.

"Yes, I have," Bianca replied.

Professor Oak looked at his watch. "Well, now that we all know each other, we should go to the Pokemon Center, the matchups should be given out soon."

"Okay!" Ash shouted happily. The group started walking to the Administrative Area in the Pokemon Center.

Delia looked at Bianca and then at the Disguised Latias. "Why is it that you look like Bianca, Latias?" Delia asked.

Latias turned to look at her. *"Well, I've known Bianca ever since she was a kid. She's my best friend, so I like to make my human appearance like hers,"* Latias replied, remembering how she had always used Bianca's appearance, well, when Bianca got older, anyway.

"A kid?" Bianca asked. "You were my babysitter when Lorenzo was busy until I turned like ten. You've known me since I was a baby." Latias giggled at the memories of that time.

Latios groaned. *"It was more like I was the babysitter for both of you."*

Latias pouted. *"We weren't that bad!"*

Latios laughed. *"And you're supposed to be as old as I am?"* he telepathed back. Latias tried to keep a straight face but soon started

giggling.

Pikachu sighed. This talk reminded him of how much Togepi got into trouble, and it was always him that had to get her out of trouble by placing himself in danger.

The group entered the administrative area. Ash noticed that there were only a few people there, probably because only sixteen trainers remained.

While Professors Oak and Elm walked to where Mr. Goodshow was, probably to talk to him or help in any preparations, Ash looked at the screen. It was displaying the faces and names of the sixteen trainers that had passed. As expected, Gary's was there as well as his. They did not have any matchups yet.

"Hello Ashy-boy," Gary greeted, walking up to Ash.

"Hello Gary," Ash said dryly. Gary chuckled and turned to look at the screen, waiting patiently for the matchups to be posted.

"Who's that?" Bianca whispered to Latias.

" *He's just some guy Ash happens to have a rivalry with,*" Latias answered.

"Ahh," Bianca muttered in understanding.

After a few minutes Mr. Goodshow stepped forward.

"Congratulations to the sixteen trainers that passed to the Finals. Now, the matchups for the battles will be decided. All battles will be six-on six-Pokémon on elemental fields, either grass, water, rock or ice." Most trainers nodded, already knowing this. "Now, this computer will randomly sort out the battles between all sixteen of you." He motioned to the screen and pressed a button on a remote control. The sixteen photos turned blank and shuffled themselves around the screen a few times until a tournament diagram appeared

and the photos set themselves. "These are the first Final Rounds battles!" Mr. Goodshow announced.

Professor Oak and Delia's eyes widened. Latias and Latios grinned eagerly. Brock and Misty looked at Ash. Bianca didn't now why everyone was reacting like this. Ash chuckled and turned to Gary, just as Gary turned to look at him. On the screen, match number two read: Ash Ketchum vs. Gary Oak. "So Gary," Ash began. "You're getting kicked out of the conference so soon, I almost feel bad for you."

"Says you Ashy-boy. I hope you enjoyed your time in the conference, because it's about to be over," Gary replied calmly.

Mr. Goodshow's voice interrupted them from possibly killing each other on the spot. "These are the Final round matches. Today the first two matches will be fought, the first at two o'clock and the second immediately after. Match number one is between Harrison and Jamie, and match number two is between Ash and Gary, so all of you go and prepare for your matches." The old man bowed and walked away, followed by the professors.

"Well Ashy-boy, I have to go and prepare my team to beat you. Please try to be a challenge," Gary said, turning to walk away.

Ash fumed. "I'll make you eat those words...."

Gary chuckled. "Oh, and remember this?" Gary dug one of his hands into a pocket and took out a Pokeball, well, the top half of one anyway. It was old and quite rusted. Everyone gave Gary confused looks.

"Is that a Pokeball?" Delia asked.

" *More like part of one,*" Latios remarked.

"Hey!" Ash exclaimed. "You still have it?"

"Of course I do, it was my first defeat," Gary stated.

"We tied! Nobody won," Ash countered.

"Well, to me tying with someone like you is as good as a loss," Gary replied, not looking very interested. He turned and left. "See you in our match Ashy-boy!" Latios suppressed a growl and would have given Gary a splitting headache had Latias not calmed him down.

"What was that Pokeball thing?" Delia asked.

"It was a small fight we had long ago, before we departed on our Pokémon journeys," Ash replied. He huffed at the memory. "It's not important... Anyway, let's go back to the hotel and register my team." He turned to Brock and Misty and looked at them pleadingly. "You'll help me build an adequate team, right!"

Brock laughed. "Of course we'll help you."

Ash smiled. "Thanks a lot."

"How I would have loved to resume visibility and scare the crap out of him," Latios commented. Everyone laughed.

"Ash dear," Delia began. Ash turned to look at her. "I'll go with Professor Oak and get my Stadium tickets. Thankfully, Oak called ahead and bought them in advance, we don't want to end up in the cheap seats. See you all later!" she chimed, walking away.

Ash shrugged. "Well, let's go!" The group headed back to the hotel to register Ash's team.

"So what kind of Pokémon does Gary use?" Misty asked.

"Well," Brock began. "Gary doesn't favor a single type, he has a wide variety of Pokémon."

"That's going to be hard. Choosing a team to beat that will be tough, unlike with Macey," Misty lamented.

"But I also have a wide variety of Pokemon! And with Latios on my side, Gary can't beat me," Ash said confidently.

"Remember what Clair said, Ash: 'Even Legendaries can be defeated.' Latios can't knock out Gary's entire team," Brock lectured.

" *Well, actually-*" Latios started.

" *No, you can't,*" Latias said. He glared at her, and she giggled.

Ash sighed. "I know..."

" *Don't worry Ash, I'll do my best,*" Latios assured him.

"Thanks," Ash said, glad that his Legendary Pokemon would help him through this tough match.

The group returned to the hotel after a few minutes of walking. As usual Latios entered through the balcony. "So Brock, what's my team going to be?" Ash asked yet again, getting on the breeder's nerves.

Brock sighed. "Well, just making a team that will have the most advantage won't work on a trainer like Gary, so we'll use other aspects to make up your team."

"Yeah, we already discussed that," Misty agreed. She placed Togepi on the floor to let her roam about the room. Pikachu jumped off Ash's shoulder to keep an eye on the baby Pokémon.

"Like what?" Ash asked curiously.

"Simple, we'll make your team based on power, speed, experience, battling style, and types," Brock said. "The idea is making a team that's varied and can adapt to anything Gary sends out against you."

"And that team will be..." Ash left the sentence hanging, waiting for Brock or Misty to finish.

"I've been thinking for some time now, and I think I know the best team to take on Gary," Brock said. "I would recommend Latios, Charizard, Snorlax, Pikachu, Bayleef and Heracross."

"Charizard? Where is he, by the way?" Ash asked.

"He's probably still on the way here, he should arrive any minute now," Misty answered.

"That sounds like a good team," Ash commented.

"Yeah, Charizard, Latios and Snorlax will give you power, Bayleef's good in defensive terms, and Pikachu and Heracross are fast. That should be able to beat Gary's team," Brock answered as he sat the computer and registered Ash's team.

"And what are Gary's toughest Pokemon?" Ash asked, wanting to know who Gary's strongest fighters were.

"Wait a minute..." Brock muttered. After a few clicks, he finished registering Ash's team and opened Gary's trainer records. "Well, he has a Blastoise-probably his starter-his Umbreon is trouble Ash-at least for Latios-and he also has an Alakazam, a very strong Psychic."

"Latios can crack an Alakazam, I'm sure of it," Ash said confidently.

Latios shrugged, happy that Ash had so much faith in him. Brock continued. "He also has a Gyarados, Dodrio, Skarmory, Kingdra, and many others, but nothing you can't handle. I think."

Ash nodded eagerly. "Sounds good to me."

"This will be good," Bianca said. "And I'll finally get to see Latios battle!"

"*My brother will beat up that Gary,*" Latias said confidently. Latios chuckled nervously.

"That reminds me..." Ash muttered. He went to his backpack and began looking through it.

" *What are you looking for?*" Latias asked.

"You'll see..." Ash muttered. After a minute of looking, he finally found what he was looking for. "Here it is!" he announced, holding the bottom half of a rusty old Pokeball before his friends.

" *Isn't that the same crappy thing Gary had?*" Latias asked. Ash facefaulted.

"It's not a crappy thing, Gary and I fought over a Pokeball long ago and we broke it. I keep it as a good luck charm. Since each of us got one half, I considered it a tie, but Gary thinks it's a loss," Ash explained.

"So how did it happen?" Bianca asked curiously.

Ash shook his head. "I'm not telling, it's a little embarrassing..."

"Aw, come on, tell us!" Misty said, encouraging Ash.

"No, I'm not telling!" Ash said, shaking his head rapidly.

" *Can I read your mind and check it out?*" Latias asked politely.

Ash shook his head. "No."

"Pleeeeeease?" Latias begged, making her 'cute face.' She pressed herself close to Ash, putting her claws together pleadingly, gave him a very tender smile, and used her Pokemon voice because she knew Ash found her squeals adorable. Ash couldn't resist her cuteness, much to Misty's chagrin and irritation.

"Alright, go ahead," Ash said, giving in. Latias nodded happily, floating back a bit as her eyes glowed. She quickly scanned Ash's mind and found the memory in question. It took her a few seconds to read it, and when she finished... she started laughing hard. Ash

blushed in embarrassment. Everyone stared at Latias, wondering why she was laughing. Her laughter sounded really cute because of her high-pitched Pokémon voice.

" *What's so funny?*" Latios asked, unable to resist his curiosity. Latios read Ash's mind too... and started laughing as well.

"Hey!" Ash shouted.

" *You got slapped by a Magikarp!*" Latias exclaimed telepathically.

Brock, Bianca and Misty stared at Latias. "Ash got slapped by a Magikarp?" Misty asked.

" *Can I show them?*" Latios asked. Ash shrugged unhappily, feeling that things were no longer under his control. Latios managed to catch his breath for a second and projected the memory into Brock, Misty, Pikachu (even if he was busy keeping Togepi safe) and Bianca's minds. They saw how Ash had been fishing for water Pokémon, through all he caught was a Magikarp that slapped him. Gary appeared soon after. They continued fishing and surprisingly they both caught a Pokeball. As they fought over it, they broke the Pokeball in half, leaving it in the condition it was now. Gary yelled at Ash for a while, then stomped off.

"I'll get him back for that!" Ash said in determination as the memory faded.

"This will be interesting," Bianca agreed, catching her breath. "So, how strong is this Gary?"

"Well," Brock started. "He's caught about ten times more Pokémon than Ash, and apparently spent the entire month before the Silver Conference training on Mt. Silver, so he's very strong."

"Ha! But those hundreds of Pokémon won't help him beat Charizard or Latios!" Ash countered.

Misty laughed. "That's true. I think."

"So, What now?" Ash asked.

"Well, it's still half an hour before match one begins, so we could just enjoy ourselves until then," Brock suggested, turning the computer off.

"Okay, sounds good to me," Bianca agreed.

"But we should attend match one," Misty noted.

"Why?" Ash asked.

"Because the winner of match one goes against the winner of the battle between you and Gary, so in case you win, it would be useful to see how your future opponent fights," Misty replied.

"Can you attend please?" Ash requested, looking at Misty and Brock. "You're the ones that help me make my teams anyway."

"And where would you be?" Misty asked. "You should be the one watching the fight!"

"Well, I have to go and get my team ready, and I have to wait for Charizard to arrive. We don't want him to show up in the middle of the match," Ash replied.

Misty nodded. "Nice excuse, but it's valid."

Ash sweatdropped. "Alright, thanks a lot."

With that the group left the hotel and parted ways. Bianca, Misty and Brock went to the stadium to see the match while Ash went to the Pokemon Center to exchange his Pokémon team. Latias felt a bit odd seeing a Nurse Joy without having to restrain a pervert.

" So, where would your Charizard arrive?" Latias asked as they left the center.

"I think he'd go to a secluded spot, maybe. I don't really think he'll arrive in the city," Ash answered.

"Let's go to the lake to pass the time . It will also be a nice place to relax before your big battle," Latias suggested.

"Yeah, let's go," Ash agreed, starting to walk to the lake. "Finally, the time has arrived, right Pikachu?"

"Yes," the mouse agreed. "Hey Ash, can I ask you something?"

"Sure," Ash agreed.

"If Gary uses his Umbreon, I want to fight her," Pikachu stated.

"Her?" Ash repeated. "Why?"

"If you remember correctly Ash, as an Eevee she defeated me, and I want a rematch, badly," Pikachu replied.

"Sure, just make sure to take her out, she could be a problem for Latios because of her Dark-type," Ash said.

After a few more minutes they arrived at the lake. As they entered, Latias and Latios psychically scanned the area in search of humans. There weren't any, mainly because they were all in Silver Stadium getting their seats for the upcoming match. Since everything was clear, Latias reverted to her Pokémon form and Latios regained visibility.

"So Ash, in which part of the battle will I be used?" Latios asked curiously.

"Well, I'll save you for my last pokemon," Ash answered.

"Alright," Latios said, wondering how tough Gary's Pokémon would be. He was confident he could defeat them.

"Gary will be defeated, of that I'm sure," Ash said out loud.

He walked until he reached the edge of the lake. He smiled at the relaxing scene. The sun reflected on the water's surface, Pidgeys chirped as they flew by, and a shadowy figure was approaching from the sky. Wait, what the heck!

Ash squinted to see the figure better without the sun's contrast. When the figure got closer Ash finally made out who it was. "Yes! It's Charizard!" He cried happily. And of course, as he landed, Charizard greeted Ash the usual way by shooting a huge Flamethrower at him from above. "Oh, crap," Ash muttered as the flames rushed towards him.

The eon dragon's reaction was immediate. Latios' eyes shined a bright white as he used his powers to lift a large amount of water from the lake, moving it quickly over Ash and forming a protective shield above him. The flames hit the water and were extinguished, turning into a billowing cloud of steam that was blown away by the airborne fire dragon's wingbeats. Charizard's jaw dropped slightly. '*What the hell?*' His gaze was caught by the two dragons that were a few meters from Ash. He noticed that the eyes of the larger blue one were glowing. '*A psychic...*'

Latios returned the water to the lake, now somewhat diminished, as Charizard landed a few feet beside Ash. Charizard glared at Latios. As for Latios... he was confused as to why Charizard was glaring at him, all he did was shield Ash. "Errr... hi, Charizard," Ash said, slightly intimidated by the glare Charizard was throwing at Latios.

"Hello Ash," Charizard said finally, looking briefly at Ash. "Who are they?"

"Those are Latias and her brother Latios. They're new members of my team... well, only Latios for now," Ash answered.

"Ah," Charizard said. There was a pause. "Wait... how can you understand me?"

Pikachu laughed. "He messed with another Legendary, as usual, and as a result Ash now understands Pokemon," the mouse explained. "Hey Charizard, long time no see."

"Hey, good to see you too," Charizard replied. He walked a bit closer to Latios. "You seem like a strong Pokemon."

Latios raised an eyebrow. "I like to consider myself one."

Charizard grinned. "And you are a Legendary, if I'm not mistaken."

Latios nodded. "Yes..."

"Fight me!" Charizard bellowed.

"What?" Latios questioned flatly.

"I said fight me, you seem like an interesting opponent," Charizard replied. "A Legendary is always a powerful opponent!"

"I'm not fighting you!" Latios argued. "Why do you even want to fight me?"

Charizard chuckled. "To see if I've become stronger. I've fought or been near many Legendaries, but I never seem to be able to do anything against them. I lost against a clone Charizard created by a legendary, I was near the Legendary birds but their fight was so intense that I knew if I entered, I could have been killed by them, and I finally fought a Legendary one on one-even if it was an illusion-and still lost! Now that I've trained so much, I want to see if I can finally fight and defeat a Legendary Pokemon. That's one of my greatest dreams!"

Latios frowned. He remembered all those events Charizard was describing from Ash's stories, but he wasn't going to fight him just for a simple power test! "I'm still not fighting you."

Charizard growled and glared at Latios. "Then I'll *make* you fight me."

Latos glared back, hoping that the glare of a psychic Legendary Pokemon (That can be a scary glare) would make Charizard back off. It didn't. Both Dragons-well, Dragon-like in Charizard's case-glared at each other, the tension rapidly building.

Pikachu sighed. "Same hot-headed Charizard... he hasn't changed in the least."

"He doesn't seem very nice," Latias commented.

Pikachu chuckled. "Don't worry, he's a good friend to be with, but he always gets like this when he spots a powerful opponent."

Ash looked back and forth between them. Charizard seemed eager to have a go at Latios, but Latios didn't seem too interested in fighting Charizard. "Alright Charizard, calm down, you aren't fighting Latios. With my luck, we'll run into another legendary Pokemon later and then you can fight it."

Charizard turned to Ash. "Oh no, I want to fight that Legendary *now*!"

Ash chuckled. "Sorry, not now. I have an important match today, that's why you're here. If you battle Latios, that would tire out two of my strongest fighters."

"And who are you fighting?" Charizard asked.

"Gary," Ash replied. "You and Latios will be my main battlers to defeat him."

"Okay, that sounds interesting," Charizard admitted. He turned to Latios. "That doesn't save you though, I'm still fighting you!" Latios sighed in exasperation but made no comment.

Ash chuckled. He grabbed three Pokeballs and opened them, releasing Snorlax, Bayleef and Heracross. Bayleef tried to tackle Ash affectionately but Ash managed to side-step in time to dodge her.

She pouted and returned to the others. "Okay, I just wanted to spend a little time with you all," Ash explained. "After all, a very tough match is coming up very soon."

"A very tough match?" Bayleef asked curiously.

Ash nodded. "Yes, we're going to fight Gary, and you six are my chosen team to beat him!"

Charizard glanced around. "I count seven Pokemon."

Latias sweatdropped. "I'm not fighting, I'm here for moral support."

Charizard glanced between Latias and Latios. He noticed that they looked similar and remembered that Ash had introduced them as brother and sister. Charizard raised an eyebrow. "Is she a Legendary too? Think I could have a battle wi-"

"I wouldn't try that," Pikachu interrupted Charizard. He was about to question why until he noticed Latios' glare, a glare that clearly said that anyone who messed with Latias was as good as dead, even him. He gulped.

Bayleef extended a vine whip and smacked Charizard on the head. "Can't you think of anything else! It's always fight this, fight that, fight here, fight there! Do something else for a change!" She scolded Charizard.

Charizard rubbed the back of his head. "I don't remember you being any different when you were a Chikorita!" He argued.

"I matured when I evolved, but you're still the same!" Bayleef countered, ignoring the fact that she was still in love with Ash and continued trying to gain his affections. "Apologize to Latias and Latios, they're our teammates now and all you want to do is fight them."

"Alright, jeez." Charizard looked at the eon twins. "Sorry for my earlier behavior, it's just that I like fighting tough opponents, and it's a dream of mine to beat a Legendary, so I kinda got eager when I saw one."

"It's alright, just try be a little nicer from now on," Latias replied. Latios nodded in agreement.

"The last time you fought a Legendary you could have died if Molly hadn't stopped Entei," Pikachu deadpanned.

Charizard fumed. "It was a crappy illusion! And you also got beat by him, too!" Ash sweatdropped at his Pokemon. Sometimes he wondered if hearing them talk was everything it was cut out to be.

Bayleef turned to Charizard. "We'll probably meet another Legendary in the future, so you can get your butt kicked later."

"Ha! Next time I'll beat a Legendary!" Charizard said confidently.

"I don't think picking a fight with any Legendary is a good idea, some of them are rather short-tempered," Pikachu muttered.

"Alright cut it out," Ash said. All his Pokémon turned to him. "For now, remember that our toughest match ever is approaching, but I know that we'll win. I trust you all. And Snorlax, please try to stay awake until the battle."

The large Pokémon suppressed a yawn. "I'll try."

"So, enjoy yourselves until the battle," Ash said. "Relaxing before such a tough fight will be good for all of us."

The Pokémon nodded. Snorlax and Heracross went to eat, Pikachu and Charizard caught up after not seeing each other in a while, Ash sat on the edge of the lake, with Bayleef, Latias, and Latios beside him. Bayleef noticed that Ash looked a little nervous. "What's wrong, Ash?"

"Well, I've never defeated Gary in the past. He always beats me to everything. I guess I'm a little anxious," Ash admitted.

"Don't worry Ash, you'll win, I'm sure of it," Latias cooed slightly, nuzzling Ash.

"Yeah," Bayleef agreed. "We'll fight our best for you. Besides, we have Mister I-will-beat-the-crap-out-of-everything on our side," she said looking at Charizard. The dragon in question was leaning against a tree casually while Pikachu sat on a branch overhead, talking with each other. Ash Laughed. "And I'm sure Latios will make sure your victory is assured, so there's no reason to be nervous." Bayleef finished.

Ash chuckled. "Thanks Bayleef." He gave her a small hug of gratitude. She squealed in delight. He parted from her and looked at Latios. "How long until the battle starts?"

Latios' eyes glowed as he closed them. He amplified his senses until he could detect what was going at the stadium, all his training lifting rocks and meditating allowing his stronger mind to reach greater distances. He sensed two Pokémon fighting in the arena, meaning that the battle had either just begun or was in progress. "The battle has already started. I can't tell how much of the match has passed," Latios answered as his eyes opened and stopped glowing.

"I wish I could see that far away," Ash muttered.

Latios laughed. "Who knows? Maybe when you're older you could do it."

"Well," Ash started. "We should get going to the stadium." He stood up and grabbed a few Pokéballs to return everyone, though Bayleef gave him a last affectionate nuzzle before disappearing. He returned everyone except Pikachu and Latios. He grabbed Latios' Pokéball too, but the eon dragon interrupted him.

"I'd like to stay outside, please," Latios said.

Ash looked confused. "Shouldn't you be in your Pokeball since you're going to fight?"

"No thanks, I'd like to stay outside for now. That and it will be scarier for Gary if I appear out of nowhere," Latios answered. Latias, Ash and Pikachu sweatdropped.

"That's a good idea," Ash muttered. "Anyway, let's go," Ash turned to leave as Latias and Latios turned invisible. They headed back to the stadium, Ash ready to take on Gary and anything his fellow Pallet Towner would send against him.

"Sneasel! Use Night Slash!" A Pokemon trainer from Hoenn named Harrison called. Sneasel became a black blur as it ran about. The opposing Pokemon, a Haunter, looked about in confusion, trying to pinpoint the speedy Pokémon. The Haunter had no time to react as a claw slash powered with Dark-Type energy tore through it. Its ectoplasmic body couldn't resist the blow, and the Haunter fainted.

"Haunter is unable to battle!" The referee called, raising a red flag. "Victory goes to Harrison from Little Root Town!" The crowd cheered as Harrison made his way to the exit.

Harrison smiled. "I did it," he murmured. *'I'm going up against the winner of the next match, so I'd better stay in the crowd and see what my next opponent has,'* he thought as he walked to the stands and looked for a nice place to watch the next battle.

Up in the stands, Misty looked worried. "That guy Harrison goes against the winner of the match between Ash and Gary, right?"

Brock nodded. "That's right."

"He'll be a tough opponent, he has a few Pokémon from the Hoenn Region. He only used one, but he probably has more," Misty remarked.

"Anyway, we should go to the entrance, Ash should be arriving soon," Brock announced, standing up and walking to one of the access tunnels. Bianca and Misty did the same.

"Popcorn for sale!" A disguised Jessie shouted. She looked at Misty and froze.

Misty shook her head, not recognizing her. "No thanks." She turned to Delia, Oak and Elm. "What about you?"

Delia smiled. "Oh, we'll stay here, thanks. We've got a good view of the battlefield anyway so I can take great photos from here, and besides, Ash has enough support from all of you."

Misty shrugged. "Alright." She followed the others away.

"Those rotten twerps," Jessie hissed quietly.

"Yeah," James agreed as he walked back to her.

"Hey! My popcorn!" A random person shouted.

"I want some too!" Another shouted. Looks like Team Rocket is too busy selling popcorn to attack the heroes today, oh well...

After exiting the stadium Misty, Brock and Bianca went to the arena access tunnel. Gary was there, showing the guard his ID. The guard let him pass... as well as his cheerleader/fangirl team. They sighed. "Great, looks like his cheerleading team is back," Misty muttered. She grabbed her mallet and hit Brock since he had been drooling at the sight of the cheerleaders.

"Hey guys," Ash said as he walked up to them.

"Great, you're just in time, lets go," Bianca said. Ash nodded and walked to the tunnel.

The guard blocked his path. "Trainer ID, please."

Ash took out his Pokedex and showed it to him. The guard verified if Ash was due to fight in the next battle. When he saw that he was, he moved aside and let Ash pass. "They're with me," Ash said, pointing to Bianca, Brock and Misty. The guard nodded and allowed them through as well.

"The time has come. Ready buddy?" Ash asked Pikachu, who was on his shoulder. The Electric-Type nodded. "Latios, are you ready as well?"

The invisible Dragon chuckled. *"Of course I am."*

Ash stepped to the arena and walked to his trainer box, the one on the green side. His friends took a seat on the bench behind him, Latias and Latios hovering at either side of him. Ash noticed Gary's cheerleaders on the other side of the field, behind Gary. "Great, those annoying girls are back..."

"Gary, Gary, he's our man, if he can't do it, no one can! Go... Gary!" Gary's group of cheerleaders cheered happily as they danced about.

"Well Ash, you have your cheerleader too," Misty said. Ash glanced at her to see what she was referring to and smiled when he saw Togepi holding a banner that said 'Go Ash!' Politoed was also there; shouting numerous cheers, through the only human that understood them was Ash.

" *Good Luck Ash,*" Latias said, giving Ash a gentle nuzzle.

"Thanks," Ash said with a smile.

"Greetings folks," the MC started. "Here we have match number two of the Final Rounds of the Silver Conference. The earlier match, as we know, was won by Harrison. The winner of this match goes against him in the next round."

Ash and Gary stared fiercely at each other. "I will win," both trainers muttered at the same time.

"This match has a special air to it," the MC commented. "Both trainers are of the same age and same home town! Ash Ketchum from Pallet Town and Gary Oak, also from Pallet Town! Gary Oak is the grandson of the world famous Professor Oak, And Ash Ketchum has quite a history as well... top sixteen of the Indigo League and Champion of the Orange League. I assure you all, this battle promises to be great! Now, let's see what battlefield is up and who chooses first!"

Everyone's attention was locked to the screen atop the Stadium. Filling it were Ash's and Gary's images. Below their photos were six empty slots for their Pokemon. In the center was a small circle divided in four parts, one had a leaf, one had an ice formation, one had a rock and the last had a drop of water. One of the segments lit up. The light started passing through all of them rapidly, gradually slowing down until it stopped on the ice formation, meaning that the battle was going to be fought on an ice battlefield. "Alright folks, this match will be fought on an ice battlefield, how will this affect and benefit the trainers?" the MC trailed on.

In the arena, the neutral arena separated from the rest of the floor and started sinking into the ground where it divided, shifting and letting another battlefield take its place. The stadium's huge hydraulic system slowly raised the new battlefield until it was at ground level. The battlefield was made of a very thick ice. Several formations rose from the ground, almost looking like the tip of Icebergs. "And now, let's see which trainer chooses first!" the MC said.

Another circle replaced the previous one and started spinning a flashing light. This time, the light stopped on a green segment, meaning that Ash chooses first. "So, the first move is for Ash Ketchum!" the MC informed rather unnecessarily.

Ash pondered his first choice. After a moment's thought, he grabbed his first Pokeball. "Go, Heracross!" He threw the Pokeball to the battlefield, and with a bright flash the large blue beetle-like pokemon with a very big horn appeared.

"And Ash has decided to start with Heracross!" the MC announced as Heracross' icon appeared in the first slot of Ash's party on the big screen.

"Go, Nidoqueen!" Gary shouted, throwing a Pokeball and summoning a large two-legged Pokémon appeared. She was mostly blue with a cream chest and lower jaw and numerous spikes on her back.

"And Gary's first choice is his Nidoqueen!" the MC announced. Nidoqueen's icon appeared on the top of the screen.

The referee nodded and raised both of his flags. "Begin!"

"Nidoqueen, use Poison Sting!" Gary ordered, taking the initiative. Nidoqueen opened her maw as a large barrage of purple needles was fired in rapid succession at Heracross.

"Heracross, use Horn Attack!" Ash shouted. Heracross' back opened as his wings flapped rapidly. He flew at extremely high speeds towards the Poison and Ground-Type. He quickly flew out of the way of the needle barrage and got into attack range.

Seeing this Gary changed tactics. "Fire Punch!" Nidoqueen's right fist was quickly engulfed in a thick layer of flames as she tried to punch the incoming Heracross.

"Dodge it!" Ash ordered quickly, knowing that a Fire-Type attack would be big trouble for Heracross. The Bug and Fighting-Type quickly changed course. With a flap of his wings, he quickly ascended to the sky, dodging Nidoqueen's attack with ease.

"Use Poison Sting!" Gary shouted. Nidoqueen's maw opened as another barrage of poisonous needles was fired at Heracross. On instinct, Heracross kept dodging the needles as they flew around him, zigzagging in the air as he evaded the attacks.

"And it looks like Gary has Heracross in a tight spot!" the MC announced.

Ash growled. "I need to do something..." he paused. *'Latos, Nidoqueen is a Ground and Poison-Type, right?'*

"Yep," Latios answered. *"Why?"*

'I have an idea,' Ash thought. "Heracross, use Megahorn on an ice formation!"

Heracross' great horn began to shine a bright white as Heracross charged the ultimate Bug-Type attack. He dove from the sky and smashed into one of the ice formations dotting the field with great force, shattering it and sending ice chunks flying everywhere.

Gary's eyes widened as he realized Ash's plan. "Dodge it!" But it was too late, several large ice chunks collided with Nidoqueen, pushing the Pokemon back. Being part Ground-Type, they caused considerable damage.

"Wow! What a way to use the field to your advantage!" the MC shouted, impressed. The crowd cheered and Delia took lots of photos.

"Megahorn again!" Ash shouted. Heracross' horn shined again as he charged at Nidoqueen.

"Stop it with Fire Punch!" Gary commanded, getting an idea of his own. Nidoqueen's right fist was enveloped in fire as she punched the incoming Heracross's horn, locking them in a stalemate as neither attack gave in. "Hyper beam!" Gary shouted.

Nidoqueen's jaws opened and charged a sphere of orange energy. Seeing this, Ash got alarmed. "Fly away!" he shouted.

Heracross tried to fly away, but in the clash of Megahorn and Fire Punch, Nidoqueen had grabbed Heracross' horn, making it

impossible for the beetle-like pokemon to fly away. Nidoqueen unleashed the Hyper Beam mere inches away from Heracross's face, sending the Bug-Type flying into the ice in a powerful blast, shattering it and throwing up a plume of smoke. When the smoke cleared, a knocked-out Heracross was revealed. "Heracross is unable to battle!" the referee shouted. Up on the screen, Heracross' icon faded completely.

"That close-range Hyper Beam proved to be too much for Heracross!" the MC cried dramatically.

Ash returned the downed Pokémon and grabbed another pokeball. "Snorlax, I choose you!" he shouted, throwing the Pokeball and letting the obese Pokémon enter the field. On the screen, Snorlax's icon appeared in Ash's second slot.

"Ash's second choice is a Snorlax! Ash has decided to bring in heavy artillery!" the MC announced. No one laughed at the pun.

"Nidoqueen, use Sludge Bomb!" Gary ordered, knowing that a Pokémon as big as a Snorlax would be quite easy to hit. Nidoqueen opened her mouth and fired a barrage of poison globs at the Normal-Type. The sludge bombs started to hit Snorlax in the chest, pushing him back. It was a good thing that his ability prevented him from being poisoned.

"Hang in there Snorlax, use Body Slam!" Ash shouted. Snorlax grunted and started walking toward the Nidoqueen, despite the constant sludge bombing.

"Dodge quickly, Nidoqueen," Gary ordered, seeing that the huge Pokémon was looming over Nidoqueen. Nidoqueen quickly side-stepped... and slipped on the ice. Thankfully for Gary, the Drill Pokémon skidded across the field, effectively getting out of the way off Snorlax's Body Slam, which cracked the ice a bit.

"What a creative way to dodge!" the MC praised.

Gary sweatdropped. "I had no idea that was going to happen," he muttered. "Hyper Beam!" Nidoqueen quickly used her tail to stabilize herself as she opened her mouth, charging a volatile orb of orange energy.

"Quick Snorlax, dodge it!" Ash cried desperately. Unfortunately, the fat Pokémon was unable to get up in time as the Hyper Beam collided with him, causing an explosion that knocked him back over.

"Finish this with Rock Smash," Gary ordered calmly. Nidoqueen ran (with some effort, considering the slippery surface) at Snorlax. The fat Pokémon barely managed to stand up again when he was hit in the chest by the Rock Smash attack, causing him to topple over. Again.

Snorlax growled angrily. Ash took advantage of that. "Ice Punch!" Snorlax skidded a bit and threw an ice-covered fist at the Nidoqueen, who was too close to get out of the way in time. She was sent crashing to the ice by the sheer force of the blow. Snorlax panted, exhaustion overtaking him. Nidoqueen barely managed to come out of the ice, panting heavily.

"Nidoqueen miraculously survives that Ice Punch!" the MC shouted. The crowd cheered at the intense battle. Delia was taking pictures of the battle like crazy in the stands. Professors Elm and Oak sweatdropped.

"Nidoqueen, return!" Gary said, holding a Pokeball in front of him, recalling the Poison and Ground-Type back. Gary grinned. "Time to end this." He hurled another Pokeball. "Blastoise, let's go!" On the field a huge turtle Pokémon with two cannons on its back appeared. On the screen, the color around Nidoqueen's icon faded, but the icon itself remained, indicating a still combat-capable Pokémon. Blastoise's icon appeared in the second slot.

"Isn't that Gary's starter Pokémon?" Misty asked.

"The very same Squirtle Gary got from Professor Oak? Yeah, that's the one," Brock remarked.

In the stands Professor Oak chuckled. "Looks like Gary wants to make Ash take some heavy losses from the start. Blastoise is his strongest Pokémon!"

"Ash will beat it," Delia said confidently. *'If Gary only knew what Ash has in store for him... His two new Pokémon will ensure his victory! If they can stop a tsunami, then they can certainly defeat Gary!'*

"Snorlax, can you keep up?" Ash asked, concerned for his Pokémon.

"Yes," Snorlax answered. "But I'm taking a long nap after this..."

"Hyper Beam!" Ash shouted. Snorlax opened his mouth and gathered an orb of energy, firing it as an orange energy beam.

"Hydro Pump!" Gary shouted. Blastoise's two cannons angled themselves downwards, aiming at the incoming Hyper Beam. A colossal spray of high-pressure water was fired from both cannons, clashing against the Hyper Beam. The Hyper Beam managed to vaporize the Hydro Pump, but didn't have enough energy to keep going as both attacks cancelled each other perfectly.

"A clash of pure power! Both of these Pokémon are real powerhouses!" the Mc cried.

Taking advantage of the fact that a Pokémon must rest after using Hyper Beam, Gary ordered his next attack. "Hydro Pump!" Blastoise aimed his cannons and fired another powerful stream of high-pressure water. It collided with Snorlax head-on and pushed him back a few meters.

The blast was too much for the already tired Snorlax, that added to the damage he suffered from the battle against Nidoqueen was enough to knock out the huge Pokémon. He toppled over, his eyes turned into swirls.

"Snorlax is unable to continue battling!" The Referee called.

Ash sighed. "Return Snorlax, take a good long nap." On the screen, Snorlax's icon faded. *'This is bad, I've lost two Pokémon and he still hasn't lost a single one!'* Ash thought desperately.

" *Calm down Ash, you can turn this around easily, just think clearly,*" Latias chided him gently. Ash smiled and grabbed his next Pokeball.

"Bayleef, I choose you!" Ash shouted, releasing Bayleef. She smiled at him and winked.

"Ash makes an intelligent choice. Will the type advantage be enough?" the MC wondered. Up on the screen, Bayleef's icon appeared in the third slot of Ash's team.

"Blastoise, use Hydro Pump!" Gary shouted. Blastoise's cannons aimed and fired a colossal torrent of water at the Leaf Pokemon.

"Bayleef, use Vine Whip on the Ice!" Ash shouted. Bayleef got the hint and extended one of her vines, wrapping it around one of the ice formations and reeling herself in, using the slippery ice to make it easier. By the time the Hydro Pump hit, she was long gone. "Now, use Body Slam!" Ash shouted. Bayleef released her vine whip and used the momentum of the skidding to power up her next attack.

"Catch her with Bite!" Gary ordered. Blastoise quickly opened its mouth and caught Bayleef by the leaf on her head. Blastoise swung her around and slammed her to the floor of the arena. "Throw it!" Gary shouted. Blastoise did a full body spin, sending Bayleef flying and crashing into an ice formation, breaking it and causing a small haze to cover the area.

"What a devastating combination!" the MC cried.

Ash closed his eyes. He sensed that through the haze, almost mist, Bayleef was alright and standing up. "Razor Leaf!" Ash shouted.

A flurry of razor sharp leafs went flying at Blastiose. "Use Rapid Spin!" Gary shouted. Blastiose tucked all its limbs inside his shell and began spinning, easily deflecting the Razor Leaf attack.

"And that, folks, is a very nice defense!" the MC remarked. The crowd cheered.

"Synthesis!" Ash shouted. Bayleef began absorbing the sun's rays as her body emitted a faint glow, healing a bit of the damage she had taken. "Now, use Solar Beam!" Ash shouted. Bayleef's sunray absorption got faster as she charged her strongest attack.

"Keep spinning!" Gary ordered. Blastiose complied and continued the Rapid Spin. Bayleef unleashed her Solar Beam, a magnificent blinding white beam glistening with the sun's power. Surprisingly, the Solar Beam was torn apart by Blastiose's very quick spinning. "Now use Hydro Pump!" Gary ordered. As the Solar Beam ended, Blastiose's limbs extended from the Shell, effectively stopping his spin. He fired a blast of high-pressurized water at the Grass-Type. She was hit and slammed into the ice rather hard again, knocking her out.

"Bayleef is unable to continue battling!" the Referee called.

Ash recalled her back to her Pokeball. "You did great, Bayleef..."

"Now that three of Ash Ketchum's Pokemon have been knocked out, we will have a five minute rest," the MC informed.

Ash walked back to the bench and took seat. "Man... this looks bad, I've lost three Pokémon, and Gary hasn't lost a single one. I think I'll lose at this rate," Ash muttered sadly.

"Don't give up yet, Ash," Latios said calmly. "You still have your three strongest fighters left."

"He has a point," Brock noted. "Latios, Pikachu and Charizard are all very strong; they won't get beaten so easily."

"And besides," Misty started. "Gary's Nidoqueen already took a lot of damage, and his Blastoise must be a bit tired after so many Hydro Pumps."

"Yeah, thanks guys," Ash said happily, smiling at his friends.

" *See, cheer up! I'm sure that you can still win!*" Latias telepathed cheerfully. Bianca nodded in agreement. Latias flew in and gave Ash a small hug, causing him to jump of surprise. "*Good Luck!*" She heard Latios snicker. "*Don't comment, you!*"

Ash relaxed a bit after hearing her cheers. He waited for the rest time to be over.

"Both trainers return to your respective sides!" the Referee called once the five minutes were up. Ash and Gary returned to the trainer boxes drawn on the ground.

"Gary, Gary, he's our man. If he can't do it, no one can! Go... Gary!" Gary's group of cheerleaders cheered again. Brock kept a straight face, knowing that either Latias or Misty was probably watching him.

Gary was the first to grab a Pokeball. "Umbreon, go!" Gary shouted as he threw the Pokeball to the field. A four-legged black pokemon with golden rings and deep red and black eyes appeared. Ash nodded to Pikachu. The Electric-Type jumped down and entered the field. On the screen, Pikachu appeared in Ash's forth slot and Umbreon in Gary's third slot.

"So, Gary has chosen Umbreon while Ash has sent out Pikachu!" the MC stated the obvious.

Umbreon laughed when she saw Pikachu. "Ah, you again. Ready for another defeat?"

"Not this time. It's payback time!" Pikachu snickered.

"The last time we fought I defeated you while I was an Eevee. What hope do you have now that I have evolved?" Umbreon taunted.

"Pikachu, use Quick Attack!" Ash shouted, seeing that their little 'trash-talking' was over. Pikachu ran at Umbreon at high speeds.

Umbreon sighed as she saw the incoming Pikachu. "Here we go again..."

"Use Double Team!" Gary shouted. Umbreon ran too, but as she did, numerous copies of herself were being left behind.

Pikachu stopped and looked around at the twenty Umbreon copies surrounding him. "Here we go again," Pikachu chuckled. "You know Umbreon, the trainer sometimes matters a lot, as you'll soon find out." Umbreon gave him a confused look. "Ash!" Pikachu shouted. By then, Ash's eyes were already closed as he searched for the real Umbreon.

"Pikachu, the real one is standing on top of the ice behind you!" Ash shouted. "Use Thunderbolt!"

Umbreon gasped. "What! How di-" She couldn't finish as she was struck by a lightning bolt. She shrieked in agony.

"Umbreon!" Gary cried as the copies dissipated. *'How did Ash do that?'* "Umbreon, cover yourself with the ice!" Umbreon jumped back, putting the ice formation she had been standing on between herself and Pikachu, blocking the thunderbolt.

"And amazingly, Ash discovers the real Umbreon! How did he do it?" the MC wondered.

Umbreon looked at Ash and growled. "Just how did he make out the real me?" she wondered aloud. By Ash's Mareepish laugh, something told her that Pikachu's trainer had understood her.

"Iron Tail," Ash ordered calmly. Umbreon snapped out of her thoughts as she saw Pikachu jumping over the ice, his tail glowing a bright white.

"Dodge quickly," Gary shouted. Umbreon quickly sidestepped. The attack cleaved a large mark in the battlefield's ice floor, but just like Heracross before, the attack sent a lot of ice flying, most of it hitting Umbreon.

"Umbreon, use Shadow Ball!" Gary shouted. Umbreon opened her mouth and gathered a powerful sphere of shadows, firing it at Pikachu. Pikachu swung his still active iron-hard tail and destroyed the Shadow Ball before it could hit him.

"Pikachu, use Thunder!" Ash shouted. Pikachu's cheeks crackled as he fired a potent blast of electricity at the Moonlight Pokemon. She shrieked as another painful amount of electricity coursed through her.

"Massive damage for Umbreon! Can it survive!" the MC cried dramatically.

"Use Faint Attack!" Gary shouted. Without warning, Umbreon vanished and slammed into Pikachu from behind, knocking him back.

"Quick attack!" Ash shouted. Pikachu recovered and ran at the Moonlight Pokémon. The Dark-Type couldn't react in time as Pikachu slammed into her and sent her skidding across the ice.

"What a show of speed!" the MC praised. The crowd cheered. Delia complained that since they were moving so fast her pictures wouldn't come out nicely.

"You have truly become stronger," Umbreon remarked through pants.

"Umbreon, Use Shadow Ball!" Gary ordered. Umbreon opened her mouth and fired another concentrated ball of shadow energy.

"Pikachu, dodge and use Iron Tail!" Ash shouted. Pikachu jumped sideways, evading the Shadow Ball, and ran toward Umbreon, his tail shining brightly.

"Umbreon, use Last Resort!" Gary shouted. Since Umbreon was in a tight spot and had used most of her attacks, this attack would be quite effective. Umbreon grinned as she charged forward. She began emitting a golden glow as she was coated in the power of the Last Resort.

"Use Thunder on your tail!" Ash shouted. Pikachu used Thunder on himself, his Iron Tail guiding the electricity there as his tail started shining even brighter, sparks and ripples of electricity running through it.

Both Pokémon crashed into each other, Pikachu having swung his hyper-charged tail just before the collision. The shockwave of the impact shattered the ice surrounding them. Both Pokémon were in a stalemate for several seconds, neither wanting to let their trainer down and lose the fight. With a mighty cry, Pikachu pushed his tail forward, breaking Umbreon's Last Resort.

"Wha-" the Moonlight Pokemon had no time to do anything as Pikachu's tail slashed at her. With a blinding flash, she was sent crashing into the ice, knocking her out.

"Yes!" Pikachu shouted excitedly as his tail returned to normal.

"What a spectacular attack!" the MC shouted, clearly impressed.

"Umbreon is unable to battle!" the Referee called as Umbreon's icon faded completely. Gary returned the downed Pokemon.

" *This is good,*" Latios commented. *"Umbreon would have been a problem for me, but now she's out of the picture."*

" Yeah, good point," Latias agreed. "See Ash, Umbreon's defeat will turn the battle in your favor!"

Ash nodded. "Thanks."

Gary grabbed his next Pokeball. "Alakazam, Let's go!" With a bright flash the Psychic-Type appeared. Alakazam's icon appeared on the screen in Gary's fourth slot. Pikachu gulped, this individual Pokémon species not bringing back good memories.

"And Alakazam is Gary's next choice!" the MC said.

Alakazam looked at Ash. For some reason, he could sense two strong minds near him... but that wasn't his concern. He looked at his opponent, Pikachu. "Ready, Pikachu?" Ash called.

Pikachu nodded. *'I'm on a team with two legendary psychic dragons. It's natural that I've picked up a thing or two about how to evade psychics,'* he thought. This was true, Pikachu had gotten annoyed that during sparring matches, Latios would use his psychic abilities to turn Pikachu's attacks against him. After a while, Pikachu asked Latios if he could teach him how to evade psychic attacks, and Latios had agreed. So now, Pikachu was truly ready.

Gary smirked. "Alakazam, use Psychic!" Alakazam's eyes glowed as his spoons were surrounded by a blue outline as he got ready to take control of Pikachu's body.

"Pikachu use Agility and Quick Attack!" Ash shouted. Pikachu began running towards the Alakazam at blinding speeds, making it hard for the Alakazam to get an effective grip on his body, and to make matters worse for the Alakazam, every time Pikachu made a turn, he released a small spark of electricity. This just confused Alakazam even more, making it difficult to concentrate only on Pikachu.

Without warning, Pikachu slammed into Alakazam's chest, knocking the wind out of him. "Now, Pikachu, use Thunder!" Ash ordered.

Pikachu clung to Alakazam's chest and released a potent Thunder attack. The Alakazam cried in pain.

"What a devastating attack! Tons of Damage!" the MC cried.

"Ha! You can't control my electricity with your mind if it never leaves our bodies!" Pikachu remarked, the direct electric shock with body contact being unable to be repelled or countered with Psychic powers.

Gary growled. He hadn't expected Alakazam's psychic powers to be countered like that. "Shake him off with an Ice Punch!" Alakazam's fist was covered in ice as he punched Pikachu off, sending the Electric-Type flying.

"Pikachu, Thunderbolt!" Ash shouted. Pikachu's cheeks sparked violently as he fired a powerful bolt at the Alakazam.

"Alakazam, use Psychic!" Gary shouted. Alakazam's eyes glowed as he used his Psychic powers to 'grab' the electric bolt and send it back at Pikachu. However, this was exactly what Ash and Pikachu wanted.

"Iron Tail!" Ash ordered, seeing that Gary had fallen for his trap. Pikachu's tail shined a bright white as it became iron-hard. He charged at Alakazam, the returned electric bolt being guided to his tail and absorbed safely. Once again his tail was hyper charged as it crackled with electricity.

Gary's eyes widened. *'Not that again!'* He knew that Alakazam would be done for if he took that attack. "Block it!"

Alakazam brought his spoons in front of him. His eyes glowed as he powered up the spoons, not wanting them to break. Pikachu swung the hyper-charged tail again. Alakazam blocked the blow effectively with his spoons... and got shocked because the metal of the spoons conducted the electricity of Pikachu's body.

"Ash repeats the attack, and it's effective once again!" the MC shouted.

"Alakazam, use Teleport!" Gary shouted. Alakazam's body glowed white as he simply disappeared. Pikachu fell on the ice and began looking around for him. "Hyper Beam!" Gary shouted. Pikachu and Ash looked everywhere in alarm.

Suddenly, from behind one of the ice formations, a Hyper Beam came flying at Pikachu. The attack was too fast for him to dodge as it crashed against him, sending him flying as he smacked into one of the walls separating the crowds from the battlefield, followed by an explosion. When the smoke cleared Pikachu was lying there helplessly, his eyes turned into swirls. "Pikachu is unable to battle!" the Referee called as the Electric-Type's Icon faded from the screen, leaving only two slots on Ash's side.

"Pikachu is down too! That means Ash only has two Pokémon remaining. Will they be enough to beat Gary's five remaining Pokémon? Will Ash make a comeback?" the MC wondered.

"Pikachu!" Ash cried, running to where Pikachu lay. He cradled the Electric-Type in his arms. "You okay, buddy?"

"That... hurt..." Pikachu mumbled, a bit dizzy.

"Don't worry, buddy. Everything will be okay." Ash walked back to the bench and handed Pikachu to Brock, who took the mouse carefully. "Take care of him, okay?" Brock nodded.

Ash walked back to the trainer box and looked at the screen. He had four faded-out icons while Gary only one. Ash was down to two Pokemon and Gary had still five battle-capable pokemon. Ash grabbed his next Pokeball. "Charizard, I choose you!" The large winged Fire-Type appeared with a mighty roar and burst of flame.

Gary frowned in confusion. "Charizard so soon?" He looked at the screen. Five slots on Ash's side had been filled, including the new

icon of Charizard. *'I expected his Charizard to be his last Pokémon. Why would he use it now? Is he desperate? Or does he have something stronger than Charizard in reserve? Hmm...'*

"Charizard is Ash's next choice! Talk about power!" the MC shouted.

Charizard cracked his knuckles. "My turn eh? This'll be good."

"Alakazam, use Psychic!" Gary shouted.

"Charizard, counter with Fire Spin!" Ash shouted. Charizard took a deep breath and exhaled a stream of fire, which quickly shaped into a tornado around him, the base melting the ice. "Fly in!" With a flap of his wings, Charizard flew up inside the Fire tornado. Alakazam managed to get a grip on Charizard in spite of this. The Fire-Type grunted in pain as his body was bombarded with Psychic power. Thankfully, this didn't last long as the fire tornado was too close for the Psychic-Type's liking.

"Dodge it!" Gary ordered. Alakazam let go of Charizard and levitated out of reach of the flames.

"Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Charizard emerged from the flames and breathed a stream of fire at the Alakazam.

"Teleport and use Thunder Punch!" Gary shouted. Alakazam's body glowed as he disappeared. The Flamethrower struck where Alakazam had been a second ago and melted part of the arena. Alakazam reappeared in front of Charizard and punched him with an electrically-charged fist.

The electricity bothered Charizard because of his type disadvantage, but not as much as it should have. He grinned at the startled expression on the Alakazam's face. "Pikachu zaps harder."

"Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Charizard opened his jaws and fired a colossal blast of Fire at close range at the Alakazam, who was

unable to dodge in time. The fire washed over Alakazam, knocking him out. He landed on the ice with a thud.

"And Charizard makes quick work of Gary's Alakazam!" the MC remarked. "Gary now has four Pokemon remaining while Ash only has two!"

"Alakazam is unable to battle!" the Referee called. On the screen, Alakazam's icon faded.

Gary returned him and grabbed a pokeball. "Blastoise! Let's go!" The Large turtle pokemon appeared once more. On the screen, the color around Blastoise's icon returned.

"Charizard, Flamethrower!" Ash commanded. Charizard spat another stream of fire directly at the Water-Type.

"Rapid-Spin!" Gary ordered. Blastoise tucked all its limbs back into its shell and started spinning rapidly, deflecting the flames. This caused more and more of the field to start melting.

"Change to Fire Spin!" Ash shouted. The flames quickly engulfed Blastoise in a tornado of fire.

"What an attack! Will this mean trouble for Blastoise!" the MC trailed on dramatically.

"Hydro Pump!" Gary shouted. Out of the flames, a blast of water came out, hitting Charizard and pushing him back as the tornado died down. "Hydro Pump again!"

"Fly up!" Ash shouted. Charizard flapped his great wings and flew up, evading the water attack.

"Keep up the Hydro Pumps!" Gary ordered. Blastoise kept bombarding Charizard with stream after stream of water as Charizard kept responding with Flamethrowers, but the Fire-Type couldn't get any decent shot because of the constant attacks. He

gave a small cry of pain as one the Hydro-Pumps managed to hit him. He panted; he had taken a lot of damage already.

"Looks like Charizard is in a tough situation!" the MC noted. One of the flamethrowers hit Blastoise, but it didn't do much.

Ash growled. "I have to think of something..." It was then that he noticed the battlefield had puddles everywhere. The field was melting from the heat of Charizard's attacks. One of Blastoise's feet sank a bit in the ice, causing the Hydro Pump he had fired to miss. "Charizard, melt the field!" Ash shouted. This would not only destabilize Blastoise, but it would mean no ice, so Latios wouldn't be so affected by the field!

Charizard looked confused as to why Ash would want that, but then again he had a weird trainer. He complied and began firing Flamethrowers all over the battlefield, slowly causing the ice to melt. "Okay... What's Ash up to now?" Gary wondered.

"We are all probably wondering, why is Charizard attacking the field?" the MC asked.

Soon, the field was halfway melted and started forming a pool. All ice battlefields were frozen layers about six feet deep to make the ice thick enough to not only support heavy Pokemon, but also so that it wasn't destroyed so easily. Charizard's flamethrowers were too much, however. Now, the field was a large pool with a few ice platforms. Blastoise was on one of them. "Wow, the battlefield is now a water field! But, why did Ash want this?" the MC wondered

"Now Charizard, use Seismic Toss!" Charizard dove towards the Blastoise.

"Oh no, Blastoise, dive into the pool!" Gary shouted. Blastoise quickly moved to enter the water, but he wasn't fast enough as Charizard scooped him up, flying high to the air.

"Blastoise, use Bite!" Gary shouted. Blastoise bit on Charizard's shoulder. The dragon-like pokemon flinched from the pain. That bite was sure to leave a mark...

"Add a Fire Spin!" Ash shouted at the Flying Pokemon. Charizard spat a spiral of fire which quickly covered both Charizard and Blastoise. Charizard began making circles in the sky, adding more and more momentum to the attack, the flames engulfing both of them never subsiding. He dived for the battlefield, aiming for one of the remaining ice platforms to make the crash harder. Charizard slammed Blastoise onto the ice platform with all his might, shattering it completely. Blastoise kept plowing down until he crashed into the bottom of the pool with a loud impact.

Charizard flew up a bit and landed on another platform, panting from tiredness. The stadium watched with bated breath, waiting for Blastoise to emerge. The Water-Type finally emerged... upside-down with swirls for eyes. "Blastoise is unable to battle!" the referee called. Blastoise's icon faded, leaving Nidoqueen and two unused slots. Gary returned the defeated water type.

"Unbelievable!" the MC cried. "Charizard has defeated two of Gary Oak's Pokémon! Now this match is three Pokémon remaining for Gary, and two for Ash!"

Gary growled. He had never expected Ash to defeat his Blastoise, but still, he had three Pokémon remaining. "Nidoqueen, go!" Gary shouted, releasing the Poison and Ground-Type, she landed on one of the remaining Ice platforms. "Use Hyper Beam!" he called. Nidoqueen opened her mouth and began gathering energy.

"Charizard, Flamethrower!" Ash ordered. Charizard spat a stream of fire just as Nidoqueen fired her Hyper Beam. Both attacks collided at the center of the arena, the volatile energy of the Hyper Beam exploding on contact and distorting the surface of the water.

"Charizard, Seismic Toss!" Ash called. Charizard waited a few seconds for the smoke to clear a bit. When he was sure of

Nidoqueen's location he flapped his wings and flew towards her.

"Nidoqueen, Stone Edge!" Gary shouted. Two blue rings surrounded Nidoqueen, turning into small sharp -looking rocks.

Charizard's eyes widened in alarm when he saw the attack. Knowing that a Rock-Type attack would cause colossal damage to a Flying and Fire-Type like Charizard, Ash changed his order. "Dodge quickly!"

Charizard flapped his wings, attempting to get out of the way, but it was too late. Nidoqueen sent a barrage of sharp rocks at Charizard. The rocks collided with him and slammed him into the wall. The double super-effective attack was too much, and Charizard fainted, his icon fading from the screen.

"Charizard is unable to battle!" the Referee called as Ash returned the downed Pokémon.

"And after a brave performance, defeating two of Gary Oak's pokemon, Ash Ketchum's Charizard has been defeated. Now Ash's remaining Pokémon must defeat Gary Oak's remaining three if Ash wants to win the battle," the MC informed the crowd.

Ash looked at the screen. On his side were five faded pokemon icons, while in Gary's side was his still active Nidoqueen and two unused slots. However, he wasn't worried. Gary took notice of this. *'I defeated his Charizard. Why isn't he upset?'*

"Ready?" Ash asked quietly.

" Yes," Latios replied. Latios began to hover inside the arena, still invisible. The Stadium watched, wondering what Ash's final Pokémon would be.

" *Good luck brother,*" Latias telepathed in a gentle tone.

Latios took a deep breath as he nodded, preparing himself to drop his invisibility and reveal himself to the world...

And Chapter 14 ends! I hope you all like this chapter! Until next Chapter!

A Legendary Surprise

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: And here is chapter 15! Hope all my dear readers didn't get too mad at me for the Cliffhanger... Hehehe. As an act of kindness from you all... please leave a REVIEW! XD

Everyone in Silver Stadium was tense. Finally, the conclusion of this impressive match was near. Only one Pokémon remained for Ash, and yet Gary still had three Pokémon left. Those were overwhelming odds, and many people thought that Ash was already defeated.

Gary chuckled. "There's no way you can win Ashy-boy. One Pokémon can't beat three!" Gary said calmly. *'I still have Nidoqueen, Gyarados and Arcanine to deal with Ashy-boy's final choice. I've already won.'*

"Good luck Gary, you'll need it..." Ash replied.

Gary frowned. "Why?"

"Latios! I choose you!" Ash shouted, thrusting his arm forward eagerly.

Gary stared at Ash. "La-wha-os? You didn't even throw a Pokéball! Just what are you planning?"

Suddenly, the air in front of Ash began to ripple slightly. Gary got the feeling that *something* was there. "Okay...."

"What is Ash planning?" the MC wondered. The Stadium watched intently.

Suddenly, before everyone's astonished eyes, a large shower of blue sparkles materialized into a streamlined airborne draconic figure as Latios dropped his invisibility, allowing himself to be seen. The entire stadium went quiet as the grave.

Gary's eyes widened. His jaw dropped slightly. "W-What the hell is that!" he stuttered. For the second time in his life, he was seeing a Pokémon he didn't recognize. He took out his PokéDex and pointed it at the blue Pokémon that was hovering in front of Ash.

"Pokémon unknown, no data available," the PokéDex said in a mechanical voice. Gary's blood chilled. *' Just like at the Viridian Gym...'*

Finally the MC recovered. "What is that!" he bellowed. "Ash Ketchum has chosen an unknown Pokémon! What could this mysterious Pokémon be!" The crowd looked in awe at Latios.

On the screen, Latios' icon appeared in the last of Ash's Pokémon slots. It was a wonder they had the icon in the first place. If it hadn't been for the earlier registration, they would have had to use a "?" as the icon.

Gary was currently stunned beyond belief. He had read every book of his grandfather's and had memorized every Pokémon in them, and yet the one before him was a Pokémon he had never heard of before. *'I need to be careful, I don't know what that is or what abilities it has. From the announcer's reaction, he doesn't know either. Does Ashy-boy possess a Pokémon so rare that no one knows about it?'* Gary wondered.

Nidoqueen paled slightly and tensed visibly. All Pokémon, no matter the type or lifestyle, recognized a Legendary Pokémon when they saw one, and Nidoqueen knew, even if she had never before seen the Pokémon before her, that she was facing a Legendary. She knew

that Legendary Pokémon were akin to gods, and hoped she wasn't going to get hurt too badly.

Ash chuckled. "Go ahead Gary, the first move is yours."

Gary looked stunned. He wondered how to attack a Pokémon like that. He didn't even know the type it was! *'It's simply floating, so that means that it's using levitation... so it's part psychic. It also looks like a Flying-Type, so I'll treat it like a Psychic and Flying-Type for now.'* "Nidoqueen, use Hyper Beam!" he shouted, wanting to attack first. Since Nidoqueen was part Poison-type, a Psychic attack would be devastating. Nidoqueen opened her mouth and fired an orange beam at Latios, who hadn't moved an inch since revealing himself.

"Use Psychic on the water," Ash commanded calmly, suddenly feeling very confident about having a Legendary Pokémon on his side. Latios' eyes glowed as the water in the battlefield started rising, forming a large wall of water between Latios and Nidoqueen, nearly knocking her off her ice platform. The Hyper Beam collided against the water wall but had no effect. With a flash of Latios's eyes, the wall was sent rapidly across the pool towards Nidoqueen, crashing into her and knocking her out almost at once due to her type disadvantage.

"No!" Gary gasped.

"Nidoqueen is unable to battle!" the Referee called, raising the corresponding flag. Nidoqueen's icon faded from the screen.

"Impressive! This mystery Pokémon defeated Gary Oak's Nidoqueen without moving an inch! And what a tremendous display of power!" the MC cried excitedly. The crowd was still quiet, trying to fathom just what Ash had sent to the battle.

Gary growled as he returned his downed Nidoqueen. *'Yep, it's a Psychic-type alright... but to lift that much water... he practically lifted the entire arena! And so quickly, not even my Alakazam can do that! Am I... facing a Legendary Pokémon?'* "Gyarados! I choose

you!" Gary shouted, hoping that his Gyarados' power would help him win against this tough opponent.

A Large sea serpent Pokémon appeared in the pool. It growled and glared menacingly at Latios. Latios glared back at the Gyarados, and suddenly the Gyarados didn't feel so powerful or scary. Up on the screen, Gyarados' icon appeared on the fifth slot of Gary's side.

"And Gary has chosen a Gyarados to fight Ash Ketchum's mystery Pokémon!" the MC announced. Thankfully for the MC some of the officials of the Pokémon League had received a bit of information on Latios from Professor Oak, so they were on their way to his cabin so that he could tell the bewildered stadium what Latios was.

"Gyarados, use Waterfall!" Gary shouted. Gyarados roared and charged at Latios, a large volume of water following along and coating the atrocious Pokemon.

' Time for our little surprise... Ready, Latios?' Ash thought.

" Always," Latios answered.

' Latios, dodge!' Ash thought. Latios tucked his forearms tightly to his body and flew upwards at high speeds, causing Gyarados to crash into the edge of the pool where Latios had been. *'DragonBreath,'* Ash thought. Latios turned and spat a large stream of white flames directly at the Gyarados.

"Why is it attacking without Ash saying so?" Gary wondered.

"Gyarados, counter with your own DragonBreath!" he shouted. Gyarados opened its jaws and exhaled a jet of green flames. Both DragonBreath attacks collided and cancelled each other out.

' Steel Wing,' Ash thought. Latios' wings shined a bright white as he dove at the Atrocious pokemon. Gary had no time to order anything as Latios moved too fast, by the time Gary was about to shout something to Gyarados, Latios had already slashed at the Water-Type, leaving a large cut on its side. *'Turn around and attack again!'*

Ash thought. Latios flew around and slashed at the Gyarados with his wings again, this time in the other side.

"Wow, that Pokémon sure is fast!" the MC shouted. The crowd cheered.

Gary growled. "Gyarados, Hydro Pump!" Gyarados opened its jaws and fired a powerful torrent of water at the Eon Pokémon.

' *Counter it with Psychic!*' Ash thought. Latios' eyes glowed as he used a Psychic attack to stop the water, causing it to harmlessly fall into the pool.

Gary couldn't believe his eyes. "Why is it attacking without you saying anything!" Gary shouted to Ash. An annoyed look crossed Latios' face at being called an 'it'.

Ash laughed. "As you may have noticed, Latios is a Psychic-Type. What I'm doing is thinking my commands, and Latios is reading my mind to hear them. So basically, I am commanding him, it's just that you can't hear it."

"So, it's called a Latios," Gary muttered. "If I can't hear Ashy-boy's commands, I can't anticipate his attacks... this is bad."

' *Turn invisible,*' Ash thought. Latios nodded. His body was covered in blue shimmering lights as he disappeared into thin air.

"And that Pokémon has turned invisible again! What is it planning?" the MC wondered. Again, Latios got annoyed; he was no 'it'!

' *Tackle it!*' Ash thought. Latios rushed at the Gyarados and slammed into its side, causing the Atrocious Pokémon to give a small cry of pain as he crashed into the side of the pool.

"Gyarados, slam the water with your tail!" Gary shouted. Gyarados made a wide swing with its tail, hitting the water and creating a rather large splash. Some of the water soaked Latios, temporarily revealing

him. "Now, use Iron Tail!" Gary shouted. Gyarados' tail became solid white and steel hard. He made another wide swing, hitting Latios in the side.

Latios winced in pain but quickly recovered and at Ash's mental command, he fired a DragonBreath at the Gyarados. The Water and Flying-Type cried in pain as the flames enveloped it. Using the Gyarados's temporary distraction, Latios used a Psychic attack to instantly dry his feathers, quickly hiding from sight again.

"What an impressive battle, folks! This unique Pokémon sure is tough!" the MC commented. The crowd cheered.

"Hyper Beam!" Gary shouted. Gyarados fired a huge orange energy beam at where it supposed Latios was.

' *Return it!* ' Ash thought. Latios quickly exerted a large amount of his psychic powers to 'grab' the Hyper Beam, slowly turning it around until it was heading right back towards the Atrocious Pokémon. The attack collided and created a large explosion. Gyarados crashed to the side of the pool from the force of the blow.

"Wow, just how strong is that Psychic-Type to return an entire Hyper Beam? Impressive!" the MC cried.

"Finish this with Luster Purge!" Ash shouted. Latios revealed himself in preparation for his strongest attack.

"What is that!" Gary wondered. He had never heard of that attack before. He looked at Gyarados. The Water-Type was just barely recovering from that Hyper Beam, and to make matters worse, he had to rest a few seconds after using the attack. He could do nothing but watch whatever attack Ash had summoned go to work.

Latios' body started shining brightly as he gathered his power, turning into a sphere of light as he charged at the Water-Type. Usually Luster Purge could be used as both as a long range attack by firing it as a projectile, or as a close-range attack by ramming the

opponent with it. In this occasion, Latios preferred the close-range version.

Gary's eyes widened as he saw the huge energy sphere collide with Gyarados, releasing a huge blast of light that forced everyone to cover their eyes. Finally, the light died down and Gary looked up only to see Latios floating calmly on Ash's side of the field, and as for his Gyarados, it was floating upside down with swirls for eyes.

"Gyarados is unable to battle!" the Referee called. Gyarados' icon faded completely from the screen.

"And with an unknown attack, this Pokémon has defeated Gyarados. Now both trainers are down to their last pokemon!" the MC announced. A league official entered the room and handed him a note with information on Latios.

"What was that?" asked an amazed Professor Elm.

"I don't know..." Professor Oak answered. "But Latios is certainly demonstrating why he's a Legendary Pokemon. That was one powerful attack." Delia kept taking pictures.

Latias giggled mentally. *"I think you overdid it with that Luster Purge."*

Latios chuckled as Gary returned his Gyarados. *"Maybe..."*

"Listen Folks," the MC started. "I've received a bit of info. Apparently the Pokemon before us is called 'Latios', and is a Legendary Pokémon!" It took a few second for the crowd to register this. They started whispering to each other in astonishment. "Latios is apparently a Dragon/Psychic-Type, and that's all the info we have for now!" The crowd applauded, awed at getting the chance to see a Legendary Pokémon right before their eyes. "Impressive... A real Legendary Pokémon, here at the Silver Conference... unbelievable!" the MC cried, clearly impressed.

Latios laughed *"Took them long enough."*

Ash and Latias had to hold back a laugh at Gary's shocked face. "Yeah," Latias agreed.

Gary looked at the field. There were no ice platforms left, so there was no place to stand, just one huge pool. Reluctantly, he grabbed his last Pokéball. "Arcanine, Go!" The large Fire dog-like pokemon was released to the edge of the field. Up on the screen, Arcanine's icon appeared in the last of Gary's slots.

"And an Arcanine is Gary's last Pokémon! Can an Arcanine fight the power of this Legendary Pokémon!" the MC bellowed.

" *Ash, don't order me to psychically return any Fire- Type Attacks,*" Latios warned.

Ash blinked in confusion. "Why not?"

" *Arcanine have an ability called 'Flash Fire' which allows them to absorb any Fire-Type attack to make their own far stronger,*" Latios answered.

Ash got even more confused. "But how can they absorb fire? Through their fur?"

" *Well, I don't really know,*" Latios admitted. *"But I don't intend to find out. A powered-up fire attack might really burn my feathers, and it's troublesome to keep them neat."* Everyone on Ash's bench sweatdropped.

" *Brother,*" Latias started. *"It only takes us a few seconds to treat our feathers to keep them clean. We do it psychically."*

" *I don't care, I don't intend to see my feathers ruined,*" Latios complained. Latias sweatdropped.

In the meantime, Gary had been figuring out what to do. "Arcanine, Fire Blast!" Arcanine opened his mouth and fired a powerful blast of fire at Latios, taking the shape of a five-pointed star.

' *Block it!*' Ash commanded. Latios' eyes glowed as he used his Psychic powers to lift more water from the pool, creating a protective sphere of water around him, extinguishing the flames.

Arcanine growled and paced around the edge of the pool. Ash chuckled. "Well, Gary, looks like Arcanine has problems with the water. Let me help you there."

Gary looked confused. "Huh?"

Ash laughed. "Latios, lift the water." Latios' eyes glowed a bright white as he lifted all the water in the pool-like battlefield. The stadium watched in awe as Latios managed to levitate all of the water high in the air.

"Wow... No wonder Latios is a Legendary Pokémon," the MC commented.

Arcanine yelped, knowing what was next. "Dodge with ExtremeSpeed!" Gary shouted frantically.

The floating mass of water descended upon Arcanine. The Fire-Type desperately ran to the side, quickly becoming a blur as it used one of the fastest Pokémon moves to try and dodge the water. Knowing that Arcanine was eventually going to try and slam in to him, Latios withdrew a small amount of water from the big bubble and held it close enough to create a shield should Arcanine try and attack him.

Arcanine disappeared from Latios' sight. Latios wasn't too surprised by this, he knew that a move as fast as ExtremeSpeed could fool his eyes, so he decided to rely on something that was far faster and more precise to see: His mind. Arcanine's speed could play tricks on his eyes, but not on the sharpness of his mind. He closed his eyes and began to sense Arcanine's movements.

He immediately detected Arcanine behind him. Latios created a column of water and flung it over his shoulder. Arcanine was forced

to dodge to the side, becoming visible again just as a series of water spheres were hurled at him.

"Flamethrower!" Gary shouted. Arcanine opened his mouth and exhaled a large stream of fire, managing to vaporize the water spheres. What Arcanine couldn't see was the huge blast of water coming from above him. Thankfully for the Fire-Type, Gary did. "Use ExtremeSpeed!"

Arcanine quickly took off and became a blur, dodging the water blast Latios had shaped with his psychic powers, Latios had his eyes closed and was relying on his mind to sense Arcanine. *'Latios, can't you get a hold of his body with psychic?'* Ash thought.

"He's moving too fast!" Latios replied.

'Trick him,' Ash thought. *'Make him dodge to break his ExtremeSpeed. When he does, grab with Psychic to end this once and for all!'*

In the meantime, Arcanine was running around, avoiding Latios' psychically manipulated water attacks. "Wow, what an impressive battle folks!" the MC bellowed. Everyone cheered loudly.

Arcanine ran at Latios, his body a blur from the sheer speed. Latios conjured a water wall and placed it between himself and Arcanine, forcing the Fire-Type to change course, running around the barrier. He charged at the Eon Pokémon, hitting him in the chest and pushing him back. Latios cried in pain, but even so, getting hit by Arcanine was just exactly what he had wanted.

When the Fire-Type managed to land the ExtremeSpeed attack on Latios, Arcanine had stopped long enough for Latios to get a psychic grip on him. Latios chuckled. "Game over." The Arcanine yelped as he was yanked off the ground just in front of Latios. The Fire-Type began to squirm in pain as his body was bombarded by Latios' mental powers.

Latios started lowering the water back to the pool. Ash grinned. "Finish this with Luster Purge."

Latios' body started glowing brightly as he charged his ultimate attack. Arcanine could only watch as Latios readied himself to finish him off, completely helpless under Latios' mental hold. "Looks like this is it for Arcanine folks!" the MC shouted.

Latios fired the Luster Purge. The light sphere engulfed the Fire-Type, slamming him into the center of the pool, creating a bright explosion that temporarily blinded everyone again.

When the light died down, Arcanine was floating in the water, completely out cold. "Arcanine is unable to continue battling. Victory of this match goes to Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town and Latios!" the Referee called.

"We have a winner!" the MC bellowed. "Looks like the Legendary Pokémon Latios proved to be too much for Gary Oak!" The entire stadium applauded.

Ash just stood there for a second; taking in the fact that he had finally defeated his eternal rival Gary Oak. Latios calmly hovered to where he was, just floating there beside him, until Ash burst into cheers. "Yeah!" he cried loudly as he threw his arms around Latios' slender neck in a hug. "We won! We won!" Latios smiled and gave a small hug back. Latias flew up and gave them both a hug. Bianca thought that scene was absolutely cute and began drawing it.

The stadium was simply awed. For the first time in their lives, they had seen a Legendary Pokémon. A lot of people were impressed, many younger trainers were jealous, and others looked at the boy hugging the Legendary Pokémon with a smile, touched by the obvious bond between the Legendary and the human. And for more extreme reactions, a few dozen childish fangirls had hearts over the eyes at the sight of the boy (Macey included). Looks like Latias and Misty are going to be busy keeping Ash safe from a bunch of rabid

fangirls. And some young trainers and kids were dying to see Latios up close... Maybe also to get an autograph.

Delia smiled happily in the stands as she took a picture of the hug. "Told you so, Oak. I knew Ash would win."

Professor Oak and Elm didn't respond. Both were too busy drooling because they had witnessed a Legendary Pokémon in action, any Pokémon Professor's dream. "Wait until we tell this to Professors Birch and Rowan, they'll be so jealous!" Elm gushed.

"Oh yes," Oak agreed.

Delia laughed. "They probably saw it on TV too, so it won't be anything new to them."

"Oh, no, they saw it on TV... but we saw it live! And besides, we got to meet that Legendary, they on the other case didn't!" Professor Oak argued.

"But still, what was that attack?" Professor Elm wondered.

"Yeah, we'll have to ask Ash about it," Professor Oak agreed. "That Luster Purge thing sure is powerful; it didn't fail to defeat a Gyarados and an Arcanine."

"Also, how is it that Latios can turn invisible?" Elm wondered.

"I don't know, maybe it's something in his feathers?" Oak guessed.

"Think can we examine him a bit?" Elm wondered.

"As long as he doesn't kill us for it," Oak deadpanned.

"Brighten up! We'd be the first Pokémon Professors in history to look at a Legendary so closely and actually examine it!" Elm said, a dreamy look in his eyes.

"Hey, Oak," Delia started. The professor turned to him. "Do you think that Latios could have defeated all of Gary's team by himself?" Delia asked.

Oak hummed in thought. "Latios is certainly quite strong, but the key factor in this battle was that the two Pokémon of Gary's that could have truly been a challenge for Latios were knocked out sooner, namely Umbreon and Alakazam," he answered.

Delia smiled. "My boy has made it to the quarter finals. I'm so proud."

"What does that have to do with anything I just said?" Oak asked.

"Nothing, just thought I'd mention it," Delia said. Oak sweatdropped.

Meanwhile, a million things were coursing through the mind of a trainer from Hoenn named Harrison. Since he was from Hoenn, he knew quite well what Latios was. *'I can't believe it, some kid from Kanto shows up having a Latios! This is bad; I'm up against him next round.'*

He looked down to the boy as he celebrated his victory with the Eon Pokémon. *'My Johto team isn't strong enough to fight off a Latios, and the rest of that boy's team is very powerful, I'll need my Hoenn Team if I want to win,'* Harrison thought.

He chuckled. "I have to admit I'm a bit jealous," he muttered. "I've always wanted a Legendary. Well, any trainer wants one..."

He turned and walked towards one of the stadium exits. *'It's a good thing that I have a few Pokémon that may be some nice Latios-counters...'*

Lorenzo smiled at what he was seeing on TV. Too bad he couldn't go there himself, he was too busy with his multiple jobs. He had to see that the museum of Altomare kept on running smoothly, and also had to attend to the Gondola workshop. He at least had let Bianca go to

Silver Town since she had been a little depressed ever since Latios and Latias had left.

It looked like Latios was becoming stronger with each passing day now that he knew how to battle properly thanks to the care his trainer had given him. He knew that Altomare would be truly safe in the future.

"Wow, the twerp's got a Legendary," Jessie muttered.

"He finally got around to catching one... why didn't he do it sooner? He's met Legendaries here and there and he didn't catch a single one!" James said.

"Who cares about dat!" Meowth shouted. "Dose Pokemon are going directly to da boss!"

"Yeah!" Jessie agreed.

"Hold on a second!" James shouted. They turned to look at him.

"What?" Jessie questioned.

"Listen, when we fight the twerps, they always beat us, now that they have a Legendary Pokémon, they'll beat us in a second! That Pokémon defeated an Arcanine, Gyarados and Nidoqueen like they were nothing! Imagine how it'd beat our Pokémon around!" James replied.

"Good Point..." Jessie muttered.

"I say we sell more souvenir badges and popcorn! That way we will have the money needed to order a really powerful mecha from Team Rocket's elite headquarters!" James suggested. Both Meowth and Jessie nodded.

"That legendary Pokémon will be ours..." They hissed to each other excitedly.

"Stop slacking and give me my popcorn!" A random person shouted. They sighed and went back to work .

Meanwhile, in Team Rocket's elite Headquarters, two Team Rocket agents were enjoying a break and watching some TV.

"Finally Professor Sebastian gave us a break..." Annie complained. "That pointy beard is an idiot."

"Shut it Annie!" Oakley snapped. "Anyway, the project Professor Sebastian and Namba are working on seems to be very effective."

"At least Attila and Hun are getting the dirty work for now..." Annie muttered tiredly.

"Anyway, according to Professor Sebastian, the project should be finished soon, in a few days," Oakley continued.

Both continued watching TV. They flipped through a few channels until they landed on a news channel. On the top of the screen the words 'Breaking news' flashed. They raised an eyebrow. This seemed interesting.

The reporter on screen, a young lady, started talking. "Today at the Silver Conference, something shocking has happened: a trainer has used a Legendary Pokémon for one of the League battles. The trainer was down to his last Pokémon while the opponent still had three remaining, yet the Legendary Pokémon had no trouble in defeating all three Pokémon."

The screen shifted and started showing recordings of the battle of Ash and Gary, more specifically, when Latios was being used. Both Annie and Oakley's jaws dropped. "The Hell!" Oakley cursed.

"Wow, looks like the stupid kid got a souvenir from Altomare," Annie commented. "If Latios is there, then no one is guarding the jewel. With that jewel I can make the best necklace ever!" she gushed, a dreamy look in her eyes.

"Forget about that damn jewel, we can try to take Latios again..." Oakley suggested.

"But we have to help Professor Pointy," Annie whined.

"But look closely," Oakley muttered, looking at the screen. "Latios seems to have trained a lot since the last time. He defeated three powerful Pokémon effortlessly, it won't be easy."

"I don't care! I want the jewel!" Annie snapped.

Oakley sighed in exasperation. "But I don't think we can beat Latios anymore. Besides, it's more likely that we will get a different assignment once this Project is finished."

"Yeah..." Annie muttered.

"Maybe we can actually be one of the Rocket agents bestowed with the Project's result. If we are, we will use the might of Team Rocket's newest weapon to crush those kids and the Latios! And Latias too, if she's there," Oakley suggested.

Annie sighed. "Whatever..."

Oakley laughed maliciously, waiting for the time when she'd fight Ash and Latios again... and this time, she'd have a new surprise ready.

And chapter 15 has ended! Hope you all liked Latios' battle!

Team rocket is finishing their new weapon... What might it be?

Anyway, **REVIEW PLEASE!** I'd love that.

Preparing For The Next Battle

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: I'm sorry for the delay in this chapter, but I just started my fifth semester of school, so my schedule was cut in half rather badly. Hehehe, anyway, I'll try to keep up to the best of my ability with this fanfic.

I thank everyone who has reviewed this fic =D Thank you all so much! Keep me happy by reviewing more! Wheee!

Today was a memorable day at the Johto League Silver Conference. A young Pokémon trainer from a small town in Kanto had actually used a Legendary Pokémon in an official battle, something that was sure to make history.

Ash parted from hugging Latios and raised both hands in the air excitedly, proud over his victory. The stadium applauded the youngster, still awed from witnessing a Legendary Pokémon in battle.

Misty and Brock smiled. "Look at him," Misty began. "He wins a match and he celebrates like he won the whole tournament."

"That's Ash alright," Brock said with a smile. "And considering he beat Gary of all people, he must feel like he's already a Pokémon Master."

"Done!" Bianca exclaimed happily. Misty and Brock turned to look at her.

"Done with what?" Misty asked. Bianca showed them her sketch book and their mouths dropped in astonishment. She had done a perfect sketch of Latios and Ash hugging. Latias was there too.

"Latias didn't celebrate with them," Brock said, analyzing the picture.

" *I did! It's just that you didn't see it,*" Latias telepathed loudly. She floated over and peeked at the picture . "*Show-off...*"

Bianca laughed. "You have some catching up to do, Latias."

" *Anyway, I think we should go,*" Latias said after she noticed Gary leaving with his heartbroken cheerleader team.

"Sure," Ash agreed as the group walked to the exit of the field. Many people in the stadium also started to leave as there were no more battles for the day, the others would be fought tomorrow. "So Brock, when is my next battle?"

"You just battled and you're already thinking about your next match!" Misty bellowed. "There are other things to life than fighting you know!" Ash chuckled nervously.

Brock looked at his guide book. "In about four days. That's three days for the other six matches of this round and a rest day before the quarter finals start."

"Alright!" Ash said. "So, what are we gonna do in the meantime?"

"As usual, we could train your Pokémon a bit more. Latios might need another attack. Now that the remaining trainers know that you have him, they'll try to find ways to beat him. A new attack might help him," Brock suggested.

Latios sighed. "*No more rock lifting please,*" he complained, a nervous tone in his voice. He was invisible at the moment. Even if he

had revealed himself mid-stadium, he was still unhappy with remaining visible all the time, so decided to cloak himself as usual. By now they had exited the stadium and were walking to the trainer's hotel.

Latias noticed the subtle nervousness of Latios' tone. *"What's up brother?"* she asked.

"I'm still a bit... uneasy about revealing myself," Latios replied.

Ash turned to the space he sensed Latios was floating in. "What do you mean? You didn't seem too affected on the battlefield."

"Well, I followed Pikachu's advice, I ignored the crowd and everything else as much as I could," Latios replied. *"Thanks for that, by the way."*

"Sure," Pikachu said. "Don't worry, the fear of battling before so many people will pass soon."

"Alright," Latios muttered, easing up a bit.

Ash changed the topic. "So Brock, what should we train in now?"

Brock took out his Pokemon Breeder's Guide. "Well, even if Latios is quite powerful as he is, he needs a few more attacks to make sure he can cover his weaknesses well. There's only four days until the next match so we should get him to learn one attack for now."

"So what attack should he learn now?" Ash asked.

"I suggest Ice Beam. It's a very powerful attack that hits many Pokémon hard. Also, with the use of Latios' psychic abilities, it can be used as a multi-purpose attack, like he did with the water at the battle," Brock suggested.

"Ah great, I hate ice," Latios complained telepathically. As a dragon, it was obvious.

" *Me too, though I like Ice Cream,*" Latias commented, and remembered that it had been a while since she ate ice cream. Maybe it would be good to get Ash to buy her a bit. Everyone sweatdropped at her comment.

"Well, Ice Beam it is. Ready Latios?" Ash asked.

" *I guess,*" Latios answered unhappily.

" *I want to learn Ice Beam too!*" Latias squealed telepathically.

Everyone would have stared at her oddly if they had known where she was hovering. "Why?" Misty asked. "You aren't a battler yet."

" *Who said I wanted Ice Beam for battles ? As I've said before, I'm not interested in fighting, it's just that it's an attack that I like a lot, and I can think up a lot of uses for it,*" Latias answered. Everyone wondered what Latias would want to do with an Ice Beam.

"Are you sure?" Brock asked. "According to this, Ice Beam is a very tricky move to learn if the Pokémon is not a Water-Type or an Ice-Type."

" *I don't care, I wanna learn it!*" Latias telepathed back.

"Okay, okay, we'll teach it to you too," Brock said, giving in, mainly because he knew that if he denied Latias she'd probably never let him see another girl in his life ever again. He looked around nervously, but to his dismay, Latias was invisible so he couldn't really see any reaction.

Latias giggled at his terrified thoughts. *'I have the perfect tool to control him...'*

Latios sweatdropped at his sister's thoughts, but quickly pushed the matter aside. "*So, when does the training start?*" Latios asked.

"We'll wait until tomorrow so we can start fresh in the morning, and we'll train with Ash's team for the next match. We'll register it today,"

Brock informed.

"Anyway," Ash interrupted. "Brock, how good is my next opponent?" Ash asked, knowing that Brock had seen his next opponent's match earlier.

"Well Ash," Brock started. "You're in for an extremely hard match."

Ash perked up, excited at the prospect of a tough battle. "Why?"

"The trainer you're facing is from the Hoenn region," Brock answered.

"Where's that?" Ash asked.

"The Hoenn Region is a region far from Kanto and Johto, to the southwest across the sea. Hoenn has a different variety of Pokémon from the Kanto and Johto regions, so when you fight your opponent, he may have Pokémon that you've never heard of before," Brock explained.

Ash gulped. "I don't know if I should be worried or excited."

"That and he also seemed to be a rather good trainer. He used many innovative strategies to defeat his opponent," Brock remarked.

"Also, he probably knows that you have Latios, so he'll be ready," Misty added. "A trainer from Hoenn should recognize Latios instantly, so he'll now what to do to fight him."

" *He knows what I am?*" Latios started. "*By tomorrow the whole city will be gossiping about the 'trainer with the Legendary,' don't you think?*"

"They probably are already," Bianca said flatly.

" *Good point,*" Latios admitted.

Ash smiled excitedly. "So, a trainer from a new Region. I wonder what kinds of new Pokémon I'll get to see. But how will I know how to fight them? I don't know a thing about Hoenn!"

"Well, I could tell you Ash," Brock started. "I know a few things about Hoenn Pokémon, but my knowledge is too limited... and it would look weird if I telling you everything from the bench."

"I'll tell him," Latios said. "As a Legendary I know a lot about most existing Pokémon, so I'll tell you anything you need to know."

"Me too, I'll help out too," Latias added, giving a happy nod.

"Besides, we can be very subtle when telling him since only you guys can hear us," Latios telepathed.

Ash smiled to the twins. "Thanks a lot."

"You're welcome!" Latias telepathed joyfully.

"If I win, I'll go to the semifinals right?" Ash asked.

"Yes Ash," Misty answered. "If you win, you're one of the top four." She paused. "Now I'm impressed...."

Brock laughed. "Yeah, Ash actually has a chance to be in the top four. Amazing, right?"

"Yeah," Misty agreed. Ash smiled, clearly proud of himself, but Misty continued. "It's just Latios, he's doing everything for Ash!" Ash facefaulted.

"Hey! Latios isn't doing everything! I can manage on my own!" Ash countered. "Well, except in the next match."

Everyone laughed at that. They walked for a few minutes in the general direction of the hotel, nothing particularly interesting happening, until...

"There he is!" A clearly excited feminine voice shouted, echoed by various others, causing our heroes to turn around to see a rather large group of people closing in consisting of a dozen immature fangirls, some young trainers and a bunch of TV reporters and other people holding cameras and boom microphones.

Everyone sweatdropped. "Why did we not see something like this coming?" Brock wondered.

"Wonder what they want?" Ash muttered. The others sighed.

Before anyone could tell him Ash was surrounded by the people, pushing everyone else aside. About three different news crews were trying to get an interview. Ash looked nervously at all the people surrounding him as they bombarded him with different comments.

"Just how did you capture a Legendary Pokémon?" A beautiful woman asked, holding a microphone to Ash's face.

Before Ash could even process the question, another reporter said, "For how long have you had that Legendary Pokémon!"

"Can I see the Legendary please!" A young trainer asked, tugging at Ash's sleeve, and by young I mean he was the same age as Ash.

"Can you help me catch my own Legendary?" Another eager trainer asked.

"Will you marry me!" A fangirl asked merrily. A furious spike of jealousy coursed through Latias and Misty when they heard this. Since Latias was invisible in her Pokémon form, she unleashed a powerful psychic attack that would have severely injured the girl's mind... and Latios frantically stopped it with a psychic attack of his own, easily cancelling Latias'. Thankfully, no one noticed. He scolded her mentally.

"Can you be my boyfriend!" Another fangirl asked.

"Can you show us your Legendary Pokémon please? Where is it?" Another trainer asked. And like that, the questions continued. Thankfully, Ash would be rescued soon.

One of the people surrounding Ash made the huge mistake of touching Pikachu, who was perched on Ash's shoulder. The startled Pikachu released a potent Thunder attack. Thankfully Ash's friends were a few feet back and thus didn't get hurt by the ensuing electric blast. "Ouch," Bianca commented. She turned and sweatdropped when she saw Brock was crying like a baby because Ash had the attention of several dozen girls.

When the attack ended the entire crowd was on the floor except for Ash, who was too used to shocks by now to be knocked out by Pikachu's Thunder. Ash sighed in relief. "Thanks, buddy."

"You're welcome," Pikachu replied. Both Ash and Pikachu groaned when they noticed that the people were slowly getting up, more determined than ever to see Ash's Legendary Pokémon. Ash took a few steps back.

"I think you should hide, they'll never leave you alone," Latios suggested. Ash sighed and ran, searching for a place to get away from these obviously mad people who had been pestering him to show them Latios without realizing Latios had been a few feet from them all along. The frenzied crowd ran after him.

"Do you think he will be alright?" Bianca asked as the crowd chased Ash into the distance.

"Latios, go and help him out please," Latias pleaded telepathically.

Latios chuckled. *"Worried that some fangirl will get to him before you do?"*

Latias blushed. *"Just go and don't comment!"* Latios laughed and quickly flew after Ash.

"Why!" Brock shouted desperately to the heavens in search for an answer. Bianca, Misty and Latias turned to look at him in confusion.

"What's got into you now?" Misty asked, through she had a pretty good guess.

"Why must Ash be so lucky!" Brock bellowed again. "He has so many girls paying attention to him and I have nothing!"

The girls sweatdropped. "He's lost it..." Misty muttered. Latias nodded in agreement.

Brock looked around. "You!" he said, pointing to Bianca. In a flash, he was kneeling before her, taking her hand. "You are my last hope to have a girlfriend! Please agree to be the soulmate that I have been searching for!"

Bianca gasped. Her eyes twitched, a vein of annoyance appeared in her forehead, an irritated look crossed her face, she turned beet red in anger, and then... she slammed Brock to the ground so hard that Latias and Misty could swear that the pavement cracked. She put a foot on top of Brock's head and began to stomp him, shouting with each impact. "I! Have! Tolerated! Your! Perverted! Acts! But! If! You! Try! To! Flirt! With! Me! Ever! Again! You! Are! Going! To! Wish! You! Never! See! A! Woman! Ever! Again! Got it!"

"Y-y-yes," Brock muttered weakly. Bianca nodded satisfied and walked a few feet back.

Latias and Misty had their mouths dropped in awe. "She does it better than both of us put together," Misty admitted.

"*I like her style,*" Latias commented. Bianca laughed nervously when she saw the terrified looks of the people passing by.

"Maybe you should try it too," Misty told Latias.

" *Maybe, though if I attack him like that I'll end up sending him to the hospital,*" Latias joked. Brock put on a terrified face, or tried to, he was still stuck in the pavement.

"What about Ash?" Misty asked.

" *Don't worry, Latios is on it,*" Latias answered.

"Let's go to the hotel room and wait for them," Misty said casually.

"He didn't break anything did he?" Bianca asked.

Latias' eyes glowed a little. "*No, he'll be alright in a few minutes, after the pain passes.*"

"Okay, see you at the hotel room," Bianca called as they walked to the hotel.

Meanwhile, Ash was hiding in an alley in terror. He didn't need his sensing abilities to know that the reporters, trainers, and fangirls were getting close. Thankfully, he sensed Latios approaching, turning the corner and hovering close to him. "Latios, help me!" Ash pleaded.

Latios chuckled. "*Sure, just let me think of a way.*"

"Can't you fly me away?" Ash asked desperately.

" *No, if they see us, they 'll be even more excited,*" Latios answered. He grinned. "*I can knock them out psychically if you want.*"

Ash shook his head. "I don't want you to harm someone like that ever again!"

" *I meant something different. In this case it's only temporary, they'll just faint and wake up a few hours later, nothing serious,*" Latios said.

"No Latios, you know I dislike you being so aggressive," Ash said.
"Find another way, please."

"I can shock them silly," Pikachu offered. Ash shook his head again.

Latios sighed. He sensed Ash's 'fans' were getting near. *"I consider you a great friend Ash, so be really grateful I'm willing to do this for you."*

Ash looked confused. Suddenly the air Latios was in sparkled brightly as he regained visibility. What surprised Ash was that Latios was getting smaller and changing shape. Ash gasped slightly when he realized what Latios was doing. In seconds, a perfect copy of Ash was standing before him. "Wow..." Ash muttered.

"I thought you said you hated that," Pikachu commented.

"I do, so you better be grateful," Latios telepathed, glaring at Ash.

Ash chuckled nervously. "I am."

"Go to the hotel, I'll lose them and meet you there," Latios telepathed.

"Thanks, Latios," Ash said. Latios smiled and ran out of the alley.

The crowd quickly noticed him and ran after the Ash-disguised Latios, everyone wanting to see him or get a nice interview for the news channel. Latios quickly ran, looking for a nice place to lose them. After a few minutes he made a sharp turn, quickly resumed his Pokémon form, and turned invisible.

By the time everyone caught up he was long gone. They groaned in disappointment and had no choice but to resume their day. Latios laughed and flew to the hotel. It took him a few minutes to reach the hotel room. As usual, he entered through the balcony. He sweatdropped when he saw the condition Brock was in.

"Hi, Latios, thanks for the help earlier," Ash said. He was sitting at the table with everyone, except Brock, who was in the computer registering Ash's team and checking Harrison's Pokémon record. He was more than a little bruised.

" *You're welcome,*" Latios answered. "*What happened to him?*" he asked, motioning to the *slightly* bruised Brock.

Latias laughed. "*He was so sad that Ash had so much female attention that he tried his luck with Bianca. You can figure out the rest.*"

Latios chuckled. "*Learned a lesson?*"

"I hope so..." Brock muttered. He refocused his attention on the computer as he checked Harrison's record and pondered on the best team to register for Ash.

" *So, how does the Hoenn guy's Pokémon look?*" Latios asked.

"He has a lot from Kanto, Johto and Hoenn. He's an older trainer, so he's traveled for a while and his Pokémon must be quite experienced. His Hoenn Pokémon might be a problem, so I registered the team that I think would be able to fair the best against him," Brock summarized.

" *Alright,*" Latios telepathed.

"I *will* beat him," Ash said confidently.

Misty smiled. "For once, I actually think you are truly capable of winning."

Ash smiled back. "Finally!"

"But I still think it's all thanks to Latias and Latios," Misty continued. Ash facefaulted.

"The upcoming match will be good, I know I'll win!" he said after recovering.

Latias smiled. *"I know you will."*

Harrison smiled as he dialed a number on the phone at the Pokémon Center. Soon a man in his mid-thirties answered, his image appearing on the screen of the videophone, sporting a nice beard and a lab coat. "Hello? Ah, Harrison, good to see you again," Professor Birch greeted one of his most successful pupils.

"Hello to you too Professor, how's it going over there in Hoenn?" Harrison asked warmly.

"Ah, it's been nice, a good time of the year here. Anyway, what's the call for?" Birch asked.

"Did you see today's matches?" Harrison asked.

"Oh, yeah, you were splendid, congratulations," Professor Birch praised.

"Well Professor, while I'm flattered that you think I did that well, you have to admit, my match was nothing compared to the surprise that appeared after mine," Harrison replied.

Professor Birch got serious. "Yes, I never imagined a Latios would be used in the Silver Conference."

"I'm impressed too, and to think a Latios is in the hands of an eleven year old!" Harrison exclaimed.

"I remember Professor Oak of Kanto calling me a month ago asking for the Pokedex entries on Latias and Latios. Since that kid is one of Oak's prospects, I assumed it was for him, but I never imagined he had asked them because a trainer had caught a Latios. I thought it

was because he had heard of a sighting or something like that," Birch said with a sigh.

"But still, how did that kid catch him!" Harrison asked.

"What I'm more impressed in is that Latios obeyed him without any hesitation! And the way they celebrated their victory... it's clear that Latios respects the boy. But how did that kid get Latios to respect him that much?" Professor Birch wondered.

"I don't know, but I'm against him and his Latios next round. My Johto team won't be enough to fight a Latios, so I'll need some Pokémon from my Hoenn team," Harrison said.

Professor Birch nodded. "A wise choice. I'll go and get your team, call me in a few hours. It might take me a while to find them, that and it's my lunch time." He held out a lunchbox to emphasize the point. Harrison sweatdropped.

"Alright Professor," Harrison said. "I'll go and plan my strategy. I have to defeat that Latios!"

"Good luck," Birch said as he hung up. Harrison got up and exited the Pokemon Center. For now he was going to his Hotel room to register his team, and then he was planning on using the remaining days to train and give his Hoenn Team a good warm-up before the match.

Today had been a nice day for our young hero, but not a nice night. Ash stirred for what was the hundredth time in his bed. He just couldn't sleep! Today's fantastic event kept replaying in his mind... how he had defeated Gary.

He looked at the alarm clock. It was eleven thirty, almost midnight. Ash sighed and stood up from his bed, careful to not wake Pikachu. He walked to the balcony and smiled at the sight of the lake, the

moon casting an almost magical glow on the surface of the water. He walked out of the hotel room quietly.

After a while, he exited the hotel, wanting to get some fresh air, walking to the lake and standing at the edge. He smiled at the breathtaking reflection of the moon's silver glow. Ash looked around and noticed that he wasn't alone. Sitting on a rock about a hundred feet away was Gary.

"Wow," Ash said to himself as he walked to where Gary was.

Gary was sitting at the edge of the lake, just thinking. He turned around and looked surprised when he saw Ash walking towards him. "Hey Ashy-boy."

"Hi Gary. Can't sleep?" Ash asked.

"No, I just came here to relax for a while," Gary responded, looking at the moon. "Congratulations on beating me. I'm impressed, you've finally surpassed me," he admitted, an almost relieved tone in his voice.

"Thanks," Ash said, a proud tone in his voice.

Gary smiled at him. "I'm just curious, how did you capture a Legendary Pokémon?"

Ash chuckled. "With friendship, Gary."

Gary blinked in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"I never battled Latios, or even intended to capture him. He decided to come with me on his own after I became his friend," Ash explained.

Gary chuckled. "Wow, not bad."

Ash smiled. "Thanks!"

"Listen Ashy-boy, go on and win the tournament, I know you can," Gary stood up and began to leave. He paused. "And thanks."

Ash looked confused. "For what?"

"By defeating me, you finally drove my annoying fangirl team away," Gary explained. Ash laughed nervously when he remember that now some silly girls were after him too. At least he knew somehow that Latias and Misty would help him. He wondered why Latias and Misty seemed so interested in keeping others girls away from him, like Macey.

"You're welcome, I guess," Ash said, still a bit uneasy.

Gary reached into his pocket and tossed something to Ash. Ash caught it and was shocked when he realized it was Gary's half of the Pokeball they had fought over all those years ago. "But why?" Ash asked, a bit taken off.

Gary smiled. "You've earned it. Consider it a good luck charm to help you win."

Ash nodded. "Thanks, Gary."

Gary walked up to him and held out his hand. Ash smiled and shook it. "Our rivalry ends, and our friendship begins," Gary announced.

"I'm happy to hear that," Ash admitted; glad to have a new (old) friend.

"You know Ash, sometimes when you win, you learn a little, or maybe nothing, but when you're defeated, you always learn a lot. When you defeated me, I learned so much. I saw the errors in my ways. Thanks a lot," Gary said, turning around. "Good luck with the rest of the Silver Conference."

Ash smiled and nodded. For some reason, now he felt sleepy. He walked back to his hotel room, slipped into bed, and fell asleep, that

last image of Gary walking away by himself in the moonlight flickering through his mind.

Chapter 16 has finished! Again, sorry for the delay...

Now, **REVIEW** please! =D Hehehe

Also, I didn't mention last chapter, but this fanfic has reached 100,000 words! WooHoo!

Until next chapter! What will Harrison use against Ash? He knows he's against a Legendary... but how will he fight Latios' powers? Find out later!

The Battle Begins!

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: Chapter 17 is here! Yay! Enjoy it!

"And here we are again. Ready for another day of training?" Ash asked his Pokémon. Ash and Brock had arrived at the same clearing they'd used for training for the entire Silver Conference.

" Yeah," Latios answered. Pikachu and Latias nodded. Bianca, Misty and Delia had gone shopping and decided to leave the training to Brock and Ash, who saw no harm in this and let them go, though Ash questioned once again why women liked shopping. It was now the day after Ash's victory over Gary, so they had still three days left to train.

Ash grabbed four Pokeballs and released the rest of the team he had chosen to fight Harrison. Bayleef, Snorlax, Squirtle and Charizard appeared in the clearing with flashes of light. "Hi everyone!" Ash greeted. All the Pokémon returned the salutation. Ash walked closer to Squirtle. "So, How's everyone at the lab?"

"Very good, it was nice to see them again," the Water-Type replied. Since he was under Ash's care for now, he used the opportunity to see his old teammates again before he returned to the Squirtle Squad.

"How's Larvitar?" Ash asked, concern in his voice. "I hope he's okay without me."

Squirtle smiled. "The kid's fine. He was very nervous at first, but being separated from you seems to have made him a bit more confident and less dependent on you," Squirtle explained.

Both Ash and Latias sighed in relief. "That's good to hear," Ash remarked.

Squirtle laughed. "Phanpy's been helping him get to know everyone, he's become a close friend to Larvitar."

"I guess I'll thank him the next time I see them," Ash said proudly, glad that Larvitar was finally opening up thanks to his surrogate son. "Anyway, thanks to everyone who helped in the battle against Gary. We won, and I'm very proud of all of you!"

Ash's Pokémon smiled. "Thanks!" Bayleef squealed happily.

"So, who's our next opponent?" Charizard asked eagerly. "I hope it's someone strong."

"Well, our next opponent is from a place called Hoenn, so he has lots of strong Pokémon unlike any we've ever seen before," Ash explained.

Charizard grinned. "That sounds good."

"Anyway, we'll do some training until the next match comes up. Brock will help out there," Ash informed, motioning over to Brock.

"While Latias and Latios learn Ice Beam, the rest of you should just spar with each other. Snorlax and Bayleef will fight Charizard and Pikachu will fight Squirtle," Brock suggested.

"No! I want to fight Latios!" Charizard shouted at Brock. Latios sighed.

Brock chuckled nervously. "I can't understand you."

"He wants to fight Latios, again!" Ash translated. "Sorry Charizard, but Latios has a new attack to learn. Maybe later."

"I want to fight him now! Snorlax is a bit slow and I've already fought him, and Bayleef... please, a Grass-Type? You've got to be kidding me," Charizard whined.

An angry look flashed across Bayleef's face as a vein of irritation appeared on her forehead. "What did you just say!" Before Charizard could reply, she extended a Vine Whip and smacked him on the head, knocking him back. She smirked and gave a satisfied nod.

Charizard rubbed the top of his head. "You know I hate it when you do that!"

"All the more reason to keep doing it," Bayleef countered, giggling.

"Okay that's it, I'm fighting you," Charizard snarled, glaring at Bayleef.

She laughed. "Bring it on!" She turned backwards to look at Snorlax, who was miraculously awake. "Let's go!" Snorlax nodded and walked to a different area of the clearing, while Bayleef attacked the already airborne Charizard with a flurry of Razor Leaves.

Pikachu and Squirtle shrugged. They moved to a different location to spar with each other, leaving Latias and Latios with Ash and Brock. "So, *what are we going to do?*" Latias asked.

"Well, according to my book, Ice Beam is learned better in a cold environment if the Pokémon is not of the Water or Ice-Type," Brock explained. He held out a Pokeball. "Thankfully Misty left me her Politoed so we can make that cold setting with its own Ice Beam."

Latias and Latios groaned. "*We hate Ice,*" Latios telepathed flatly.

Brock laughed. "No pain, no gain."

" *Good point...*" Latios admitted grudgingly.

" *Then why hasn't Brock gained anything from the pain we've given him?*" Latias quietly asked.

" *I have no idea,*" Latios replied.

"Okay," Brock began. "After we have the cold setting, you'll do breathing exercises while trying to focus the cold to your mouth and fire it."

Both eon dragons nodded. "*Alright,*" Latias telepathed.

Brock threw the Pokeball, releasing Politoed. Brock looked around and noticed the small river that ran through the clearing. "Politoed, please freeze that river," he commanded. Politoed opened its mouth and released a beam of blue freezing energy, easily freezing the river.

"Latias and Latios, move over the river and hover as close to it as possible," Brock instructed.

Latias and Latios nodded and floated to the frozen river, hovering closer to the surface. Latias shivered. "*Okay, what now?*"

"Now, start to inhale and exhale in a relaxed manner. When you think you're ready, concentrate the cold in your mouth and let it out," Brock instructed.

Both eon dragons nodded and relaxed, closing their eyes. They began to breathe deeply, suppressing the occasional shiver from the cold. Latios was the first to try. He concentrated as much as he could and tried to release the cold from his body... and only released a small icy breath. Latias tried and the same thing happened. "This is going to be hard," Latios deadpanned.

"I agree," Latias replied. Both dragons concentrated again and continued.

Meanwhile, Pikachu moved very quickly around the clearing with his Agility, but even so, Squirtle's very precise Water Guns were nearly impossible to dodge. Pikachu tried to fire a Thunderbolt, but his aim was off because he was too busy dodging the Water Guns.

"You're good!" Pikachu commented as he made another quick turn, barely evading the Water Gun that had just been fired at him. "But I'm better!" He used Quick Attack and charged directly for Squirtle. Just as Pikachu had predicted, Squirtle spat a Water Gun directly at him, but Pikachu used an Iron Tail to jump over it. He spun in midair, directing the Iron Tail at Squirtle.

"You need to be faster than that," Squirtle replied smugly as he withdrew into his shell and used Hydro Pump, turning into a spinning waterspout, easily knocking Pikachu away and blasting him into a tree with a Water Gun.

Meanwhile, Charizard was actually having trouble dealing with Snorlax and Bayleef, mainly because Snorlax would always shield Bayleef from his attacks so she could counterattack safely. This certainly was an interesting challenge, but Charizard was more than confident that he could prevail nonetheless.

The group kept training, a usual thing for them by now. By noon, Latias and Latios had made some progress with Ice Beam. They could now create the freezing energy, but still lacked the power to actually make it into a beam.

Surprisingly, Squirtle defeated Pikachu. He used a good strategy to tire the mouse out, mainly by shooting Water Guns until Pikachu got tired of running around. Charizard defeated Bayleef and Snorlax. When Snorlax was finally knocked out, Charizard politely asked Bayleef to admit her defeat. She reluctantly agreed, knowing that fighting a Fire and Flying-Type was a very bad idea for a Grass-Type like her.

After they finished they returned to Silver Town, Latios was careful and warned Ash every time he sensed a fangirl or news crew nearby

so Ash could hide until the danger passed. Aside from this, the walk back to the hotel was rather uneventful.

Meanwhile, in the training fields of Silver Town, Harrison nodded in approval at his team. Normally the fields were rather full, but with only eight trainers remaining in the tournament, they were now rather empty.

"Very good all of you. It seems that none of you has lost strength. I'm glad that you're all in your best shape," Harrison remarked. His Hoenn Pokémon Team nodded happily, all of them glad to see their trainer and friend once more. "Listen, The next battle we're having will be extremely hard. While the opposing trainer is just a kid, his Pokémon team is impressive, especially since it includes a Latios," Harrison explained. All of his Pokémon gasped.

"While fighting a Legendary will be very hard, I trust that you will all do your best and aid me in the upcoming match," Harrison told them proudly. He grabbed four Pokéballs and returned four Pokémon, leaving out two. He turned to one of the remaining two, a rather small Pokémon. "You are my key to defeating Latios. As much as I saw of him in his last battle, Latios can't defeat you no matter what," Harrison said, a smile tugging at his lips. The Pokémon in question gave a curt nod from the air it was floating in. "Return," Harrison muttered while holding out a Pokéball. A red beam shot from the Pokéball and recalled the Pokémon.

Harrison looked at the last Pokémon that he left out. Said Pokémon was at least five times bigger than Harrison. "You are the strongest Pokémon I have ever owned. I'm proud of you and I trust in your aid in the upcoming match." The Pokémon took a small step forward and roared triumphantly into the air. Harrison smiled and patted the Pokémon. "Seems you're eager for a nice battle. The last time you had a tough fight was in last year's Hoenn League. This time we're ready to finally win a tournament."

The Pokémon nodded as Harrison returned it to his Pokeball. "We'll train for the remaining days to get ready. Ash Ketchum, you are going to be the toughest challenge I have ever faced."

Three days passed rather quickly, especially when you were about to fight a trainer that had so many Pokémon you didn't know anything about and if you trained continuously all day. Being the most experienced of the siblings, Latios managed to learn Ice Beam after training so hard in the icy terrain created by Politoed's own Ice Beam. Latias was almost finished learning it, all she needed was to add the force necessary to expel the freezing energy.

"Almost there!" Ash shouted excitedly as the usual group walked to the Silver Stadium. Ash looked like he had a sugar high.

"Patience!" Misty yelled in exasperation. This did little to make the cap-wearing trainer any less excited.

"Let him enjoy this, he's one match away from being in the top four of the Silver Conference," Latias chided, a smile on her face at seeing Ash so cheerful, though no one saw it because she was invisible.

"See Misty! You should listen to her!" Ash said happily. Misty growled but made no further comment. "So, do you think I can win?" Ash asked eagerly.

"No," Misty replied instantly. Ash sweatdropped.

"You'll win," Latias reassured him. *"My brother will make sure you do."*

"Yeah, Latios will beat up anything that Hoenn Guy has," Bianca agreed.

"And I get to see lots of new Pokémon too!" Ash commented, that being the second reason he was so excited. He paused. "Hey Brock,

after I win the Silver Conference, do you think I could travel to Hoenn?"

"Through I'm not entirely sure about the 'win the Silver Conference' part, yes, I do. It would be a good place to continue your journey," Brock answered.

"Maybe you could use your match against Harrison to decide," Misty suggested. "You'll get a peek at some Hoenn Pokémon during the match anyways."

"Yeah, that's a good idea," Ash agreed.

"Hello!" A familiar girl squealed in front of Ash, making leap in alarm.

"Err... Macey?" Ash replied in confusion. Misty and Latias' eye twitched in annoyance.

Latios grinned, expecting a nice show. *"Pikachu, I bet you my dinner tonight that Latias will scare Macey away or have Ash go somewhere else,"* the eon Pokémon telepathed exclusively to the electric mouse.

Pikachu grinned. *'I bet my dinner too that it will be Misty who drives Macey or Ash away.'*

"*Deal!*" Both Pokémon thought at the same time.

"Hello? What brings you here?" Ash asked, completely oblivious to the mass of hatred that was looming behind him, namely, Latias and Misty. Macey was too focused on her object of affections to notice.

"I just wanted to ask you on out that date I couldn't finish asking you properly for last time, maybe tonight after your battle? I sure you'll win," Macey stated, a dreamy look in her eyes. This time Brock remained perfectly calm because he had resigned himself to Ash being *far* more successful in his love life than he could ever hope to be.

This time Ash knew what a date was because Latias had explained it to him. "Well," Ash started nervously. "I don't know... I always enjoy dinner with my friends and Pokémon."

"Come on! It'll be fun!" Macey insisted.

"Sorry, but Ash is busy right now, he has to prepare for his battle and can't have any interruptions!" Misty shouted quickly, pushing Ash in the direction of the stadium.

"Hey!" Macey shouted. "Not you again!" *'Through I have to admit this time she did sound like a coach...'* she thought.

Latios' eyes widened as he got worried. Pikachu was winning the bet... And he could see Pikachu's toothy grin. *"You still haven't won!"* Latios bellowed. Pikachu chuckled.

"Oh no, I'll leave him alone once he says yes!" Macey replied quickly. With a sprint she caught up to Misty and Ash.

Misty turned around. "Sorry, but no!" Misty yelled. Both girls glared at each other.

Latias grinned and flew beside Ash. She nudged him slightly. *"You know, your match is up soon, you'd better hurry up! You don't want a silly girl stalking you."*

"Right!" Ash paused. "Why do those girls stalk me?"

"I'll explain in a minute," Latias telepathed, nudging him in the direction of the stadium.

Ash turned and began walking to the stadium. "Thanks!"

Pikachu groaned. He had a feeling as to why Ash had begun walking to the stadium, and he could literally feel Latios' smirk on his back.

"Hey Ash, wait up!" Brock shouted as the group ran after him.

"Later Macey," Misty said.

"W-Wait up!" Macey yelled... and tripped on a conveniently placed rock. Latias started giggling.

Latios sighed, but at least he had won the bet. Pikachu whimpered on Ash's shoulder. *'Latios... you'll let me eat a bit won't you?'* Pikachu thought.

" I think I'll be extra hungry for tonight, so the double fill might be good for me, what a nice bet," Latios telepathed, with a cruel chuckle. Pikachu sank on Ash's shoulder. *"And I'm not letting you eat ketchup in a year."*

Pikachu had to put his paws on his mouth to stop the terrified shriek that almost escaped. *'Anything but that!'*

Latios laughed. *"I'm just kidding."* Pikachu sighed in relief.

" A bet? What are you two talking about?" Latias asked.

Latios chuckled. *"Nothing, dear sis."*

"So, why do all those girls you call 'fangirls' want me as a boyfriend?" Ash asked, glad that he remembered the concept of boyfriend for once.

"Well..." Misty began.

" Well Ash," Latias began, beating Misty to the answer. *"The just want you as a boyfriend because they only see what you have, like Latios for example. They're impressed that you have a Legendary Pokémon, or they like the fact that you are a strong trainer. The reason fangirls aren't appreciated is because they think its love they feel for someone while all they really have is nothing but a silly crush. A true girlfriend would be one that cares for your feelings and for you sincerely, as well as knows you perfectly, and, most importantly, feels true love for you."* Latias smiled to herself as she finished. *'Someone like me...'* she thought to herself dreamily.

' *Someone like me...* ' Misty thought dreamily the very second Latias finished. She paused and shook her head in denial. *'What am I thinking? Get a hold of yourself Misty!'*

Everyone paused for a few seconds. It was a good thing that Latias was invisible or else everyone would have stared at her like she was an alien . *"I heard that!"* Latias telepathed exclusively to Misty. She jumped in surprised and blushed a little.

" I heard that!" Latios yelled in Latias' mind. She gave a small start in surprise and blushed.

Bianca was the first to recover. "Wow Latias that was very accurate. Someone woke up today feeling a little philosophical."

Latias laughed nervously. "Thanks Latias, that clears things a bit," Ash said, still sorting out a few of the things Latias had said.

Thankfully, the group was saved from the awkward moment by the fact that they were already very close to the stadium and it was starting to get full. Ash arrived at the access tunnel to enter the arena and was surprised to see Harrison there. Harrison turned to meet him. "Ah, well, well, well. Hello Ash, I'm Harrison, your next opponent." Harrison held out his had.

Ash grinned and shook it. "Hello, I'm Ash Ketchum! Nice to meet you."

"Likewise, let's have a great battle," Harrison said.

Ash nodded. "I'm eager to see what kinds of Pokémon you have. What's the Hoenn region like?"

Harrison was a bit surprised that this kid was acting so kindly and carefree around someone who was his future opponent. Harrison had to admit, there was a very friendly feeling around the boy. The question Harrison had been asking himself all this time about how this eleven year old could catch a Legendary and also, why the

Latos respected him so much, like Birch had implied, had just been answered, without him needing to ask about it. Harrison smiled.

"Well, it's a very wonderful region. It's a very special place, you can find a lot of Pokémon that are only native to there," Harrison replied.

Ash smiled. "Thanks!"

Harrison nodded. "No problem." He turned and held out his Pokedex. The guard let him pass.

"Wow, the Hoenn Region sounds cool, I'm definitely going there!" Ash commented.

Brock smiled. "It's a good choice Ash."

"Okay," Ash replied as he took out his Pokedex and showed it to the guard. The guard allowed him to pass, as well as his friends.

Ash was surprised when the second he entered the arena the crowd started cheering loudly. *"Guess my appearance last battle really made you very famous Ash,"* Latios commented, chuckling at Ash's nervous expression.

"Both trainers have entered the field!" the ever-present MC announced, causing the crowd to cheer even louder as Ash walked to the green box and Harrison was already waiting in the red.

"This will be a full battle of six on six Pokémon, with substitutions allowed for both sides. A short five minute break will be taken after either trainer has lost three of their Pokémon!" the Referee announced.

The MC began his introduction of the match. "This match should prove to be interesting. The Trainer named Harrison is from Littleroot Town of Hoenn, so we should expect lots of interesting Hoenn-only Pokémon, more now than the previous battles, considering that we all know the legendary Pokémon under Ash's command!" Harrison and Ash stared at each other as the crowd cheered some more.

"What will Harrison do to fight Latios, Ash's unique Pokémon?" the MC continued. "Now, let's decide the field for the match!"

On the screen, Harrison and Ash's image appeared. Beneath them were six unused slots for their Pokémon. On the center of the screen, a wheel appeared divided in four segments, each representing a battlefield: Water, Rock, Grass and Ice.

The segments flashed in rapid circles until slowing down gradually to stop on the segment with a rock on it. "And this match will be fought on a Rock battlefield!" the MC announced.

The neutral field separated from the rest of the arena floor and started sinking into the earth until it split in half and was pulled sideways; revealing a new battlefield underneath that was slowly lifted up until it was at ground level. The field was made of a hard stone floor with numerous rocks sprouting from the ground, making it hard to maneuver. "How will this battlefield affect the trainers?" The MC wondered. "Now, let's see who moves first!"

The field-choosing wheel was replaced by another one, divided into red and green segments. As before, a light flashed rapidly across them until it slowed down and stopped on a green segment, meaning that Ash went first. "And Ash Ketchum has the first move!" the MC bellowed.

In the stands, Professor Oak chuckled. "Getting the first move is bad for Ash."

"Yeah," Gary agreed. "He doesn't know what his opponent has. But I'm certain Ashy-boy will be fine, though."

Delia nodded proudly as she readied her camera. "This will be a most entertaining match."

Professor Elm nodded eagerly. "And we get to see Latios again!" Both Elm and Oak giggled, and the others stared at them.

Ash hummed in thought. *'I don't know what he'll use, so I better pick the Pokémon that should adapt the best to anything Harrison sends at me. I need the experience,'* Ash thought to himself. "Pikachu! I choose you!"

Pikachu nodded and entered the field as his icon appeared on the screen. "And Ash Ketchum has started with his Pikachu! Don't let appearances deceive you folks, as we saw last battle, this rodent is made of tough material!" the MC commented. Pikachu nodded proudly.

Harrison smirked as he grabbed a pokeball. "Go, Kecleon!" A small green bipedal lizard Pokémon appeared, a zigzagging red line adorning its chest. Kecleon's icon appeared on the large screen.

"Wow, doesn't look too tough," Ash commented.

"Don't let appearances fool you," Latios warned.

The Referee raised both Flags. "Kecleon against Pikachu, Harrison versus Ash, Quarter Finals of the Silver Conference, BEGIN!"

Giovanni was feeling pleased today. He had been informed a few hours ago that his newest implement for world domination was finished. He had been waiting a long time for this. He was now walking to Team Rocket's main laboratory. After walking for a few minutes he arrived at the main access door and pressed a password into a keypad at the side of the door. The door opened and he stepped in. He was immediately greeted by the entire scientific crew of Team Rocket, who saluted as he entered.

Professors Namba and Sebastian stepped forward. "Greetings, Master Giovanni," Professor Sebastian greeted him formally.

"Greetings as well, Master Giovanni," Professor Namba said as well.

"Hmm, Professors Sebastian and Napla-" Giovanni started.

"It's Namba!" Professor Namba bellowed, clearly irritated.

"I don't care what your name is," Giovanni replied flatly. "As I was saying, I received information stating that you have finished the project."

"That is correct," Professor Sebastian affirmed with a curt nod.

"Come this way please," Professor Namba offered as he and Sebastian turned and walked to a glass box with several cables attached to it at the end of the lab. The glass container wasn't that big, it was barely two feet wide.

"Here it is," Professor Sebastian said proudly.

Giovanni looked closer, almost feeling a chill when he saw the small object inside, it radiated such malice that even Giovanni found himself fidgeting slightly. He turned to the Professors. "Can it be mass-produced?" Giovanni asked.

"Sadly, No," Professor Namba answered.

"Due to the components and materials required, they are extremely expensive to make. With Team Rocket's current funds, only another four can be produced without endangering our budget," Professor Sebastian continued.

"Which gives us a total of five, well. I think that should be enough," Giovanni muttered. "They are the perfect weapons, after all."

"If you'll excuse me," Professor Namba started. "I think we have been calling them 'weapons' mistakenly. They are not the weapon, it's more like with it we can create the perfect weapons."

"I agree," Professor Sebastian said. "They are the means to create the ultimate weapons, not the weapons themselves."

"I fail to see the distinction. I want a full report on their capabilities and usage on my desk by the time I get back to my office, got it?"

Giovanni stated.

Both Prof. Namba and Sebastian nodded quickly. "Yes, Boss," both said at the same time.

Giovanni nodded. "I want the other four to be produced. When will they be finished?"

"Mmm, I estimate in two weeks to a month," Professor Namba Replied.

"Alright. When they are finished, announce it to me immediately so I can hold a meeting to state what is to be done with them. In the meantime, cancel all of Team Rocket's current missions, I want all available agents ready to begin operations using your creation," Giovanni instructed.

"Understood!" Both Professors saluted.

Giovanni nodded and turned around, heading to the exit of the lab. *'Many of my most recent plans have failed. This time, however, there will be no mistakes. Everything will be mine!'*

"It seems we impressed the boss with this," Professor Sebastian noted, pointing to the small object inside the glass box.

"I agree," Professor Namba noted. "Let's get everything ready, Sebastian. We must make another four."

Professor Sebastian nodded. "True, we must get back to work, Mamba-"

"Its Namba!" Professor Namba bellowed.

"Sorry, my mistake," Prof. Sebastian replied. He grinned sinisterly. "Let's begin."

And Chapter 17: Done! Hope you all enjoyed it, Next chapter will be a blast for you all! That I promise! Finally Harrison's full team will be revealed!

And Please Leave A **REVIEW** ! Wheeee!

A Great Plan: Defeating Latios!

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: And here is chapter 18! Enjoy! =D

The stadium watched intently as the two trainers stared at each other, ready for the battle that was about to take place. "Popcorn!" Jessie shouted, holding a rather large tray filled with numerous popcorn bags.

"Lemonade, on the double!" James shouted, holding a tray filled with lemonade glasses. Behind them was Meowth, sitting on the small sales cart carrying most of the food they were selling, counting money.

On the field, looks of utter concentration were etched on Harrison and Ash's face., Kecleon and Pikachu were intently staring at each other, waiting for the battle to begin.

The referee raised both flags. "Kecleon against Pikachu, Harrison versus Ash, Quarter Finals of the Silver Conference. BEGIN!"

"Kecleon, use Psybeam!" Harrison shouted, taking the initiative. Kecleon opened its mouth and fired a zigzagging multi-colored beam at Pikachu.

"Pikachu, dodge it!" Ash shouted. Pikachu nodded and jumped, using one of the rocks as a stepping-stone to gain altitude, causing the Psybeam to pass just below him.

"Ash, be careful, while Kecleon isn't exactly a strong Pokémon, it can be a bit tricky to fight. Like us, it can turn invisible by camouflaging, and its type changes to the type of the last attack that was used on it," Latias telepathed.

Ash frowned. 'Its type changes to the same one as the last attack that was used on it?'

"Kecleon, use Psybeam again!" Harrison commanded. Kecleon fired another multi-colored beam of psychic energy at Pikachu.

"Pikachu, counter with Thunderbolt!" Ash ordered. Pikachu's cheeks crackled as a massive surge of electricity was fired at the incoming Psybeam. Both attacks collided and clashed in a stalemate for several seconds until Pikachu's electricity started gaining the upper hand, slowly pushing the Psybeam back until it was destroyed. The Color Swap Pokémon cried in pain as several hundred volts of electricity coursed through its body. Even so, it refused to go down.

"What a powerful electric shock!" the MC commented.

"Quick, use Faint Attack!" Harrison ordered. Kecleon suddenly disappeared, much to Ash and Pikachu's astonishment. A split second later, Kecleon reappeared and slammed into Pikachu rather hard, sending the Electric-Type crashing into a rock.

"Pikachu, use Thunder!" Ash shouted. Pikachu quickly recovered and prepared to launch a powerful electric blast at the Color Swap Pokémon.

"Kecleon, use Sucker Punch!" Harrison ordered quickly. With amazing speed, Kecleon reached Pikachu before the Electric-Type could start the Thunder attack, delivering a rather hard hit that sent him stumbling back.

"And with surprising speed, Kecleon lands an attack first!" the MC boomed.

"Hey, what gives!" Ash shouted in confusion. "I attacked first!"

" *Sucker Punch is an attack that makes the user hit first. It's an increased priority move, like Quick Attack,*" Latios explained.

"Pikachu, use Quick Attack!" Ash commanded, hoping to counter Sucker Punch. Pikachu quickly darted forward with amazing speed, becoming a blur.

"Kecleon, turn invisible!" Harrison ordered. Kecleon nodded and quickly changed its skin colors to match his surroundings, blending into the landscape save for the zigzagged line on its chest.

"Aww, how am I going to take a decent picture?" Delia complained as she lowered her camera. Professors Elm and Oak chuckled.

Ash quickly noted Kecleon's weakness, as did Pikachu. "Keep going Pikachu!" Ash shouted. Pikachu grinned and lunged at the Kecleon, who hadn't moved since blending into the landscape.

"Kecleon, quick, dodge!" Harrison ordered. Not wasting a second, the chameleon-like Pokémon leaped to the side and hid between some rocks, getting the zigzag line out of Ash's view. "Now, use lick!" Harrison shouted. Kecleon slid its insanely long tongue out of its mouth and sent the appendage directly at Pikachu. The Electric-Type had no time to react as he was licked in the cheek. Kecleon's saliva made Pikachu's fur stand on end and a dizzy sensation washed over him, making stumble about randomly.

"And Pikachu is dizzy after taking that lick attack. Ew!" the MC commented in a disgusted tone.

"Pikachu, snap out of it!" Ash shouted frantically, but to no avail.

"Kecleon, we have it now! Use Psybeam!" Harrison ordered. Kecleon undid its camouflage and fired another multi-colored beam at Pikachu, hitting the Electric-Type and slamming him into a rock

again. However, the force of the Psybeam was enough to snap Pikachu back into reality.

"Ugh, that was gross!" Pikachu shouted, shaking himself to get rid of the phantom feeling of the lick. Ash sweatdropped.

"Kecleon, use Lick again!" Harrison ordered. Pikachu got a terrified look on his face as Kecleon fired its long tongue at the Electric-Type yet again.

"Catch it!" Ash shouted.

"Are you kidding!" Pikachu replied, completely grossed out.

"Just do it!" Ash ordered. Pikachu quickly readied himself and caught the tongue between his paws before it could hit him, a shiver went down his spine at the sensation of touching it.

"Wow, impressive folks! Pikachu has caught Kecleon by the tongue, now Kecleon is at Pikachu's mercy!" the MC bellowed.

"Thunder!" Ash shouted.

Pikachu smirked as his cheeks crackled violently. A few seconds later a huge electrical blast engulfed Pikachu. Kecleon shrieked as he was shocked as well through its tongue. The attack died soon after as Pikachu released the Color Swap Pokémon's tongue and immediately rubbed the paw on a rock to get rid of the sticky saliva.

" *Pikachu, you'll need a bath after this...* " Latios commented flatly.

"Yeah, this thing doesn't come out easily, my fur is all sticky," the mouse complained, Ash sweatdropped, suppressing a nervous laugh.

Ash returned his sight to the field. "What!" Pikachu turned and was amazed to see the Kecleon standing up without any injuries. "How did it survive Pikachu's Thunder!" Ash wondered.

" Simple Ash, remember that before this Thunder attack, the last attack Kecleon took was Pikachu's Thunderbolt, so Kecleon has been an Electric-Type all this time, lessening the damage from Thunder," Latios clarified.

Ash growled. *'I never expected that ability to be so effective. I need to change Kecleon's type!'*

"Ready for more?" Harrison asked with a smirk.

"Always! That Kecleon's good, but so is Pikachu!" Ash replied.

"Pikachu, use Iron Tail!" *'That will make Kecleon a Steel-Type, which would make Electric-Type attacks effective again'* Ash thought as his plan came into place. He paused. *"If this is Harrison's first Hoenn Pokémon, then I wonder what the rest will be like?"*

Latias giggled. *"Don't worry Ash, you can prevail. Just think clearly and don't let his Pokémon intimidate you."* Ash smiled and nodded in gratitude.

Pikachu's tail shined a bright white as he charged forward, heading toward the waiting Color Swap Pokémon. *'He's probably trying to change Kecleon's type to make electric attacks effective again, I can't allow that!'* Harrison thought. "Kecleon, use Shadow Sneak!"

"Shadow what!" Ash repeated incredulously. Kecleon's shadows drifted forward at amazing speeds. Before reaching Pikachu, the shadow somehow leaped into the air and struck Pikachu in the chest, hurling him back. He panted in tiredness.

"Pikachu seems tired," the MC noted. "This Kecleon is tough!" The crowd cheered.

"This is bad," Ash muttered. "He knows that I want to change Kecleon's type, but he's stopping me from doing so." He paused. "Pikachu, return!"

Pikachu looked at Ash in surprise, but complied and ran back to him. The color around Pikachu's icon faded, but the image remained in place. "And Ash Ketchum has decided to rest Pikachu. What will Ash's next choice be?" the MC wondered.

"Bayleef, I choose you!" Ash shouted while throwing a Pokeball. In a bright flash of light Bayleef appeared. Up on the screen, Bayleef's icon appeared as well.

"And Ash's next choice is his Bayleef! How will the Grass-Type deal with this tricky Pokémon?" the MC wondered.

" *Bayleef? Why Bayleef?*" Latias wondered. *"Don't you need a fast Pokémon to counter Kecleon?"*

' My problem is that Kecleon does m any things to avoid being attacked, and when I do manage to land a hit, it's not very effective. I can fix that with Bayleef, and besides, Harrison is probably expecting another fast Pokémon,' Ash explained. Latias and Latios stared intently at the field, wondering what Ash's plan was. They could simply read his thoughts to know it, but where was the fun in that?

"I'm counting on you Bayleef!" Ash shouted enthusiastically. Bayleef gave an eager nod and readied herself, not wanting to let down the object of her affections.

"Kecleon, turn invisible and run around! Bayleefs aren't fast Pokémon!" Harrison instructed. Kecleon camouflaged itself and began to run around. "Then use lick!"

Ash smirked. "That's what I knew you'd do." Harrison gave Ash a confused look. Ash closed his eyes and began to sense Kecleon's movements. "Bayleef, tangle Kecleon up with your Vine Whip! It's on your left!"

Bayleef shot a vine to her left. Kecleon tripped and reappeared, much to Harrison's disbelief. Bayleef wrapped the vine around Kecleon's legs to hold it in place. *'Now Kecleon is a Grass-Type*

because it was hit with Vine Whip,' Ash thought. "Bayleef, use Headbutt!"

Bayleef nodded and charged at the tangled-up Kecleon. "Free yourself!" Harrison shouted. Kecleon couldn't free himself in time and was rammed by Bayleef's attack, her superior physical strength easily sending it flying and crashing into a rock.

"Wow, what a hard hit!" the MC commented. The crowd cheered.

' Now Kecleon is a Normal-Type,' Ash thought. "Finish this with Solar Beam!" Ash shouted. Bayleef nodded and absorbed sunlight through her neck leaves as they started shining brightly.

"Kecleon, move out of the way!" Harrison shouted frantically. Kecleon stood up and got ready to move away, until something tugged at its leg. The Kecleon look down in horror as it realized that even after the Headbutt attack, Bayleef still hadn't released its legs. Bayleef fired the Solar Beam as Kecleon tried to free itself desperately. The blast struck Kecleon in the chest, creating a bright explosion. Once the blast died down, Kecleon was lying face up, its eyes turned to swirls.

"Kecleon is unable to battle!" the referee called. Up on the screen, Kecleon's icon faded completely. Harrison returned the defeated Pokémon.

"What a great combination!" the MC commented excitedly. The crowd cheered again, impressed with how the battle was going so far.

" That was an interesting idea," Latios commented.

' Thanks,' Ash replied.

"Not bad Ash!" Brock called from the bench. "That's one down!" Politoed and Togepi began cheering happily for Ash, though only Ash could understand them.

Misty smiled. "Good luck Ash! You're doing great! Show him that Hoenn Pokémon won't be enough to beat you!"

Ash smiled at his friend's cheers and sweatdropped when he saw that Bianca was furiously scribbling in her sketchbook, probably drawing something.

Harrison grabbed his next Pokeball. "Swellow, Go!" Harrison threw the Pokeball and a medium sized blue and red feathered bird-like Pokémon appeared, chirping proudly as it flew around.

"Okay, I guess that's a Flying and Normal Type right?" Ash asked.

"*Yep,*" Latios confirmed. *"Are go going to switch Bayleef out?"*

' No,' Ash answered. *' I have a good idea how to beat that Pokémon with Bayleef. Besides, Harrison will expect me to switch out. This'll surprise him,'* Ash explained.

Again, Latios and Latias wondered what Ash was planning, and like before, they chose not to peek at his thoughts to find out, mainly because if they did, they'd question the idea so much about how illogical it was that they'd get a headache, so they preferred to watch it in action instead. *"Seriously, where does Ash get all his crazy ideas!"* Latias telepathed to Latios.

" Honestly... I don't know. For now I guess we'll have to wait and find out," he answered.

"Ash seems to be planning on leaving Bayleef on the field," the MC commented, confused. "What does he have in mind?"

"Hmm, interesting," Brock noted.

"Swellow, use Quick Attack!" Harrison ordered. Swellow quickly tucked its wings close and dived towards the Grass-Type at a very fast speed.

"Bayleef, use Razor Leaf!" Ash shouted. Bayleef swung the leaf on her head and released several spinning razor-sharp leaves at the incoming Flying-Type. Swellow dodged the attack, forcing it to take to the air again and stop its dive.

"Swellow, use Wing Attack!" Harrison commanded. Swellow squawked and lunged for the Grass-Type yet again, its wings glowing a soft white.

"Bayleef, shield with a rock!" Ash shouted. Bayleef quickly got Ash's plan and hid behind a rock, forcing Swellow to stop his attack and take flight, because if it crashed against a rock at that speed, it might break a wing.

"Very clever! Bayleef has a perfect cover from Swellow's attacks!" the MC shouted.

"What!" Brock exclaimed, clearly impressed.

"You have to use the field to your advantage," Ash explained. "As long as Bayleef remains hiding by a rock, Swellow can't hit her."

"That's brilliant," Misty said in disbelief. "Good work!"

Ash smiled. "What happened to the 'you'll probably lose' part?"

Misty laughed. "Just toying with you." Ash sweatdropped.

Harrison growled slightly, he had been sure that Bayleef was going to be defeated quickly. *'He probably knows that if he uses Pikachu I'll immediately switch Swellow out...'*

"Bayleef, Razor Leaf!" Ash shouted. Bayleef stepped out from behind her cover and fired a flurry of razor sharp leaves at the airborne Swellow. The Flying-Type immediately evaded her attack.

"Swellow, quick, while Bayleef is out of its cover, use Wing Attack!" Harrison shouted. Swellow again dove as fast as it could, its wings shining.

"Bayleef, take cover again!" Ash shouted.

"Not this time! Swellow, get close and use Peck!" Harrison shouted. Swellow stopped the Wing Attack and flapped its wings quickly, stopping and landing on the rock closest to Bayleef before lunging forward.

"Bayleef, try to dodge!" Ash shouted. Bayleef began taking quick backward steps, trying her best to avoid Swellow's Pecks. A few hit her anyway, doing quite some damage considering the type disadvantage. Ash got an idea. "Quick, change to offense, use Headbutt!" Ash shouted. Knowing that Bayleef had superior weight, she should easily win a direct close combat match, and that was just what happened. She quickly stopped her back steps and charged head first at the Swellow, who was too surprised by her sudden change of tactics to react in time and was hit head on by the attack. "Use your Vine Whip to jump and use Body Slam!" Ash ordered.

Bayleef nodded and thrust her vines into the stony floor as hard as she could while leaping, resulting in her being lifted a few meters into the air. She aimed and let gravity do the rest as she came down on the Flying-Type. Harrison got a very worried expression on his face. "Swellow, get away with Quick Attack!" he ordered frantically, impressed that a *Grass-Type* of all types was giving Swellow such a hard time.

Swellow flapped its wings fast and took off with Quick Attack, evading Bayleef's Body Slam at the last second. "What an impressive display of close combat!" the MC cried. "I've never seen a *Grass-Type* deal so well with a *Flying-Type*!" The Crowd cheered.

Bayleef growled slightly, but at least she felt proud that she was so far winning against a *Flying-Type*. Would that last much longer, though? "Swellow, use Wing Attack!" Harrison ordered.

"Take cover!" Ash shouted.

Harrison hit his forehead with his palm. "Not that again..."

The Flying-Type dove toward Bayleef as she ran to hide behind a rock. Swellow growled as it prepared to change course again and fly back up. "Grab its wings with Vine Whip!" Ash ordered.

"What?" Harrison exclaimed. Bayleef extended her vines and shot them forward. Swellow gave a startled chirp and flapped frantically to get away, but was too late. The vines wrapped around the base of its wings.

"Smash him down, and then use Solar Beam!" Ash ordered. Bayleef reeled her vines in and with a powerful pull, slammed Swellow onto the floor as hard as she could. Her leaves shined brightly as they gathered power and released a mighty Solar Beam.

"This could be it, folks!" the MC announced.

"Swellow, Use Aerial Ace!" Harrison shouted. He was impressed as hell that a Grass-Type had almost beaten Swellow, but he still had a trump card left.

Ash looked confused. "Aerial what?"

Swellow smirked and with a massive display of speed, broke free of Bayleef's Vine Whip, almost seeming to disappear from the sheer speed it flew at, evading the Solar Beam in the process. The next thing that anyone could see was Swellow slamming into Bayleef so fast that Bayleef was very forcefully slammed into the same rock she had used to shield herself, shattering it completely. "Bayleef!" Ash cried.

"Now, that's what I call a perfect counterattack!" the MC shouted. The crowd cheered.

"Bayleef is unable to continue battling!" the referee called. Bayleef's icon faded from the screen, leaving with both trainers with one Pokémon down.

Ash returned the defeated Grass-Type. "You were amazing," Ash whispered to Bayleef's Pokeball. *'If I choose Pikachu again, he's going to switch Swellow out. I need someone else to defeat it,'* Ash thought. He grabbed another Pokeball. "Go, Squirtle!" he shouted, hurling the Pokeball. With a bright flash of light the shade-wearing Water-Type was released.

"And Ash has chosen his very cool Squirtle as his third Pokémon!" the MC bellowed.

Harrison hummed in thought. *'I expected him to send Pikachu. I may need Swellow for later on anyway, so I'd better switch out.'* He grabbed his Pokeball and pointed it at Swellow. "Return!" A red beam shot from the Pokeball and engulfed the Flying-Type, returning him inside the Pokeball. Up on the screen, the light around Swellow's icon disappeared.

"And Harrison has switched out Swellow. What will be his next choice?" the MC wondered.

Harrison grabbed his next Pokeball and threw it. "Go, Shiftry!" A human-sized brown Pokémon with incredibly long shaggy white hair and what seemed like leaf-made fans for hands appeared. Up on the screen, its icon formed in the third slot of Harrison's team.

"What is that?" Ash wondered. "It looks kinda weird."

"*That's a Shiftry. It's a Grass and Dark-Type. Watch out Ash, they're fast,*" Latios explained.

"Thanks," Ash whispered. "Squirtle, get ready!"

Squirtle nodded and adjusted his shades. "This should be good."

"Shiftry, use Faint Attack!" Harrison ordered. Almost immediately, Shiftry lunged forward, becoming a blurry image from the speed at which he moved, dark energy crackling around him.

"Squirtle, use Hydro Pump!" Ash shouted. Squirtle quickly tucked his limbs into his shell and spun in place, releasing a potent blast of water. Shiftry crashed against the spinning fortress of raging waters and was sent flying back. "Quickly, use Water Gun!" Ash shouted. Squirtle stopped spinning and fired a stream of pressurized water, hitting Shiftry in the chest and slamming it into a rock before Harrison could even tell him to dodge.

"That was a very fast and precise attack!" the MC noted.

"Shiftry, get in there and use Whirlwind!" Harrison shouted. Shiftry made a quick leap, propelling itself a few feet into the air. With a cry he swung his fan-like hands, sending a powerful blast of wind at Squirtle, pushing the Water-Type back as he did his best to resist the intense winds.

"Hang in there Squirtle!" Ash shouted.

Harrison smirked. "Use X-scissor!" Shiftry's leaf fans began glowing a light green tone as he charged at Squirtle. When he was in front of the turtle-like Pokémon, the Wicked Pokémon made an X-slash, hitting the Water-Type rather hard and sending him stumbling back.

"Quick, Water Gun!" Ash shouted. Squirtle quickly aimed and fired a potent Water Gun. The close distance was not enough for Shiftry to react as it was hit, sending it back.

"Both Pokémon are fighting fiercely!" the MC shouted excitedly. "So far, this battle is great!"

"Shiftry, use Seed Bomb!" Harrison shouted.

"What's that!" Ash wondered. "Squirtle, get ready!"

"Ash, Seed Bomb is a very powerful Grass-Type move, be careful!" Latias warned.

Shiftry opened its mouth as it started shinning a bright white. Several green flares were fired, raining down on the Water-Type. Ash growled a little when he saw the attack. *'Squirtle isn't fast enough to dodge that!'* he thought desperately.

"Like a rain of meteors, that attack covers a wide area! How will Squirtle dodge!" the MC wondered.

"Squirtle, use Hydro Pump!" Ash shouted.

"Right!" Squirtle agreed. He tucked his limbs inside his shell and started spinning, releasing a potent blast of water. The Seed Bomb started crashing down on the field, creating small explosions. Several of the projectiles smashed against the spinning water fortress that was Squirtle. He managed to resist the impacts, though he was still taking damage.

After the Seed Bomb attack ended, Squirtle charged forward, wanting to hit the Wicked Pokemon with his still-going Hydro Pump. "Shiftry, use Twister!" Harrison shouted. Shiftry pushed its arms forward and created a cyclone of raging winds, forcing Squirtle back and breaking his Hydro Pump. "Now, use Shadow Ball!" Shiftry joined both fans and generated an orb of shadows. He hurled it forward as it used the previous twister attack as cover, also gaining a bit more force as it continued its path towards the Water-Type.

"Squirtle, look out!" Ash shouted a bit too late. Squirtle was hit by the twister-powered up Shadow Ball, causing the compressed shadows to glide past him as the attack exploded. He was sent stumbling back until he collapsed, completely out cold.

"Squirtle is unable to continue battling!" the referee shouted. Up on the screen, Squirtle's icon faded, leaving nothing but a black silhouette. Ash returned the defeated Water-Type.

"Looks like that Shadow Ball was too much!" the MC commented.
"Ash Ketchum is down to four Pokémon!" The crowd cheered.

"Pikachu, ready to enter the battle again?" Ash asked, looking at the Electric-type with a grin.

Pikachu nodded eagerly. "Of course!" Pikachu charged back into the field. Up on the screen, Pikachu's icon was surrounded by an orange light again, indicating he was back in the battle.

"And Ash has decided to continue with Pikachu. Between these two Pokémon, we'll see a real battle of speed!" the MC bellowed over the stadium's speakers.

"So, Pikachu again eh?" Harrison questioned. "If it's a battle of speed you want, then it's a battle of speed you'll get!"

"Make sure your Pokémon can keep up!" Ash responded. "Pikachu, use Quick Attack!" Pikachu nodded and charged at the Wicked Pokémon at incredible speeds.

"Shiftry, use Twister!" Harrison shouted. Shiftry quickly moved both fan-like hands, sending a colossal cyclone of raging winds at the Electric-Type.

"Pikachu, dodge with Agility!" Ash shouted. Pikachu nodded and exerted a massive burst of speed, becoming a blur as he quickly passed besides the twister and headed toward the Grass and Dark-Type.

"And with an impressive display of speed, Pikachu evades the Twister attack!" the MC narrated. The crowd cheered loudly.

"Shiftry, quick, move with Quick Attack and then use X-Scissor!" Harrison shouted. Shiftry charged forward with Quick Attack before turning sideways and moving away, causing Pikachu to miss him. He made a sharp turn as his fans started shining a soft green.

"Pikachu, use Iron Tail!" Ash ordered. Pikachu quickly bounced off a rock and charged, his tail glowing a bright white as it hardened to steel-like properties.

Shiftry made a battle cry as it slashed both arms forward in an X-shape. Pikachu swung his tail, slamming it against Shiftry's leaf-made fans. Both Pokémon cancelled each other out, their attacks remaining locked together, Pikachu's Iron Tail stuck between the leaf fans of X-scissor.

"What a display of close combat! These two Pokémon sure are powerful!" the MC noted.

Ash smirked. "Thunder!" Pikachu smirked as his cheeks sparkled violently.

"Shiftry, use Hyper Beam!" Harrison bellowed. Shiftry opened its mouth and started gathering an orb of volatile energy mere inches away from Pikachu.

Both attacks were released at the same time. Pikachu unleashed a potent blast of electricity, engulfing both Pokémon as Shiftry fired the Hyper Beam, the extremely high-voltage electricity of Pikachu's attack causing the volatile energy making up the Hyper Beam to detonate just as it was being released by the Wicked Pokémon. The result was a massive explosion that shattered rocks and covered the field in smoke.

"Pikachu!" Ash shouted, concern clear in his voice.

"Shiftry!" Harrison shouted, equally concerned for his Pokémon.

"What a potent explosion! Shiftry and Pikachu have clashed with true power, but who will prevail!" the MC bellowed dramatically. The crowd watched intently. When the smoke cleared, both Shiftry and Pikachu were standing up, both looking completely worn out. They glared at each other and took a step forward at the same time, both wanting to continue the fight... but the tiredness of their previous battles plus this one was too much. Their feet failed as they both collapsed to the field, completely out cold.

"Both Shiftry and Pikachu are unable to continue battling!" the referee shouted, raising both flags. "Since Ash Ketchum has lost three Pokémon, a short five minute break will be taken!"

"And thus concludes the first half of the battle folks!" the MC roared over the speakers.

Harrison grabbed a Pokeball and returned Shiftry while Ash walked into the field, cradled Pikachu in his arms, and walked back to the bench where his friends were. Ash took a small glance at the screen. He had three black silhouettes while Harrison had two, plus the icon of Swellow. Ash reached the bench and handed Pikachu to Brock, who immediately took out one of his super Poke-potions. "Pikachu seems fine," Brock informed. "Nothing I can't patch up." He started to tend to the unconscious mouse.

Ash sighed in relief as he took a seat. "This battle is hard. Those Hoenn Pokémon always have something to surprise me every time I think I'm in control."

"Check this out," Bianca said as she showed Ash her sketchbook. It had a drawing of the battle between Swellow and Bayleef.

"Wow, looks nice Bianca," Ash said as he looked at the picture. "Anyway, all I have left is Snorlax, Charizard and Latios to deal with Harrison's remaining four Pokemon. This isn't going to be easy..."

Misty smiled. "Well, make sure that whoever you send in first manages to at least knock out Harrison's choice. That way you'll even the field."

" *But don't underestimate Harrison's remaining three Pokemon, plus his Swellow,*" Latios advised.

"Yeah," Ash muttered, looking across the field as Harrison sat on his bench, a thoughtful look on his face.

Meanwhile, in the stands...

"Ashy-boy is doing great holding off Harrison's Pokémon," Gary commented.

"Yeah, and I've taken lots of cool pictures!" Delia chimed.

"Elm, do you think Harrison is ready to take on Latios?" Professor Oak asked.

"I don't know," Professor Elm answered. "Latios has proven to be rather powerful." He looked at Ash's bench. "And I know he's there with Ash right now, invisible, probably with Latias as well."

Gary turned to look at him in confusion. "Latias?"

"Ah, you haven't talked to Ash recently?" Professor Elm asked.

Gary shook his head. "I just talked to him for a few minutes the night he defeated me. I haven't seen him since then. I knew he'd need time to train with his team. I didn't want to interfere."

"Well," Delia begun. "The Pokémon you fought, Latios, has a sister. Her name is Latias. She too is under Ash's care, though not captured yet."

"Wow, so Ashy-boy has two Legendary Pokémon? Now I'm even more jealous! But why doesn't she battle?" Gary wondered.

"Well, according to Ash, she dislikes battling, so she prefers to sit back and cheer Ash and Latios on," Delia answered, remembering what Ash told her when she asked the very same question.

"A Pokémon that dislikes battles?" Gary questioned. "Is that possible? Why?"

Delia turned to look at him. "Well, Ash told me that she hasn't told him why, all she said is that she dislikes to battle."

"Okay," Gary replied. He turned to look back at the field. "Good luck Ash..."

In another part of the stands, Team Rocket was watching. "Nice battle," James commented.

"Yeah," Meowth agreed.

"Just more motivation to capture the twerp's Pokémon!" Jessie shouted excitedly. Some people stared at her oddly.

"Stop saying weird things and give me my popcorn!" someone shouted.

"Team Rocket selling popcorn at the speed of light!" All three members shouted as they started selling their products back to the crowd.

The Referee took a small glance at his watch. "The five minute rest is now over. Both trainers please step back to the field!"

Ash smirked and stood up, Harrison doing the same. Both walked back to their respective trainer boxes. "Good luck Ash! Win this one!" Misty shouted.

"You can do it Ash, you can win!" Bianca cheered. "You too Latios!"

" *Thanks,*" Latios telepathed back in gratitude.

"Good luck!" Brock cheered as well. Pikachu stirred in Brock's lap as he woke up.

"Ouch, remind me not to detonate a Hyper Beam in my face next time..." Pikachu grumbled. He looked around. "Did I miss anything?"

Brock sweatdropped. "I can't understand you... damn, Ash's ability is making me jealous."

Pikachu chuckled and walked to where Ash was, jumping to his shoulder. "Sorry I lost," Pikachu apologized in a sad tone.

"It's okay," Ash replied softly, rubbing the Electric-Type behind the ear gently, earning a small squeal of delight. "You were great anyway."

"The Battle seems ready to begin!" the MC started. "The second half of what has been a truly exciting match! Which trainer will prevail? The most surprising trainer of the Silver Conference so far, Ash? Or the more experienced Harrison of the Hoenn Region? Remember folks, the winner of this match goes to the top 4. On an interesting note, if Ash Ketchum advances to the Semi-finals, he would be the youngest trainer ever to make it to the top four of any league at the age of eleven years and ten months old!" That was a very surprising feat, as the top four of the Leagues were usually reached by stronger and more experienced trainers, not rookies.

"Both trainers continue the battle!" the Referee shouted.

Harrison grabbed a Pokeball as he made the first move. "Go, Blaziken!" he shouted as a vaguely humanoid red and cream-feathered Pokémon was released. Blaziken gave a mighty roar as its wrists ignited. Up on the screen, Blaziken appeared in the fourth slot of Harrison's Pokémon.

"And Harrison's next Pokémon is a Blaziken. Things are getting interesting!" the MC shouted. The crowd cheered excitedly.

"Wow, what's that?" Ash wondered.

"*I believe we are looking at Harrison's starter Pokémon, a Blaziken,*" Latias answered.

"That's one of the starter Pokémon of Hoenn?" Ash asked.

"*It's the fully evolved form of one, a small Pokémon called Torchic,*" Latias answered.

"Okay. Anything I should know?" Ash asked.

" Yes. *Blaziken are strong contenders. They're Fire and Fighting-Types, can leap very high in the air, and deliver powerful kicks,*" Latios said.

' *Hmm, Fire and Fighting-Type... Snorlax would be weak against it, Latios would have a good advantage, but if I send Latios in, Harrison will probably switch out immediately. That leaves me with one choice...*' Ash thought as he grabbed his next Pokeball. "Charizard, I choose you!" he shouted as he hurled the Pokeball.

The great fiery dragon-like Pokemon appeared on the field. "Ah, about time it was my turn," Charizard commented. He looked at his opponent and smirked when he saw what it was. "A strong opponent... this is interesting."

"And Ash's choice is his Charizard! Talk about fighting fire with fire! This match should be good!" the MC shouted. Up on the screen, Charizard's icon appeared as well.

Harrison hummed in thought. '*I have to be careful, that Charizard is extremely powerful from what I saw last match.*'

Charizard glared at the Blaziken. "Try to be a good opponent."

Blaziken glared back. "Let's see who the strongest Fire-Type is," it replied in a masculine voice. The curtain for a very heated battle was thrown off as both Blaziken and Charizard stared off at each other.

Ash took the initiative. "Charizard, use Flamethrower!" he commanded. Charizard reared his head back and spat a powerful stream of fire at Blaziken.

"Blaziken, counter with your own Flamethrower!" Harrison countered. Blaziken's wrists flared up as he spat his own Flamethrower. Both fire attacks collided and formed into a massive ball of flames, heating up the stadium.

"What a duel folks! This is one fiery match!" the MC joked.

The fire sphere died down as Charizard and Blaziken glared at each other. "Charizard, use Dragon Rage!" Ash shouted. Charizard gathered an orb of orange crackling draconic energy in his jaws and fired it at the Blaze Pokemon.

"Blaziken, use Flamethrower!" Harrison shouted. Blaziken opened his beak and spat a stream of fire at the incoming attack. Both attacks collided and exploded, creating a cloud of smoke. "Use Blaze Kick!" Harrison shouted.

Blaziken ran out of the smoke at startling speed. Blaziken jumped very high as his right leg was engulfed in fire, and quickly started descending. "Charizard, fly away!" Ash shouted. With a mighty flap of his wings, Charizard flew up and moved to the side rather quickly, causing Blaziken to miss in his kick, hitting the stone floor extremely hard and cracking it from the sheer force of the attack. "Now, use Flamethrower!" Ash ordered.

Charizard reared back and spat a powerful stream of fire at the Blaze Pokemon. "Blaziken, dodge with a jump and use Fire Punch!" Harrison ordered. Blaziken quickly leaped into the air, evading the Flamethrower attack as it passed underneath him. His right hand curled into a fist as it was covered in flames. With a powerful swing, he punched Charizard. Charizard cried in pain, but quickly recovered and lashed out with his tail, hitting the still-airborne Blaziken and sending him crashing back to the field.

"What a nice counter!" the MC noted. "Which Fire-Type will prevail?"

"Charizard, use Seismic Toss!" Ash commanded. Charizard descended quickly, intending on grabbing Blaziken to use one of his strongest attacks.

"Blaziken, use Flamethrower!" Harrison shouted. Blaziken opened his beak and fired a stream of flames at the incoming Flame Pokémon. Due to the fact that Charizard was flying very fast, he was unable to move away in time and was hit head-on by the flames.

With a mighty flap from his wings, Charizard broke the flames apart. "Use your own Flamethrower!" Ash ordered. Charizard took a deep breath and then spat a stream of fire.

"Blaziken, use Fire Punch!" Harrison commanded. *'I have to admit, this battle is tough! Who would have thought an eleven-year old was this strong?'*

Blaziken's right wrist released a large amount of flames as the entire arm was covered in fire. He threw the first in front of him, the Flamethrower colliding with Blaziken's arm, completely splitting the fire stream as Blaziken refused to give in. "Charizard, use Dragon Rage then Seismic Toss!" Ash shouted.

Charizard stopped the Flamethrower and quickly spat a blazing orb of draconic energy. The second the Flamethrower ceased, Blaziken looked up only to see a huge sphere of energy heading directly at him. "Blaziken, use Blaze Kick!" Harrison ordered frantically.

Blaziken's right leg was covered in fire as he kicked upwards, splitting the energy sphere attack in half and disintegrating it. He smirked and gasped when he saw Charizard only a few meters away from him, flying at high speed. He had no time to react as the Dragon-like Pokémon grabbed him by the midsection and flew into the sky with a mighty flap of his wings.

"This could be it!" the MC shouted as Charizard gained altitude. "That's one powerful attack!"

Harrison growled. "This is bad... Blaziken, use Flamethrower!"

Blaziken barely heard Harrison, but he obeyed nonetheless. He opened his beak and fired a point-blank Flamethrower, hitting Charizard dead center in the chest as both Pokémon kept gaining altitude. They were engulfed in a maelstrom of fire as a result. Even so, Charizard continued flying. After making a few loops in the air, he dove for the arena. "Make it crash with you!" Harrison shouted as loud as he could.

Blaziken grabbed Charizard's neck in a strong grip, intending to do just that. Charizard had no time to change course as both Pokémon crashed into the stone floor of the arena, the firestorm that had been covering them creating a powerful explosion on impact.

"Wow! These two are giving an intense battle!" the MC bellowed as the crowd cheered loudly.

The fire died down to reveal Charizard and Blaziken in the middle of a crater at the center of the arena, their arms locked as they pushed against each other. Both were covered in cuts and bruises from the sheer force of the impact, but were otherwise fine. Blaziken broke free and spun around, kicking Charizard in the face and making him stumble to the side. He used this to his advantage as he continued the spin and lashed out with his tail, effectively smacking Blaziken away. "Flamethrower!" both trainers shouted at the same time.

Both Fire-Types fired a colossal continuous blast of flames, slamming into each other and pushing both back. Charizard growled. "You have certainly been a good opponent..." he remarked between pants. "But the end is near."

Blaziken gave a weak smirk. "If this ends, it will be with your defeat."

"It appears that these two battlers are ready for the final clash!" the MC shouted excitedly. The crowd cheered.

"Blaziken, use Blaze Kick!" Harrison shouted. Blaziken's leg ignited as he lunged forward.

"Catch it, then use Flamethrower!" Ash ordered. Charizard smirked as he readied himself. Blaziken spun and launched a kick, aiming at Charizard's neck. Charizard brought his arms forward and caught the kick. He couldn't care less that it was covered in flames. Blaziken gave a startled squawk as Charizard headbutted him, knocking the wind out of Blaziken. With his head still lodged into Blaziken's midsection, Charizard released the most powerful flamethrower he had ever fired. Blaziken shrieked in pain at the sheer force behind

the attack. He was propelled backwards as the flames consumed him, crashing against a rock and shattering it completely, raising a cloud of dust over the field.

"Oh no, Blaziken!" Harrison shouted. Charizard smirked, but his grin soon faded in exhaustion. Blaziken emerged from the rubble, walking weakly. Harrison smiled. "Great you're all right! Let's finish this! Use Fire Punch!" Harrison bellowed. Blaziken's right fist was covered in flames as he charged forward. He didn't make it halfway to Charizard before a sharp pain hit him in the chest. He froze, his eyes widening as he collapsed, the last of his energy spent. Charizard smirked. He had won. He was exhausted and covered in cuts and bruises, but he had won.

"Blaziken is unable to continue battling!" the Referee shouted. Up on the screen, Blaziken's icon faded completely, leaving Charizard as the victor of this duel of fire. With a sigh, Harrison returned the defeated Fire-Type back to the Pokeball.

"And Charizard has won folks!" the MC boomed excitedly. The crowd cheered loudly "Now, both trainers are down to three Pokémon!"

"Yes!" Charizard cheered. "I'm the top Fire-Type around here!"

" *Congratulations,*" Latios telepathed.

"Now that you've seen how tough I am, will you battle with me?" Charizard asked hopefully.

" *No,*" Latios telepathed flatly.

"Awww... it was worth a shot," Charizard muttered.

"Great work Charizard!" Ash praised. "Can you keep it up?"

"I'm fine; I've gotten worse from the other Charizards in the valley. This is how I usually end up after a warm-up," Charizard replied smugly. Ash, Pikachu and the Eon twins sweatdropped.

"Alright, if you say so," Ash replied.

Harrison smiled as he tucked away Blaziken's Pokeball. "I'm impressed," Harrison called, getting Ash's attention. "It's been a long time since my Blaziken lost, but, I'm not done yet. It's time for you to face my strongest Pokemon!"

Ash gave a small start. *'His strongest? So soon?'*

Harrison threw a Pokeball to the field. "Go, Salamence!" As the pokeball opened, a huge Pokemon materialized on the field. It was a four-legged mostly blue Dragon Pokémon with large red wings and several red lines in its legs and tail, soft gray armor-like plates located on the underbelly and the underside of its neck, and three spike-like extensions splayed on either side of its head. Elm and Oak looked in wonder at the Pokémon. Delia kept taking pictures.

The Salamence reared its head back and gave a massive roar, causing Charizard to take a small step back in fear as Salamence's Intimidate ability activated. Ash's jaw dropped as he too took a step back as the Dragon Pokémon stopped roaring and glared at Ash and Charizard. Both of them gulped. "W-W-What is that!" Ash asked, clearly terrified.

" Ash, that's one of the strongest Pokémon from the Hoenn Region! It's a Salamence, a Dragon and Flying-Type. Watch out, they're extremely powerful!" Latios warned him.

Ash nodded. He turned to the massive Pokemon before him and Charizard. Harrison smirked. "Good luck fighting my most powerful Pokémon!"

"Wow folks! Talk about power! Salamence is Harrison's fifth Pokémon!" the MC said as Salamence's icon appeared on the screen.

"Charizard, use Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Charizard took a deep breath and exhaled a potent stream of fire at the Dragon Pokémon.

"Counter with your own Flamethrower!" Harrison ordered. Salamence opened his jaws and spat a stream of fire as well, colliding with Charizard's and cancelling each other perfectly. "Take to the skies, Salamence!" Harrison ordered. Salamence nodded as he proudly flapped his enormous wings, taking to the air.

"You too Charizard!" Ash shouted. The Fire-Type nodded and followed the Dragon Pokémon.

"Looks like this battle has been turned into an aerial game!" the MC shouted over the speakers.

"Charizard, Dragon Rage!" Ash shouted. Charizard took a deep breath and spat an orange sphere of draconic energies at Salamence.

"Salamence, Dragon Breath!" Harrison shouted. Salamence opened his jaws and fired a potent blast of green flames. The sheer force behind the attack was enough to rip Charizard's Dragon Rage attack apart.

"Charizard, dodge it!" Ash ordered. Charizard quickly turned to the side, dodging the blast of green fire. "Now, use Flamethrower!"

"Salamence, use Aerial Ace to dodge, then use Dragon Claw!" Harrison shouted. Salamence roared and lunged forward. With an impressive display of speed, he quickly flew aside and around the stream of fire, his front claws shining in a soft green light as he slashed at Charizard hitting him right in the chest. Charizard tried pushing Salamence away, but the Dragon Pokémon was twice his size and knocked him from the sky, the damage taken from the battle against Blaziken and Salamence starting to be too much.

"Charizard!" Ash shouted in alarm.

Charizard quickly flapped his wings to steady himself. He roared as a fiery red aura surrounded him, hyper-heating the air around him. His tail flame blazed brightly as it grew to a huge incandescent flame

almost half as big as Charizard himself, his Blaze ability activating. He roared again as he quickly elevated, gaining the same altitude as Salamence. "Look like Ash's Charizard is nowhere near done!" the MC shouted excitedly.

"Wow, what's that?" Ash asked in wonder as he gazed at Charizard's power.

"That's Blaze, it's an ability that allows some Fire-Type Pokémon to be powered up when they're about to be defeated," Latias informed.

Ash grinned. "You're awesome Charizard! The true battle begins now, use Flamethrower!" Charizard opened his mouth and fired a colossal blast of fire, clearly overpowered due to Blaze.

"Salamence, use Hyper Beam!" Harrison shouted. Salamence began to gather an energy orb in his mouth. Seeing the Fire stream was getting near, he released the orange energy beam, both attacks colliding in midair and exploding forcefully, creating a massive shockwave.

Harrison squinted to see better, but all he saw was a huge cloud of smoke in the stadium's airspace. "And both attacks have collided! Who has the upper hand?" the MC wondered. Ash closed his eyes, sensing both Pokémon within the smoke cloud. He grinned a little when he remembered that a Pokémon had to rest after using Hyper Beam.

"Charizard, use Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Charizard spat another stream of fire tearing the smoke cloud apart. Salamence quickly used his Dragon Claw to stop the Flamethrower, splitting it into many smaller fire streams. What he didn't expect was for Charizard to suddenly appear in front of him and with a spin, hit Salamence on the side with his tail, and since the flame at its end just happened to be half as big as Charizard himself, it was a rather nasty hit.

"Salamence, use Dragon Breath!" Harrison shouted. Salamence quickly adjusted himself in midair and fired a stream of green fire,

hitting Charizard in the chest and pushing him back, causing him to also lose altitude.

"Wow, a nice hit!" the MC remarked.

"Charizard, use Dragon Rage!" Ash ordered. With a mighty flap from his wings, Charizard shook off the Dragon Breath and spat a colossal blazing orb of draconic energy at least as big as him.

"Salamence, use Giga Impact!" Harrison bellowed. Salamence smirked and flew down at the Flying and Fire-Type. A golden orb of energy appeared in front of Salamence's head. Soon golden energy streaks started engulfing Salamence, and soon after that, a purple aura surrounded him as he approached the Dragon Rage.

"That seems like an extremely powerful move! Charizard, watch out!" the MC shouted.

Charizard's attack was no match for the Giga Impact. Charizard's eyes widened as he spat a Flamethrower on instinct, wanting to stop the incoming projectile, but again his attack was futile. Salamence crashed into Charizard, hitting him with a colossal amount of force, knocking the Flame Pokémon out instantly. He fell from the Sky and crashed to the floor of the arena.

"Charizard is unable to continue battling!" the Referee called. Ash growled slightly as he returned Charizard. The Fire-Type's icon disappeared from the screen, leaving Ash with two blank spaces, while Harrison still had Swellow and Salamence active, plus an empty space.

"That Pokémon is strong..." Ash remarked.

" *Well, Charizard was already weakened,*" Latias pointed out.

"What will Ash's next choice be to counter Harrison's Salamence?" the MC questioned.

Ash grabbed his next Pokeball and threw it to the field. "Snorlax, I choose you!" Ash shouted. Thankfully for Ash, Snorlax was awake. He appeared with a huge yawn as his icon filled Ash's fifth slot. Snorlax scratched his belly lazily and grumbled about having to battle.

"And Ash's fifth Pokemon is his Snorlax!" the MC announced the obvious.

Harrison smirked. "One last Pokémon before I face Latios... Salamence, use DragonBreath!" Harrison shouted. Salamence took a deep breath and exhaled a stream of green fire at Snorlax.

"Snorlax, use Ice Punch!" Ash shouted. *'Snorlax is at a disadvantage as long as Salamence stays in the air. I need to have Salamence get closer!'*

Snorlax threw his ice covered fist and completely tore apart the DragonBreath attack with ease. Harrison growled slightly. "Salamence, use Dragon Claw!"

Salamence's claws glowed a soft green as he flew right at Snorlax. "Snorlax, use Ice Punch again!" Ash shouted. Snorlax's fist was covered in a thick layer of ice as he punched at the incoming Dragon Pokémon. Both attacks collided, neither giving in. "Snorlax, Use Body slam!" Ash ordered. Snorlax smirked and grabbed the Dragon's claw. With his superior weight, he slammed Salamence into the stony floor with a great crash.

"Ouch!" the MC commented. "What a hard hit!"

Snorlax jumped and slammed into the Dragon Pokémon's back, cracking the floor. Salamence gave a loud cry of pain. "Salamence, shake him off, use Crunch!" Harrison shouted.

Salamence twisted his neck and bit into Snorlax's arm, drawing a bit of blood from the bite and causing Snorlax to flinch. Using the fat

Pokémon's loss of concentration, Salamence flapped his wings and shook off Snorlax. "Ice Punch!" Ash shouted quickly.

Snorlax twisted rapidly, something surprising for a Pokémon that big. The ice-covered punch landed in Salamence's side, forcing another cry of pain from the Dragon Pokémon as the super-effective attack took its toll on him. The Dragon Pokémon skidded a few meters from the sheer force behind the Ice Punch. "Hyper Beam!" Harrison shouted. Salamence roared as he gathered the energy required for the Hyper Beam.

"Snorlax, use Hyper Beam too!" Ash shouted. Snorlax too gathered energy. Both Pokémon continued charging what was one of the strongest moves in the Pokémon world.

"A clash of Hyper Beams!" the MC roared over the stadium's speakers. "Who will win!"

Both Snorlax and Salamence fired their respective Hyper Beams at the same time. The attacks collided and created a huge explosion, the resulting shockwave enough to force everyone against their seats, covering the arena in smoke, yet again. "Ice Punch!" Ash shouted.

"Dragon Claw!" Harrison shouted. The sound of a powerful clash was heard inside the cloud of smoke. After a minute, when the smoke finally cleared, Ash sighed when he saw a panting Salamence walk back. His Snorlax was on his back, his eyes turned into swirls.

"Snorlax is unable to continue battling!" the Referee bellowed as Snorlax's icon faded from the screen, leaving Ash down to his final Pokémon. Ash returned the fallen Pokémon, whispering congratulating words to the Pokeball as he tucked it away.

Harrison took a deep breath as everyone in the stadium watched expectantly. They all knew what was coming next. "And Ash

Ketchum is down to his last Pokémon, folks!" the MC bellowed. "And we *all* know who Ash's final Pokemon is!"

Without being told to, Latios dropped his invisibility, appearing in a shower of shimmering blue lights beside Ash as his icon appeared in the huge screen atop the stadium. The stadium began cheering as Latios entered the field. *'Wow, seeing him up close, it's an amazing feeling...'* Harrison thought as he gazed closely at the first Legendary Pokémon he had ever seen. *'Salamence should rest a bit, and it's too soon for me to use my 'secret weapon.' I need to battle Latios first with another Pokémon so I can get the feel of fighting a Legendary Pokémon. Once I'm used to it, I can use my little surprise to beat him easily.'* He grabbed a Pokeball. "Salamence, return!" the large dragon Pokémon was returned. Latios cocked his head to the side in surprise. He had expected Harrison to leave Salamence out to battle him.

"And Harrison has withdrawn Salamence. What is he planning?" the MC wondered.

Harrison grabbed his next Pokeball. "Go, Swellow!" The blue and red bird appeared on the field again. The light around Salamence's icon faded and the light around Swellow's icon returned. "Swellow, use Wing Attack!" Harrison shouted. Swellow dived as its wing shined a bright white, flying straight at the Eon Pokémon.

"Latios, dodge!" Ash called. Latios calmly adjusted the power in his levitation, moving to the side in one fluid motion and gracefully evading the Flying-Type. The Flying-Type turned around and made another pass, this time aiming for Latios' back, but to its utter surprise, Latios calmly dodged to the side again. Latios may not have seen Swellow, but he had sensed him coming.

"Latios is demonstrating perfect flight control!" the MC noted.

Harrison growled. "Swellow, use Aerial Ace!" Swellow took an immediate burst of speed as he charged at Latios.

"Latios, take to the sky!" Ash shouted. Latios quickly took off, surprisingly evading the Aerial Ace. Swellow chased after him, but every time he tried to ram Latios, the Eon Pokémon would simply fly faster and get away. "Latios, get behind him and use Ice Beam!" Ash shouted. Latios nodded and with an impressive mid-air flip, he got behind the startled Swellow. He took a deep breath as he formed an orb of freezing energy in his mouth and unleashed several rays of blue light.

"Swellow, dodge!" Harrison shouted. Still using Aerial Ace, Swellow quickly flew around, evading the Ice Beams, even when Latios adjusted his aim by shifting his neck and body.

Ash smirked. "Fly to ground level!" Latios didn't question him and flew down, quickly reaching ground level and leaving Swellow alone in the skies.

"What is he planning?" Harrison whispered to himself. "Swellow, use Aerial Ace!" Swellow quickly took a steep dive as he descended with Aerial Ace.

"Latios, use Luster Purge!" Ash shouted. Latios smirked, getting Ash's idea. His body emitted a faint glow. Instead of concentrating the energy into a single blast, Latios slowly channeled the energy into his mouth, forming a sphere of light.

"Oh no! Swellow, dodge!" Harrison cried. Latios smirked as he fired his Luster Purge in the form of a bright beam of light, quickly ascending and forming a pillar of light. The Flying-Type moved to the side, evading the initial beam, but Latios turned his neck, redirecting the beam after Swellow. The Luster Purge caught up to him and exploded in a bright blast of light.

When the light faded, a knocked out Swellow fell from the sky. Harrison's reaction was a bit too slow, noting that Harrison was probably not going to be able to return Swellow in time and that the Flying-Type was heading for a rock, Latios decided to lend a claw. His eyes glowed as he used his Psychic powers to stop Swellow's

fall and gently deposit the downed Flying-Type on the stony floor. "Swellow is unable to continue battling!" the Referee cried. Swellow's icon disappeared from the Screen.

Harrison breathed a sigh of relief. Seeing that Swellow was safe, he returned the defeated Pokémon to the Pokeball. "And Latios has his first victory without receiving a hit!" the MC noted. "And also saved his opponent from a rather nasty fall. Now that's sportsmanship!"

"Wow, I don't remember Luster Purge looking like that," Ash noted.

" *Well, Luster Purge is basically a psychic blast of intense light . How I shape the light and the blast is up to me,*" the Eon dragon replied.

" *A www, you get a fancy light attack and all I get is a bunch of mist?*" Latias complained.

Latios laughed. "*Well, your Mist Ball is also a formidable attack sis, you just have to be creative in how you use it.*"

Latias grinned devilishly. "*I can be very creative...*"

Latios chuckled nervously. "*That's what I'm afraid of...*" Latias giggled.

The MC's next comment broke the Eon twins from their conversation. "Well, Harrison has only two Pokémon left! Who will his next choice be?"

Harrison smirked. "Well, fighting a Legendary certainly is hard, but I came prepared." Latios turned to look at him. "Latios, the legendary eon dragon, prepare to be defeated."

Harrison threw his next Pokeball. "Go, Shedinja!" A small hollow Pokémon appeared, an insect exoskeleton that was brown in color with a grey lower body. Two nubs made its forearms and it had two horizontal slit-like eyes and unmoving wings with a gaping hole between them. A halo was floating atop of its head.

Latos gulped when he saw the Pokémon . *'Oh crap, I'm busted.'*

"Wow, Harrison's sixth Pokémon is Shedinja!" the MC announced.

"Latos, use DragonBreath!" Ash shouted, wanting a quick win.

Latos reluctantly prepared to fire the attack, not wanting to disobey Ash in front of the stadium, even though he already knew what was going to happen. Latos fired a powerful stream of white fire at the small Bug-Type. The Shed Pokémon didn't even move as the flames neared him. A soft yellow outline appeared around Shedinja as its Wonder Guard ability activated. The flames washed over it, and when the attack ended, Ash was surprised to see that the small Pokémon didn't even look like it had felt the attack. "Hey what gives! It was a direct hit!" Ash argued.

Harrison smirked. "Shedinja, Hyper Beam!" The halo atop Shedinja's body turned upright and aimed at Latos. A small orb of orange energy appeared in the very center as it started absorbing energy, growing bigger.

Latos growled. *'I know Ice Beam, Luster Purge, Psychic, DragonBreath and Tackle as offensive moves, but none of those can break Wonder Guard. Shedinja is a Ghost and Bug-Type, and I'm weak to both Types... I can't win, I have nothing to damage Shedinja!'* Latos thought, clearly worried. Shedinja fired the Hyper Beam, the bright orange beam headed directly at Latos. The Eon dragon growled as the attack neared him, wondering how was he supposed to battle an opponent he couldn't beat...

And, Chapter 18 has ended! Hope you all liked the Ash Vs. Harrison! So, tell me, did I do a better job than the anime? XD

So, how many of you saw Shedinja coming? Poor Latos... Hehehe

Anyway, stay tuned until next Chapter! And please, don't forget to **Review!**

Limit Surpassed!

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech"

' *Thoughts* '

" *Telepathy* "

A/N: Sorry for the delay, I had some difficulties like moving to a new apartment. Anyway, here's chapter 19!

Also, I had some Reviews telling me that Ice Beam can work on Shedinja, which is false. Bug is not weak to ice. Bug-Type is only weak to Rock, Fire and Flying. Check it out on Bulbapedia or WikiDex if you want. If you want to go to more extremes... try Ice Beam on a Shedinja in a Pokémon game... it will not work.

"Latios, use Ice Beam!" Ash shouted frantically as he saw the Hyper Beam nearing his Dragon Pokémon. Latios took a deep breath as a small orb of freezing energy gathered in his mouth. He released three icy-blue zigzagging beams that collided with the incoming Hyper Beam, both attacks stopping in a stalemate.

The freezing temperatures cooled down the volatile energy of Hyper Beam within seconds. Shedinja's attack was soon weakening and it started to fade completely. Soon both beams cancelled each other out. Ash growled slightly. "Why didn't that earlier Dragon Breath attack do anything!" he wondered.

" *Ash, I hate to tell you this, but I don't think I can win,* " Latios telepathed.

Ash looked confused. "Why?"

"Listen, the Pokémon before us is called Shedinja. It has a very powerful ability called Wonder Guard, which means that only attacks that Shedinja is weak against will harm it. All attacks that are not effective or neutrally effective to it will be completely nullified, no matter how powerful," Latios explained.

"Shedinja is a Bug and Ghost-Type," Latias continued. *"That means that only Rock, Fire, Flying, Dark, and Ghost-Type attacks can hurt it. Latios doesn't have attacks for any of those Types."*

Ash's eyes widened in alarm. "That's bad! How are we going to beat it!" he wondered.

Misty stood up. "Come on Ash! You can find a way! Use that deviant mind of yours to think of something, you can do it!"

"Yeah, you can do it!" Bianca cheered. "You too Latios!"

Ash smiled at his friends cheers. "They're right Latios, we can find a way to win this!"

"I'll fight as best as I can," Latios assured. *"Just think quickly, I'm weak to both Bug and Ghost-Type attacks!"*

Harrison grinned. "You should give up if Latios has nothing to beat Shedinja."

Ash smirked. "I *never* give up!"

"Very well then, Shedinja, use Shadow Ball!" Harrison ordered. The halo above Shedinja turned and aimed at Latios. An orb of concentrated shadow energies gathered inside it and was immediately launched at the Eon Dragon.

"Latios dodge it!" Ash shouted.

"I'm not letting Latios' speed beat me like before. Shedinja, use Shadow Ball again!" Harrison shouted. With a burst of speed, Latios flew upward, the Shadow Ball harmlessly passing where he had

been a few seconds before. Shedinja gathered another Shadow ball and faded from sight, disappearing completely. It reappeared a few inches away from Latios, appearing like a Ghost, which it was. The blue Eon dragon gasped in surprise as the Shadow Ball in Shedinja's halo was fired. Latios had no time to move as the Shadow Ball exploded against him.

"Latios!" Ash cried worriedly.

"What a good maneuver from Shedinja, now Latios' speed is of no use!" the MC narrated.

Latios quickly emerged from the smoke that resulted from the explosion. Ash growled slightly. *'I can't order any attack because they will have no effect, and for Latios to learn an attack that can hurt Shedinja will take too much time. Think Ash, think!'*

"Shedinja, Shadow Ball again!" Harrison ordered. *'This is too easy. I can do anything I want and Latios can't even lift a claw to defend himself. I almost feel sorry I'll have to beat up a Legendary. Even so, I have to be careful. He is a Legendary Pokémon after all, he might have something to surprise me.'*

Shedinja aimed its halo and fired a black orb of concentrated shadows. "Latios, dodge!" Ash shouted. Latios nodded and quickly accelerated downwards, causing the Shadow Ball to miss.

'He can gain time if he keeps using that speed of his to dodge Shedinja's attacks. I have to turn time against them,' Harrison thought. He smirked, getting an idea. "Shedinja, use Toxic!"

Shedinja's halo aimed downwards and fired a purple glob of poison at the floor. The glob expanded and impacted the center of the arena, making a foul stench as a deadly poisonous gas was released. "Latios, quick, fly up and get away from the poison cloud!" Ash shouted.

Latos nodded and took off skywards, but Harrison knew Latios was going to do that. "Shedinja, use Shadow Claw! Force Latios down!"

Shedinja disappeared and reappeared a few meters above Latios. The two nubs on Shedinja's front glowed an eerie purple as a dark energy tendril extended from each one, forming a pair of blades. The momentum Latios had from flying upwards made it impossible for him to stop in time as Shedinja slashed at him. He cried in pain as he was knocked from the sky. He quickly regained stability and righted himself, but it was too late, he was already inside the poison cloud. He had no time to take notice as he inhaled... and was severely poisoned. Latios' eyes widened in horror. *'Oh... shit.'*

"Looks like Latios has been Poisoned!" the MC cried as the poison cloud dissipated.

Ash growled. "Oh no..." he whispered. He began to look around frantically. *'Latos is getting beaten around! I need to find something quickly!'* He spotted his mother, the Professors and Gary in the stands. They were seated close to the field so he could see them clearly. Delia was apparently talking with Professor Elm about something as Professor Oak looked intently at Latios. Gary was standing, shouting something. Though Ash couldn't hear him over the roar of the crowd, there was no doubt he was cheering for him. Ash smiled. *'Looks like I'll lose this battle... at least I defeated Gary, my eternal rival,'* Ash thought.

He sighed nostalgically as he got flashbacks of his fight with Gary, how Pikachu defeated Umbreon, how Charizard turned the tide of the battle, Gary's shocked face as he saw Latios, and Gary's reactions as Latios effortlessly defeated his remaining Pokémon, using the water to beat Nidoqueen and Arcanine. Ash chuckled. *'Water, it was really useful in that battle. It could help me now, at least it'd make a good shield for Latios... all I have now is a stupid Rock field.'*

He looked back at the field... and gasped, getting an idea. "A stupid Rock field... that's it! Shedinja is weak to Rocks!"

"Shedinja, now use Shadow Ball," Harrison ordered confidently, knowing that he had complete control of the battle. Shedinja took aim and prepared the Shadow Ball.

"Latios, we can still win! The field!" Ash shouted.

Latios looked down at the field. "*What's with the fi-*" he paused, getting Ash's plan. He looked at Harrison and smirked. A chill went through the human's spine as Latios stared at him. For some reason, that stare was really frightening.

Latias smiled, clearly impressed. '*Good job Ash...*' the female Dragon thought. Everyone in Ash's bench was one again impressed by Ash's prowess to improvise plans for everything.

"Latios, we need more loose Rocks! The previous battles have weakened the field, so smash it up with Luster Purge!" Ash shouted to the Eon Dragon. "Take to the sky!"

Latios nodded... and cried in pain as he was engulfed in purple energy. He coughed as the Poison affected him. He shook it off as best as he could and took to the sky, flying upwards and, at the same time, dodging Shedinja's Shadow Ball. Ash smiled as he saw Latios soar. "Thanks Gary..."

Once he was at a decent height, far above the stadium, Latios's body glowed as he gathered as much power as he could. Harrison blinked in confusion. "Okay... What are they up to?"

Latios fired a huge orb of white light downwards, into the center of the field. Many people in the crowd covered their eyes, knowing the Luster Purge could be a little hard on the eyes. "And Ash Ketchum has ordered his Legendary Pokémon to attack the field! Why would he do that!" the MC wondered, like pretty much everyone else.

The sphere of light collided against the ground and exploded in a huge blast of light that covered the whole field. Latios smiled in satisfaction and flew downwards, but not before being surrounded in

purple energy and taking another bit of damage from Toxic. Not noticing this, Ash smirked as he looked at the new battlefield. A crater from the Luster Purge crash was in the middle of the field, and the rest was rubble. Thousands of Rocks were sprawled all over the place, having been separated from the main field, which was now non-existent. "Wow! Latios has completely decimated the whole field! How will this fit into Ash's plans?" the MC wondered.

"Now that's more like it," Ash commented. "Latios, you know what to do."

Latios nodded as his eyes glowed a solid blue. Several dozen Rocks were surrounded by a faint blue outline as they were lifted by Latios' mental powers. Latios found himself thanking Brock for all that boulder-lifting training and meditation he'd been doing. Harrison's eyes widened in alarm. *'Why did we have to fight on a damn rock field!'* he cursed mentally. "Shedinja, dodge and use Shadow Claw!"

Shedinja readied itself. Latios sent the first barrage of rocks flying at it. Shedinja's small body was quite hard to hit as it levitated and flew around, frantically dodging Latios' barrage of Rocks. Shedinja suddenly disappeared from sight and reappeared below Latios. With a pair of Shadow Claws ready, he attacked the Eon Dragon, causing him to grunt in pain and clutch his chest, where the attack had hit. Latios' eyes flashed as a pair of Rocks were hurled at Shedinja, forcing the Bug and Ghost-Type to back away quickly. "What an impressive battle folks! There's a way for Latios to win after all!" the MC cried excitedly. The crowd cheered.

A Rock flew at Shedinja from behind. The Pokémon couldn't see it since it was coming from its blind spot. Latios knew it was going to hit... until a spasm of pain tore through him as his poisoned condition worsened, causing him to lose concentration and make the Rock fall harmlessly back to the field. "And the effects of Toxic are worsening!" the MC cried in alarm. "Latios better hurry and win before it's too late!"

Ash growled. "Damn Poison... wait, Psychic is strong against Poison, can't you remove the poison psychically?"

" Well, A Psychic can remove poison from its body or anyone else's with its mental powers, but only very skilled psychics can do that. I'm not that good yet," Latios answered. *"I still need a lot more experience to even think of pulling off something like that successfully."*

"What happens if you try it now as you are now?" Ash asked curiously.

" If I try, I could apply too much force accidentally and snap something inside me, like an artery or an organ, causing me to die from severe blood loss or blow up an entire part of my body," Latios deadpanned. *"Treating a wound or removing poison psychically is very delicate business."*

Ash turned green. "Let's not try it then..."

" I agree," Latias murmured.

"We have to trick Harrison and Shedinja so we can hit that damn bug... and fast, at least before the Poison finishes Latios off," Ash muttered. "Latios, keep throwing rocks!"

Latios nodded and lifted more rocks psychically, hurling them at the Shed Pokémon. "Shedinja, dodge and use Shadow Ball!" Harrison shouted.

Shedinja quickly disappeared and reappeared once again below Latios with a Shadow Ball in its halo. The sphere was fired and collided against Latios' chest, exploding violently. Latios cried in pain and clutched his chest, but quickly focused and sent a barrage of rocks at the Bug and Ghost-Type. The Shed Pokémon quickly evaded them, flying about and getting out of the way of every rock. "I need to find a way for Shedinja to stay in one spot so Latios can slam a rock into it..." Ash murmured. He quickly got an idea. "Latios,

fly toward Shedinja as fast as you can and use Ice Beam!" Ash commanded.

Latos knew that Ice Beam wouldn't do anything, but he trusted Ash and knew that he had an idea. He charged at Shedinja as an orb of freezing energy formed in his mouth. He got within inches of Shedinja so fast that Harrison didn't get the chance to issue an order to his Pokémon. Latios fired the Ice Beam at close range, the attack striking and pushing the shed Pokémon back. Shedinja's body was surrounded in a faint yellow outline as Wonder Guard activated, completely nullifying all the damage from Ice Beam. However, Wonder Guard could do nothing to stop the ice from spreading and encasing Shedinja in a thick block of Ice.

Ash smirked. "Shedinja is finished. Latios, use Psychic on the rocks!"

Latos' eyes glowed a solid blue as he lifted several huge rocks and slammed them into the icy prison, tearing the ice apart and hitting Shedinja rather hard, forming an orb of compressed Rocks around Shedinja. The whole thing was surrounded in blue light as Latios dragged it down, slamming it into what was left of the battlefield. The rock prison was torn apart from the sheer force of the collision, revealing... a knocked out Shedinja. The referee nodded. "Shedinja is unable to continue battling!" he bellowed. Up on the screen, Shedinja's icon disappeared, leaving only Latios' and Salamence's icons on the screen.

"Ash has done it! Latios has defeated Shedinja!" the MC shouted excitedly. The entire stadium burst into wild cheers.

Harrison returned the defeated Pokémon, a worried expression on his face. *'Now, all I have left is Salamence, but... he's tired,'* Harrison thought. He looked at Latios and noted that he wasn't in any good condition either. Latios was panting heavily and had a pained expression on his face, probably because of the effects of the poison, and he was clutching his chest because that close range Shadow ball had truly injured him. *'Latos is also tired. This goes*

down to the Dragon that can tolerate the most.' Harrison grabbed the Dragon Pokémon's PokeBall. "Salamence, go!"

The Dragon-Type appeared, panting slightly. He looked at Latios. "Guess the fact that you're still up means you defeated Shedinja," he stated.

Latios chuckled. "Indeed, and you're next."

"Now the battle is between Salamence and Latios!" the MC bellowed. "Who will win!"

"Salamence! Be careful, that Latios is extremely fast!" Harrison warned.

"Latios, use Ice Beam!" Ash ordered. Latios gathered an orb of icy energy and fired a blue three-beam blast of cold at Salamence.

"Salamence, counter with Flamethrower!" Harrison commanded. Salamence spat a powerful torrent of fire, easily ripping Latios' Ice Beam apart when the attacks collided.

"Latios, use Psychic!" Ash countered. Latios' eyes glowed as he used a powerful psychic blast, easily tearing apart and extinguishing the Flamethrower.

"And Latios' impressive Psychic abilities have completely rendered Salamence's Flamethrower useless!" the MC narrated.

"Salamence, Dragon Claw!" Harrison ordered. Salamence roared and with a powerful flap of his mighty wings charged forward. His front claws glowed green as he readied the attack.

"Latios, stop him with Psychic!" Ash shouted. Latios' eyes glowed again as he attempted to take control of the incoming Salamence's body. To his dismay, Salamence was coming so fast and with so much momentum, and since Latios was already so weakened, his psychic abilities were not strong enough to stop Salamence.

Ash's eyes widened as he saw the Salamence get closer to Latios. "Latios, fly away!"

Latios stopped his Psychic attack and prepared to take off, but he cried in pain as he was surrounded by purple energy, coughing violently as the effects of Toxic worsened yet again. Taking advantage of Latios' inability to move, Salamence slammed both Dragon Claws into him, crashing Latios into the rocky floor of the arena, inside the crater left by his Luster Purge. Latios cried in pain. Harrison smirked as he saw Salamence pinning Latios down to the floor. "Finish this, use Hyper Beam!"

Salamence's jaws opened as he gathered an orb of volatile orange energy in his maw, aiming it at Latios. Since the Eon Pokémon was pinned to the ground by his body weight, Salamence knew that he had no way out. Latios coughed as he tried to breathe, but had some trouble because Salamence was pinning him to the ground. *"Ash! I'm too weakened, I won't survive a direct Hyper Beam!"* Latios telepathed frantically as Salamence's charge was nearly finished.

"This could be it folks! Latios seems defeated!" the MC commented.

"Latios! Use a rock!" Ash shouted. Latios' eyes glowed as he lifted a medium sized Rock and slammed it into Salamence's face, causing the still unfired Hyper Beam to detonate, creating a terrible explosion and making the crater even larger.

"Latios!/Salamence!" Ash and Harrison called at the same time, both clearly worried.

"And a colossal explosion shakes the battlefield! Which dragon shall emerge victorious?" the MC wondered. The crowd looked at the battlefield intently.

When the smoke cleared, both Salamence and Latios were lying a few meters from each other, and both were miraculously struggling to stand up. Each one pushing himself way past all their limits, neither of the two dragons wanted to let their trainer down and admit

defeat. This was a duel of Dragons. Pride was also on the line, and neither Latios nor Salamence wanted to let another dragon beat them. Salamence was the first to recover completely and took to the air, Latios soon followed, both Dragons flying a few dozen meters from the ground, glaring at each other. "Both of them are up! This is impressive!" the MC commented excitedly.

Latios panted heavily as his vision started to darken and he began to feel light in the head. He pushed back the dizzy feeling, refusing to faint. "Salamence, this is the last stand, use Giga Impact!" Harrison bellowed.

"Latios! Use Luster Purge!" Ash shouted. Both Dragons took off at each other. Latios was covered in a huge sphere of light as he charged his Luster Purge. An orange energy orb appeared in front of Salamence's head as it formed several streaks of orange light, a purple aura coming into being as he transformed into an purple and orange missile.

With a deafening clash, both Dragons collided into each other, Latios with his Luster Purge and Salamence with his Giga Impact. As both dragons pushed against each other, Latios' attack was broken as he suffered another spasm of pain courtesy of that Toxic attack. With Latios' concentration destroyed, the Giga Impact tore through his Luster Purge easily. Latios coughed up as the Giga Impact collided against his chest and started pushing him towards the ground. Latios knew that the second Salamence collided with the stony floor, he would be knocked out.

Ash's eyes widened. "No..." he whispered, knowing that he would lose.

Latios pushed those thoughts back. He didn't want to lose this battle and have Ash eliminated, he was going to win no matter what! Without any command, Latios gathered what little power he had left as his body started glowing again with the power of Luster Purge. As Salamence collided against the stony floor, Latios released the

energy in every direction, using his Luster Purge to create a ball of light, cushioning the impact a little and flinging Salamence back.

"This is certainly the most intense battle of the Silver Conference! And at its end, which dragon shall emerge victorious?" the MC narrated. Everyone watched intently as the blast died down.

When everything was clear, both Salamence and Latios were sprawled a few meters from each other, and neither of them were moving. The referee nodded and looked at the screen, then spared both Dragons a final look. "Since both are their trainer's last Pokémon, a tie can't be declared. The battle will go to the trainer whose Pokémon stands up first, or manages to stay up!" the Referee stated.

"Salamence, come on get up! I know you can!" Harrison shouted.

"Latios, get up! Please, you have to!" Ash pleaded.

Salamence stirred a little as his eyes opened. He tried to stand up, trembling heavily. He didn't get far as he fell once more. Even so, he once again tried to get up. Latios was still not moving.

"Latios get up please!" Ash pleaded once again.

" *Brother get up, you can do it!*" Latias pleaded telepathically.

"Latios, come on, get up! If you do, you'll win!" Bianca shouted as well.

"You can do it! Win this one Latios!" Brock shouted.

"Latios, show how strong you are, all you have to do is get up!" Misty encouraged.

"Latios you *have* to get up!" Pikachu shouted too.

The referee noticed that even with all their encouragement, Latios was still not moving. He started to raise the flag for Harrison' side,

preparing to declare Harrison and Salamence as the victors. Latias noticed this. *"Quick brother, get up, please! Show them how strong you are! Prove it Brother! GET UP!"* she telepathed as loudly as she could.

Latios stirred as his red eyes opened. The referee noticed this and lowered the flag. Latios pushed his claws forward as he began to lift his neck. "Both Dragons are struggling to get up! Who will do it and make their trainer the winner!" the MC bellowed. The crowd began to cheer for the dragons to get up, some for Salamence and some for Latios.

Latios grunted as he felt a stab of pain from his chest. With a final push and exertion of his powers, Latios activated his levitation and hovered a few feet from the ground, looking extremely beaten and panting heavily. Salamence too managed to get up, panting heavily. Both dragons glared at each other, daring the other to admit defeat and collapse. Latios started to sway slightly, his vision going dark as he started to see about six Salamences and six Harrisons in front of him. It took all of his willpower not to faint on the spot.

Salamence gasped slightly as his legs failed him, a sharp pain hitting him in the neck and wings. He collapsed to the floor again, leaving Latios hovering before him. Salamence struggled weakly to get up again, but it was in vain. His eyes turned to swirls as he fainted. The referee nodded and raised the flag for Ash's side. "Salamence is unable to continue battling. The winner of this battle and the trainer going to the semi-finals is Ash Ketchum from Pallet Town!" Up on the screen, Salamence's icon faded. Ash's image was expanded to cover the entire screen, the word 'Winner' appearing below his photo.

Harrison dropped to his knees as he saw that he had lost. "This... can't be."

Instead of cheering, Ash immediately sprang towards Latios, with some difficulties considering that the field was now a bunch of loose rocks. Latios collapsed, his body landing harshly in the cold stony

floor, but to his surprise, his head landed in a soft cushion. He weakly looked up and saw that Ash had caught him in his arms. "Thanks... Latios," Ash said as he hugged Latios.

The Eon Pokémon smiled weakly, feeling comforted in Ash's arms. "You're welcome." Latios felt something soft nuzzle him in his neck. He knew by instinct that it was Latias. "Hi, sis."

" *Congratulations on winning Brother, but look at you, you're a mess,*" Latias telepathed, concern in her mental voice.

"It's... not that bad, is it?" Latios wondered. Latias used her psychic powers to project into his mind what she was seeing. Latios nearly choked as he saw how beaten up he was. "Funny thing is... I don't feel anything..." Latios said weakly. He cried in pain as he was once again attacked by the effects of Toxic. This time he was unable to resist it, and he fainted.

"Latios!" Both Ash and Latias cried.

"This looks bad Ash," Brock noted as he examined Latios. Ash nearly jumped out of his skin in fright, he was so caught up in his worry for Latios' wellbeing that he never saw Brock, Misty and Bianca came up to him. "You better get him to the Pokémon Center fast!"

"Right," Ash replied as he grabbed a Pokeball. "Latios, return!" The bright red light sucked Latios inside the Pokeball. Ash stood up and ran for the exit, going as fast as he could towards the Pokémon Center, Latias flying at his side the whole time. Brock, Misty and Bianca left too, though they went at a more sedate pace. In the stands, Delia, Gary and Professors Elm and Oak got up to follow them.

Running faster than he ever had before, Ash burst open the doors of the Pokémon Center. To his utter surprise, Nurse Joy already had readied a stretcher of an appropriate size to accommodate Latios. A

Chansey and a Blissey were at her side. Ash looked at her dumbfounded. "But... How?"

Nurse Joy giggled slightly. "I saw your battle on TV. When I saw you running so fast out of the stadium, I guessed that it was because you were greatly worried for your Pokémon's health and you were rushing to get them to the Pokémon Center, something admirable in a trainer. Now let's make haste. Place the Latios on this bed, he's in the one in the most critical condition."

Ash nodded and held Latios' Pokeball, pointing it at the stretcher. "Latios, come out!" There was a flash of light as the still unconscious Latios was released onto the stretcher.

Nurse Joy nodded and pulled the stretcher into the advanced treatment room. Ash sensed that Latias was going to glide past him and into the room too, so he held out a hand and caught one of her wings, causing her to squeal and drop her invisibility. "Hey!" Latias yelled at him, slightly upset. "I want to be with my brother!"

Ash took a step back, not used to seeing Latias even remotely angry, considering she was usually happy and cheerful most of the time. "Err, but you can't enter... your brother will be fine, I guess," Ash replied nervously.

Latias was about to yell something when the Chansey interrupted her. "Excuse me Miss Legendary, I'm afraid you can't enter, you'd just get in the way. Please let the nurse treat your brother back to health, he'll be fine."

"The name's Latias..." she grumbled. "And why not!"

"Please calm down, your brother will be fine Miss Latias, he's in good hands. I assure you he'll be back up soon," the Chansey continued.

Latias huffed, crossing her arms over her chest. "Fine then," she replied, giving in.

Chansey smiled softly and turned to Ash. "May I have your remaining Pokémon please?"

Ash nodded and took out four Pokeballs, putting them in the tray in Chansey's small stubby hands. Ash turned to Pikachu, who was perched on his shoulder, as usual. "Want a small heal or are you okay buddy?"

Pikachu shook his head. "Na, I'm fine."

Chansey shrugged and carried the Pokeballs to another backroom of the Center. Ash took a seat in the one of the couches, waiting for Nurse Joy to heal his Pokémon. Bianca, Brock and Misty entered the Pokémon Center a few minutes later. They were a bit taken aback that Latias was in her Pokémon form, but didn't say anything as the lobby was empty save for Ash and Latias. Everyone was probably at the stadium since the second battle would begin soon.

"So," Bianca started as she took a seat beside Ash. "How's Latios?"

"I don't know," Ash answered. "He's in the treatment room."

Bianca sighed. "I hope he's alright."

"He's very strong, he'll be fine," Ash assured her. Everyone joined him on the couch.

"Latios was impressive, he defeated Harrison's Swellow, Shedinja and Salamence," Brock noted. "Too bad that he took so much damage in the process."

"Yeah, but I'm sure he'll be fine," Misty commented. "Right Latias?" A few seconds passed and she got no answer. Everyone looked to where Latias was.

They sighed when they saw Latias was floating a few feet in front of the door, staring at it intently, waiting for it to magically open and Latios to come out safe and sound. Bianca smiled sadly, stood up

and gently wrapped her arms around Latias' neck from behind. Latias let out a squeal of surprise. "It's okay Latias, he'll be fine, come on and relax," Bianca chided in a loving tone, trying to soothe Latias.

Latias nodded slightly and glided back to the couch, floating beside it. At that moment Professors Oak and Elm along with Gary and Delia entered the lobby. "Well, hello everyone," Delia greeted. Gary froze when he saw Latias. He noted that she looked very similar to the Pokémon that Ash had used to beat him, Latios.

"So... She's Latias?" Gary asked. Latias nodded and gave a light squeal. "Nice to meet you," Gary continued. He turned to Ash. "So, how's Latios?"

Ash sighed. "I don't know... I hope he's alright."

"I hope so too. Congratulations on making it to the top four Ashy-boy," Gary commented.

Ash smiled. "Thanks Gary."

"But still, how is it that the little bug managed to take on Latios' attacks without suffering a single injury?" Gary asked.

Professor Oak stepped forward. "Well, the reason was because of the Wonder Guard ability, which makes Shedinja invincible to everything that it is not super-effective to it."

"The next move we teach Latios should be one that can break Wonder Guard," Brock grumbled.

"What really doomed Latios in that battle was the Toxic attack," Professor Elm commented.

"Yeah, that poisoned condition really affected him..." Delia muttered.

"But, at least he won in the end," Bianca praised. "But why were those two Pokémon so troublesome for Latios?"

"Well, take notice that Harrison is an older trainer from Hoenn, where it's easiest to catch Nincada and Bagon, the pre-evolved forms of Shedinja and Salamence. He must have had those two for years, so they were very experienced," Professor Elm explained.

"And Latios just started competing in Pokémon Battles almost two months ago," Oak continued.

Misty smiled. "When Latios is that experienced, he'll be a very powerful battler."

"Yeah," Bianca agreed.

"And what about her?" Gary asked, looking to Latias.

Latias shook her head. *"I don't like battles."*

"She says she doesn't like battles," Ash repeated, since Gary couldn't hear her telepathy yet.

Gary frowned. "Okay."

A door opened and the same Chansey from before walked to Ash, holding a tray with his Pokeballs. "Here are your Pokémon, they are all fine," the Chansey announced.

Ash nodded and took his Pokeballs. "Thanks."

The Chansey smiled. "You're welcome." She turned around and walked back to the backrooms.

With that the group chatted while they waited for Latios to be treated. About an hour passed and still Latios had not been yet released. Every minute that passed was torture for Latias and Ash. After about another hour of waiting, finally the syringe icon over the intensive treatment door turned off, the low sound it made enough to attract everyone's attention. Soon the door opened and Nurse Joy stepped out. Latias wanted so badly to be the first to ask her how Latios was, but she couldn't because of her telepathic limitation. She was now

even more determined to become a stronger psychic to be able to freely talk to everyone. Ash was there almost as fast as she was. "So how's Latios?"

Nurse Joy smiled. "He's fine. He took some serious blows during the match, but it's nothing I couldn't patch up. After a good rest, he should be all right."

Ash sighed in relieve, like pretty much everyone else. "Thank you so much!"

"But," Nurse Joy continued. "He took a rather large amount of damage to his chest area, probably from the last Giga Impact. I'd recommend no excessive movements or exercise on his part for three to four days to let everything heal nicely and let him rest completely. All the poisoning he took was also removed, but he'll have to rest too for all the aftereffects to pass," Nurse Joy finished.

Ash frowned and turned to Brock. "When's my next battle?"

Brock checked his guidebook. "The semi-finals are in three days."

"How would Latios be by then?" Ash asked Nurse Joy.

"In three days?" Nurse Joy asked. "Well, I'd say he'd be almost fully healed, but his chest area might still be a bit delicate. He could fight by then, but it'll be at your own risk. If he takes another hard blow, it could turn into a very serious problem for him. The best thing to do would be for you to let him recover completely."

Ash frowned. "Alright, thanks. May we see him?"

She smiled. "Sure, but don't enter for now. He needs rest. You can stay here until night to keep watch over him if you want. By then you can see him because all the effects of the antidotes and treatments should have passed. Latios is in the third room to the left." With that she turned and walked to another room, probably to tend to other Pokémon.

The group walked inside. The door led to a long hallway with multiple doors. Beside each door was a window panel and bench. The group walked to the third one and looked inside the window. It was a medium-sized room with a bed in the center. Latios was lying peacefully on it. He had bandages going all around his mid-section, a few others were on his arms and neck, and he had a few patches here and there. A few cables went from a band in Latios' arm to a small screen that displayed his vitals. Professors Elm and Oak explained that from what they could see, Latios was mostly alright.

"So, three to four days..." Brock began. "Ash, are you going to use him in the semi-finals?"

Ash immediately shook his head. "No, I won't risk his health just for a trophy. He means a lot more to me than any title ever could. Besides, this won't be the last league I'll fight in, so I have a few more tries left."

No one was really surprised by that statement. That was Ash alright, placing his friends before everything. Latias smiled and nuzzled him. "*Thanks.*"

Ash smiled and rubbed her head tenderly, causing her to release a low squeal of contentment. "You're welcome."

"At least he'll recover completely," Brock noted.

"That's the idea," Ash replied. "Besides, I'm sure that my team can fare well without him."

"Great, now I get all the work," Pikachu grumbled. Ash chuckled.

Delia smiled. "Now that we know he'll be fine, why don't we go get something to eat?"

"*I want to stay,*" Latias replied firmly.

"Me too," Ash said as well, wanting to stay beside his Pokémon.

Delia sighed. "Alright, we'll bring dinner."

They nodded. After sharing their good-byes, the rest left to eat. Pikachu, Ash and Latias stayed behind, wanting to keep an eye on Latios. Ash took seat on the bench with Pikachu while Latias decided to simply hover there.

After a few minutes of awkward silence, the female Eon Pokémon decided to start up a conversation. Latias looked at Ash and smiled softly. "Thanks for letting my brother rest."

"It's okay," Ash replied. "He deserves it anyway."

"Too bad he was beaten up so much," Latias commented sadly, a frown coming to her features.

"Hey Latias, exactly why is it that you dislike battling?" Ash asked.

"Is it because you're afraid to end up like Latios?" Pikachu asked.

Latias shook her head. "No, it's not like that, it's the other way around."

Ash looked confused. "What do you mean?"

Latias took a deep breath, gathering her thoughts. "Well, the reason I hate battling is because I dislike hurting others, even if it's a controlled competition. Sometimes my soft and calm demeanor fools others, but remember Ash, like my brother, I too am a Legendary Pokémon, and if I take things seriously, I could become just as strong as him." She paused. "I don't want to battle because I don't want to be the reason another Pokémon ends up like my brother. I don't want to send an injured Pokémon to the Pokémon Center."

"Ah, so that's why," Pikachu muttered.

"Of course, I do train from time to time because I know I need to at least be able to defend myself, just in case," Latias added. "I know

that you wanted to someday capture me and have me a battler, along with my brother... Sorry if this upsets you..."

Ash chuckled. "Nah, it's alright Latias. If you don't want to battle, I understand," he assured her, putting a hand on her head and petting her gently. She giggled.

"But if you ever have a very tough battle ahead, I'll help you if you want me to," Latias told him, nuzzling his hand.

"If *Latios* lets you," Pikachu deadpanned. They shared a small laugh at that.

"Nah, I'm fine like this. Besides, having both you and Latios on my team at the same time would make everything too easy, and I like challenges," Ash said, looking at her.

"Through she'll be very useful in the next Pokémon League you enter, because next time, *everyone* will know you have Latios so they'll have counters ready, but oh, what a surprise, you have Latias too!" Pikachu commented.

"Speaking about Pokémon Leagues, I'll have to deal with the Semi-Finals without Latios," Ash commented sadly.

"At least there are no more Hoenn trainers..." Pikachu remarked dryly. "Don't worry, you have me and Charizard!"

"Even so, I'm still going to win!" Ash said enthusiastically.

Latias giggled. "I'm sure you'll win," *'Just maybe... I hope you can...'*

And Chapter 19 has ended! Hope you all liked it! I'm very sorry for the delay, the past days have been rather hard for me, but everything should soon be back to normal.

So, how was the battle outcome? Did you all like the Shedinja vs. Latios and the Salamence vs. Latios? And Next, Ready to take on the Semi-Finals of the Silver Conference!

And Please, Leave lots of **Reviews!** =D *Happy Dance*

In The Eve Of Battle

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

And Chapter 20 has been reached! Yay! Enjoy this chapter!

Everything was calm and quiet in a small room in the Pokémon Center. It was early morning, and the four inhabitants of the room were sound asleep. Latios was resting in a bed, still bandaged from his previous battle. Ash was sleeping in a chair, leaning to the side so his upper body was resting on a small unused corner of the bed. Pikachu was curled up beside him. Latias was sleeping on the floor, her head resting on a pillow.

The past day, Latias and Ash had stayed all afternoon outside the room, refusing to go to the hotel to sleep, saying that they would join their friends later, preferring to stay with Latios. By night, Nurse Joy had said that they could enter the room. She also told them that they should be careful and try not to disturb Latios' rest. After a while, they fell asleep as well.

Now morning had arrived, and having been the one that slept the most, Latios was the one to wake up first. He opened his eyes, looking at the odd room he seemed to be in. He tried to move but a small pain in his chest interrupted him. He paused as memories of the previous day filled him. *'Must be in the Pokémon Center then,'* he thought. He paused as he thought of the most important thing in the world to him. *'Where's Latias! She must be worried sick!'* Since he knew that moving wasn't a good idea at the moment, he amplified

his mental senses in search of his sister. He relaxed when he sensed Latias was asleep on the floor. He couldn't help but chuckle slightly at his own overreaction. He sensed Ash and Pikachu sleeping nearby too.

He turned his neck and looked at the sleeping boy with a smile. It wasn't a surprise for him that Ash had chosen to stay by his side. He frowned when he caught a glimpse of all the bandages he had. He saw Latias stirring as she too woke up, they both had the habit of waking up early.

The first thing Latias did was turn her bright amber eyes to Latios. She grinned happily when she saw that he was looking back at her, a soft smile on his features. She resisted the urge to glomp him like she usually did because she knew he might still be a bit delicate and she didn't want to hurt him, so she gently floated over to him and leaned her body against his, hugging him around the neck and nuzzling him softly. "You finally woke up. How are you feeling, brother?" Latias asked, clearly concerned.

Latios smiled. "A bit sore, but nothing I can't handle."

Latias nodded and gave Latios a gentle kiss in the cheek before hovering back. "That was your get well soon kiss," she commented jokingly, giggling.

Latios smiled warmly. "I think I already feel a lot better."

"Awww..." Pikachu and Ash chorused at the same time, looking at the scene with interest. "You two should keep it down a little, you woke us up," Pikachu said.

Latias giggled. "Sorry."

Pikachu smiled. "No problem."

Ash gently patted Latios on the head. "So, how are you feeling Latios?"

"I already answered that to Latias," Latios told him.

"I didn't hear it, I was waking up," Ash replied Mareepishly.

Latios chuckled and repeated his answer. "A bit sore, but... I should get better soon, I hope."

"Nurse Joy said that you should be better in three to four days," Latias informed him.

Latios nodded. "Alright." He frowned. "Will I be okay soon enough for Ash's next battle?"

Ash shook his head. "Even if you were ready, you aren't battling like this. You're resting until you've recovered completely."

Latios cocked his head to the side. "So, I will be ready but you don't want me to risk myself?"

Ash nodded. "Nurse Joy said that you would be healed in three to four days yesterday, and the next battle is in two days. You *might* be ready, but the thing is, since you might still be a bit delicate, if you take a hard blow, she said it could give you severe health problems later on, so I'm not risking anything. You won't fight in the semi-finals."

Latios frowned. "But what if you lose because of my absence? I don't mind fighting for you Ash."

Ash smiled. "I don't care, you're more important to me than any trophy or title could ever be."

Latios nodded, touched by Ash's concern for him. "All right."

"Besides, I have Charizard left!" Ash commented, sounding sure of himself.

Pikachu chuckled. "Yeah, he'll make sure you win."

Ash smiled. "Anyway Latios, thank you so much for winning that battle for me, I'm very proud of you." Ash gave Latios a small hug around the neck, being careful to avoid the bandages. "That's enough help for now, my team will do the rest."

Latios sighed. "Sorry for being unable to help you..."

Ash smiled and petted the eon Pokémon reassuringly. "It's okay Latios, you did your best and that's what counts."

Latios smiled and nodded. "Alright."

"So," Pikachu began. "How did your first beating feel?"

"Horrible..." Latios mumbled.

Pikachu laughed. "The first time you get the crap beaten out of you is always the hardest. Mine was against a flock of Spearows..."

"I can imagine," Latios muttered unhappily. "Look at me now, I hope my feathers weren't ruined." Everyone sweatdropped.

"So, can you get up?" Pikachu asked.

"Let me try," Latios said as he activated his levitation power. He started to hover off the bed slowly until he floated a few inches into the air. "Yes, I can levitate without much effort."

Latios hovered off the bed and steadied at his usual height, enjoying floating once again, he would have stretched a little, but he knew it would hurt, so he restrained from doing so. Ash smiled. "Nice to see you can at least fly."

"So, when can I leave?" Latios asked.

"I don't know," Ash answered.

At that moment Nurse Joy entered with a Blissey. "Ah, Hello, glad to see you're all up," she said sweetly. She turned to Latios. "And glad

to see that you're up, too."

"Hi," Ash greeted. "So, when can Latios leave the Pokémon Center?"

"I'll have to do a small checkup to see how his healing has progressed over the night," Nurse Joy replied. "Could you please leave us alone so I can examine him and change his bandages?"

Ash nodded. "Alright. Come on, let's go Latias, Pikachu." Pikachu jumped off the bed and ran out the room. Ash followed him.

Latias shared a small look at Latios. He nodded at her. She grinned and followed Ash. "So, think my brother will be out today?" Latias asked as the door closed behind her.

"I hope so," Ash answered. "He's already rested for a while so he should be better." He smiled reassuringly at her.

Latias grinned. "Yeah, I know he'll be fine today!" she said brightly. Ash smiled at her again. He was glad that the gloomy look Latias had yesterday about Latios' condition was gone. The fact that Latios was up definitely cheered her up.

"I wonder who I'll use in the semifinals?" Ash wondered.

"Brock will help you there," Latias reassured him.

"I think I'll give some of my other Pokémon a rest too, they must be tired after the battles against Harrison and Gary," Ash commented. "Well, except Charizard."

Latias laughed. "Need a powerhouse to make sure you have a chance?"

"Yes, that, and if I leave him out of the semifinals, he'd be so pissed at me he might try to fry me," Ash commented nervously.

Pikachu and Latias laughed. "Yep," Pikachu began. "Sounds like something Charizard would do."

"Hello Ash!" Misty chorused. Ash turned and was surprised to see Bianca, Brock and Misty entering. "You're up this early! The world must be coming to an end," she joked.

"Very funny," Ash deadpanned. "Sorry I didn't get back to the hotel last night."

"We already knew you weren't going to arrive," Brock assured him. "We knew you'd stay here the whole night."

"Ah, all right then," Ash replied Mareepishly. "Sorry if I got you worried or something like that."

"We weren't," Brock assured him. "We knew Latias would make sure you didn't do something weird or get into trouble, and you have your other five Pokémon with you anyway." They laughed slightly.

Ash facefaulted. "Forget it..."

"So, how's Latios?" Bianca asked, fidgeting in anxiety.

"He already woke up. Nurse Joy is giving him a morning check up, and changing his bandages," Latias answered. "After she finishes, she'll decide if Latios is in any condition to leave the Pokémon Center."

"Oh, that's good to hear. At least he's up," Bianca commented, clearly relieved.

"Yeah," Misty agreed.

"That's good to hear, he seemed in pretty bad shape at the end of the battle," Brock added.

"So, who's my next opponent?" Ash asked. In his worry over Latios, he had forgotten about that.

"Well," Brock started. "Your next opponent is from Sento Cherry Town. His name is Jon Dickson. I checked his records, and he has no Pokémon foreign to Kanto or Johto, so he shouldn't have any surprises. He does have a powerful team, however."

"Well, I can still win this one," Ash commented. "I *have* to win. If I win I'll make it to the grand final, and Latios will be ready to fight by then!"

"Yeah," Misty agreed. "I wish you the best of luck."

"Thanks," Ash said, smiling at her.

A small beep was heard as the door opened. Nurse Joy stepped out, holding some papers with various records and charts on them. Latios was hovering behind her, with new and clean bandages on his body, a bit less than before. Nurse Joy looked through the papers. "Well, Latios is good enough to leave the Pokémon Center. Please, no excessive activity for at least one to two days," Nurse Joy announced. "Also, he's safe and clear to go inside a Pokeball."

Ash smiled. "Thanks, Nurse Joy."

"Also," Nurse Joy said, giving Ash a small bottle of pills. "In case that Latios starts to feel too much pain, those should make him feel better, they're effective painkillers."

"Okay, thanks again," Ash said. He gave the bottle to Brock since he was the one that knew about medicine and such.

"Have a good day," Nurse Joy said as she turned around and walked off to continue her duties.

"Well, what now?" Ash asked.

"We could talk about your upcoming battle in the semifinals," Brock suggested. "And register your team."

Ash nodded enthusiastically. "Alright!" He turned to Latios and frowned. "Can those turn invisible?" Ash asked, pointing to the bandages.

Latios sweatdropped. "No, it's my feathers that make me able to turn invisible, so I can't make other objects invisible."

"Ah," Ash muttered. "Sorry Latios, into the Pokeball it is."

"Can bandages actually go inside a Pokeball?" Latios asked curiously.

"I've seen bows and ribbons go into Pokeballs, so why not bandages?" Ash said.

Latios shrugged. "Good point. Just don't keep me in there for too long, please."

Ash chuckled and grabbed Latios' Pokeball. "Don't worry, just the walk from here to the hotel. Latios, return." A red beam extended from the center of the Pokeball as Latios was returned inside. Latias glowed as a bright shower of blue lights covered her, turning her into her human form, looking completely identical to Bianca. "Well, let's go," Ash suggested.

Ash's friends nodded and together walked back to the hotel. It was completely uneventful, seeing as most of the streets were empty since the last two battles of the Quarter-finals were being fought and everyone was watching them. Once they got back to the room and everyone got comfortable, Ash grabbed a Pokeball and pointed it at the center of the room. "Latios, come out," Ash said. In a bright flash of white light, Latios was released.

"Okay, Ash," Brock said from the PC. "Jon Dickson has a very powerful and well balanced team."

"And I don't have Latios..." Ash muttered. Latios sulked in the back. Latias went to comfort him. "Brock, I'd like to give the other members

of my team a rest too. After all, they fought very hard against Gary and Harrison, so they might enjoy the rest. Besides, that way I can give the others a chance to battle, and if I use an alternate team, that'll surprise my opponent."

"I guess that's a good idea," Misty said.

Brock nodded. "Good idea Ash, it'll confuse your opponent... also, you'll fight with fresh Pokémon since your team is carrying the toll of both battles against Gary and Harrison. I'll think of a team that's good enough to fight that Jon Dickson guy."

"After today, only four trainers will be left," Bianca noted.
"Congratulations on making it so far Ash!"

"Thanks! And I'll make it to the finals so Latios can battle again!" Ash said cheerfully.

Brock examined Jon Dickson's profile. "Jon Dickson's current team is: Ampharos, Tyranitar, Feraligatr, Togetic, Rapidash and Steelix."

"Wow, sounds tough," Misty commented.

Ash's eyes widened. "N-Not a Tyranitar..." He paused, regaining his composure. "Wait, a Togetic? What's that?"

Brock clicked on the image and expanded it to cover the screen. "It's the evolution of Togepi."

"Wow," Ash commented. He looked at Togepi, who was cradled in Misty's arms. She looked at him and chirped happily. "Can't be too tough..." Ash muttered.

" *Guess you'll find out on the battlefield,*" Latias commented.

"Well," Brock began. "How about we register Phanpy, Larvitar, Charizard, Noctowl, Tauros and Totodile? Phanpy and Larvitar have an advantage against most of Jon's team, except for Feraligatr. Tauros has raw power, Noctowl is a smart fighter, and Totodile is

good to keep some of them in check, like that Tyranitar. Charizard will be your main powerhouse for the battle."

Ash nodded. "Sounds good."

"Hey! Where am I in that team!" Pikachu bellowed angrily.

Ash sweatdropped. "A rest would be good for you too Pikachu, and besides, you only have an advantage against two of them, but I doubt that guy will send them to fight you," he explained, trying to calm the Electric-type down.

Pikachu huffed and crossed his arms over his chest. "Fine then. But why does Charizard get to battle again?"

Ash chuckled nervously. "Charizard flew all the way here. He might be mad at me if I don't include him in this important battle... and he'll fry me if I exclude him..."

Pikachu laughed. "Good point."

"Anyway," Ash started as he turned to Brock. "That team is fine, go ahead and register it."

Brock nodded. "Alright, registering the team for the battle now." He typed in a few things and within a minute, he was done.

"So, what should we do for these next two days?" Ash asked curiously.

"We could give your alternative team a warm-up," Brock suggested. "After we go to the Pokémon Center to swap them."

"But we just came from there!" Misty complained. "Why didn't we just use the PC there to look up Dickson's team rather than coming all the way back here only to leave again?"

There was a long, awkward pause. "Uh..." Brock said.

"Out we go again!" Ash said loudly. "And Latios, sorry."

Latios sighed. "Back into a pokeball..."

"Yep. Latios, return," Ash called sucking the Eon Pokémon back inside his Pokeball. With that, the group returned once more to the Pokémon Center. Again the walk was uneventful, and they could hear the roaring crowd and explosions and the MC's commentary all the way, so they assumed the first of the two battles was at its climax.

After calling Tracey at the lab and exchanging Ash's team (Thankfully during Pokémon League competitions he could keep around more than six Pokémon at a time as long as they didn't interfere. This was usually allowed for training and planning purposes, through Ash didn't have the need until now, as he needed to have Latios and Pikachu as well as the team that was going to fight Dickson with him at the same time). Once Ash was done, they exited the Pokémon Center. "So, it's still an early day, let's go to the usual training place."

"Sure," Brock agreed. "Your current team could use a warm-up before the battle to come."

"Okay! Let's go!" Ash said happily, eager to see his other Pokémon again, especially Larvitar and Phanpy. After a few minutes of walking into the forest, they reached the training clearing.

"Here again," Misty mused, looking at the clearing.

"Yeah," Ash agreed. He grabbed his Pokeballs. "Come on out!" he shouted. With a bright flash of light, all six of his chosen Pokémon were released, plus Latios.

Larvitar looked around and the second he noticed Ash, he gave a big smile and ran at him, glomping him happily and knocking him over. Latias reacted quickly and psychically reduced most of Larvitar's weight so when they landed, Larvitar didn't crush Ash. "Daddy!"

Larvitar chirped happily. Ash and Latias' jaw dropped at what Larvitar had called Ash. Latias then smiled happily, her innate ability to sense the emotions of others telling her that Larvitar was a bit more sociable now. His time without Ash had made him more confident and less dependent on Ash's presence. Though he still had a lot of resentment left because of his mother's separation from him, he now learned that he shouldn't be all gloomy over that forever.

Ash smiled happily and hugged Larvitar back. "Aww, what did you call me?" Ash asked, touched by the display of affection.

Larvitar chuckled nervously. "Well, ever since Phanpy got that idea into my head, it hasn't left me, and every day that passed that I didn't call you that I felt more uncomfortable, so I decided that I was now going to refer to you as my daddy. Hope you don't mind..."

Ash smiled. "No, its fine with me, I like the idea... guess I have another surrogate son." Bianca, Brock and Misty 'awwwwed', Latios had been translating Larvitar's words to them as they couldn't understand his Poke-Speech.

Ash stood up, still hugging Larvitar. The small Rock and Ground-Type fidgeted slightly as he turned to look at Latias and smiled. "Hi Aunt Latias!" he turned to Latios. "Hi Uncle Latios!"

Latias smiled and floated over to him. "Hi cutie." She gently took him from Ash's arms, accommodating him in her claws and giving him a hug. Larvitar squealed happily. Ash took the chance to go and talk to the rest of his Pokémon. Phanpy did the same thing Larvitar did, through he was a bit gentler with his affectionate tackle-hug.

"Thanks for helping Larvitar out so much!" Ash thanked the small blue Pokémon.

Phanpy squealed happily. "You're welcome daddy!"

Ash turned to the rest. "Hello!" All of his Pokémon returned the greeting. Latias set Larvitar in the floor and he walked back to the

main group. "Well," Ash began. "You six are my chosen battlers for the next match..."

Charizard looked around in surprise. "He isn't fighting?" he asked, looking at Latios. He then noticed his bandaged chest. "Ahhhh, he got beaten up, didn't he?"

"Yep," Pikachu confirmed. "He took his first beating as a battler, so, he's still recovering. Remember that the first beating is always the toughest to get over."

Charizard chuckled. "Reminds me of your first beating... fond memories... though I wasn't there."

Pikachu rolled his eyes. "And it reminds me of your first beating as a Charizard... may I remind you that you decided to listen to Ash after that?"

Charizard grimaced. "Don't mention that!"

"Anyway," Ash interrupted. "Next up is the semi-finals, so together we're going to win! Right?"

Ash's Pokémon gave a triumphant cry. Charizard smirked proudly. "With me on your side, you've got it in the bag!"

"You were defeated in the previous two battles," Pikachu pointed out.

"I went easy on them. I knew Latios was in reserve, I just *had* to let him battle and not do all the work myself..." Charizard responded. Everyone rolled their eyes.

"Well, for know, what do you suggest Brock?" Ash asked.

"Well, since we don't have time to learn new moves, we should do exercises to improve speed, power, and to warm everyone up and get them in shape for the battle," Brock suggested.

Ash nodded. "Sounds good to me!"

Latias sighed. *"If it's not that much of a bother, can I go to a more peaceful place? I don't really want to hear about battles or training now,"* she asked kindly.

Ash shrugged. "Sure, go ahead. I see no problem with it if you want to take your mind off battles for a while."

" *I'm going to the lake,*" Latias announced. She began to fly in the direction in the lake. Everyone knew that Latios would follow her, so they weren't surprised when he sped after her.

Latias and Latios weren't really needed, so everyone started to train normally. Bianca sighed. She noted that she couldn't help, looked at her sketch book, and walked after Latias and Latios.

Latias smiled contentedly as she arrived to the peaceful shore of the lake. She sensed that there were no humans nearby so there was no need to hide herself. "Hi sis," Latios greeted as he came over. "Why the run-away?"

"I just didn't want to hear about battling Pokémon for now," Latias answered.

"I'm fine already, you know," Latios told her in a gentle voice.

Latias smiled. "I know." She gave Latios a hug, minding the bandages.

In the nearby bushes Bianca smiled happily at the scene. *'This is gold!'* she thought as she took out her sketch book and began to draw. Though she was hiding from them behind some bushes, not wanting to disturb them, Latias and Latios knew she was there, they could sense her mind approaching a long way back. They silently decided to pretend they hadn't noticed her.

Latios sighed as he parted from the hug. "I feel bad for not being able to help Ash..."

Latias smiled. She knew that had been bothering Latios for a while. "Its okay brother, you helped him enough by winning the battle against Harrison, so don't look down on your efforts."

Latios smiled at her, thankful at her support. "Thanks sis."

"Besides, Ash will be fine! So don't worry," Latias continued.

Latios nodded. "I hope so."

Latias giggled. "Next time, try not to get all messed up like you were last battle."

Latios laughed. "I'll try, it wasn't my fault that Hoenn Guy was so well-prepared."

Latias smiled nostalgically. "Traveling is very fun," she noted. "Why didn't we do it sooner?"

"Well," Latios began. "I think it was because we never had a chance to do so, or it never crossed our minds. But when Ash came into our lives, he gave us the perfect chance to travel outside of Altomare safely."

Latias laughed. "I guess so." Latias fidgeted nervously. "Eh, brother?"

"Yes sis?" Latios answered, wondering what was crossing Latias' mind. He could simply read her thoughts to find out, but again, where was the fun in that?

"When I asked you if we could travel, you said yes, but you never specified how much time we were going to travel, and Ash's current League is coming to its end, so... for how much longer are we going to travel with Ash?" Latias asked.

Latios smiled at her. "For as long as you want to sis. I'm fine with it, so long as we keep our duty and return to Altomare in times of need. With that small exception, we can travel for all the time you want."

Latias grinned happily. "Thanks brother, you're the best."

"You're welcome sis," Latios replied.

As the day passed, both eon dragons talked and enjoyed the time they had together. Soon they would return to Ash's group to help him prepare for the Silver Conference semi-finals, which were just around the corner...

And chapter 20 is over! A short yet peaceful chapter, and brace yourselves because next Chapter is the Ash Vs. Jon Dickson! (And please don't comment to me for the last name XD, Its taken straight out of the anime lol)

Also, a very dear friend of mine is writing a nice fanfic I'd like to share with you all, its Called Pokémon Black: Enter Chaos, check it out! It's nice =D You can look for it in my favorites list. The author is called "Lady Venamisa." She too is on my Favorite authors list, so, you can find her there =D

Enjoy it! Please, take a look at it, you won't be disappointed. (Soon she'll start another story which has an interesting story line and she will co-write it with yet another dear friend of mine. I'll also share it with you when Chapter 1 is out!)

AND. I started a Very interesting **Poll**, it's on my profile. Please go and vote for up to **five** choices. The question is: In Pokémon, which shipping that includes Ash do you like the most?

Anyway, 20 chapters! I'm glad to have been writing for you all for all this time! Please... Leave a **REVIEW!**

Intense Full Battle: SemiFinals!

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: And here's chapter 21! Yay! This is, officially, my longest chapter EVER! So enjoy it! =D Also, I am very sorry for the delay. I was pretty busy for most part of the month of October, so I started writing this during late October.

Two days had passed rather quickly for our group of heroes, and today was the day of Ash's battle in the semi-finals.

The two days had been rather normal. The group trained lightly so that Ash's team was in proper form for the battle to come, and Latios' recovery was coming along great, though he needed pills at night so that he could sleep peacefully. They had taken him to the Pokémon Center the previous day for a quick check-up, and Nurse Joy had said that he was recovering nicely and that he didn't need the bandages anymore.

Morning came soon for our eager hero, though as usual he wouldn't wake up without some help. Latias, Latios and Pikachu stared at his sleeping form. "He isn't waking up any time soon, is he?" Latios wondered curiously.

"Nope," Pikachu replied, shaking his head. "I'll wake him up," he announced, his cheeks sparkling as a grin formed on his face.

"Pikachu!" Latias scolded. "Don't hurt him! I have a better way of waking him up. Her eyes glowed slightly as she gently interrupted his

sleep with a light thought. Ash yawned and started to wake up.

"Aww," Pikachu whined. "I like to wake him up with thunderbolts..."

"But my method is much better," Latias countered. "And less harmful."

"Whatever..." Pikachu muttered. Latias giggled happily.

Ash rose from his bed and yawned. "I wish I could wake up like this every morning. I feel great!"

Pikachu sulked as Latias snickered. "Told you so."

"So, what time is it?" Ash asked curiously.

"Eight in the morning," Latias answered.

"Why so early... I want to sleep more," Ash whined, throwing himself under the covers and stuffing the pillow over his head.

Pikachu laughed. "What was that about your method being better?"

Latias sweatdropped. "I said it'll wake him up, I never said he'd *stay* that way."

Pikachu snickered. "Then I guess I'll have to do that," he said a little too eagerly, cheeks beginning to spark.

"Again, we have a better method," Latios interrupted, causing Pikachu to sigh. "Tell me what you think." Latios eyes glowed as he telekinetically lifted the bed and flipped it over, causing Ash to fall to the floor with a yelp.

Pikachu nodded. "That's a good one..." All three Pokémon laughed.

Misty cracked the door open slightly and peeked in. "Is everything all right? I heard someone fa-" She sweatdropped when she looked at the room. The bed was floating upside-down with Ash on the floor,

Latias, Latios and Pikachu were laughing, and Latios' eyes were glowing. She sighed. "And all I asked was for them to wake him up..." she muttered before closing the door again and going back to the living room. The three Pokémon sweatdropped as Ash struggled to stand up. Latios set the bed back in its rightful place, thankfully not on top of Ash.

"Next time, I'm buying an alarm clock..." Ash muttered dizzily, finally accepting that his Pokémon would probably kill him one day with their 'wake Ash methods'.

"You've smashed all the alarm clocks you had wanting to sleep a bit more. Brock got tired of buying replacements," Pikachu pointed out.

"Damn," Ash muttered. He stood up from the bed lazily.

"Brock is making breakfast!" Latias chimed.

Ash smiled happily. "Really!" Latias nodded. Ash immediately forgot he had just woken up and ran out of the room to take a seat in the living room.

"That's how to cheer Ash up alright," Latias giggled. Latios and Pikachu nodded in agreement. They exited the room.

Ash had been forced to wake up early as he had to be ready for his upcoming match, and to have a nice breakfast courtesy of Brock. Bianca and Misty were seating at the table already.

"Morning, sleepy head," Misty greeted him. Bianca did the same.

Brock came out of the kitchen holding two plates of food. "Good morning Ash," he greeted as he set the plates on table.

"Good morning to you as well Brock, Misty and Bianca," Ash greeted with a smile. "You too Latias, Latios and Pikachu," he continued, sensing that the last three were coming out of his room just at that moment. Brock came out with the last two plates of food and set

them on the table, and, after serving all the Pokémon their own breakfast, he took a seat to enjoy the most important meal of the day.

"So Ash, nervous?" Bianca asked curiously as she got ready to eat.

Ash was already eating, so he answered with his mouth full, much to everyone else's disgust. "Nope, why should I be?"

"Because the Pokémon that was the key factor for your victories against Gary and Harrison is out of the picture," Misty deadpanned.

"Even so, I can still win!" Ash replied confidently before he resumed eating.

"Yeah, he's right," Latias telepathed. "He can still win. I'm sure that his current team will do everything to make sure he prevails. Right, guys?"

All the Pokémon nodded. "Yup!" Phanpy said cheerfully. "We'll help daddy win!"

"Through I'd love to also help in the battle..." Pikachu muttered. He turned to Ash. "Is there a way I can fight, please?" Larvitar took advantage of Pikachu's distraction and took a bite out of Pikachu's plate. Latias stifled a giggle, but didn't say anything.

"Sorry Pikachu, but everyone is already eager for a battle. Besides, a rest will do you some good," Ash replied.

"That and Ash's next opponent probably expects you, so he'll get a surprise when Ash doesn't use you," Charizard noted before he resumed eating. Thankfully their living room was big enough to fit them all comfortably.

"Remember Ash, don't get nervous, and remember that you have mostly small Pokémon in your team. Use that to your advantage," Brock suggested.

"And," Misty continued. "Jon has mostly bulky or large Pokémon, so your smaller Pokémon should be nimble enough to get away from their moves and attack safely."

"Also, use Charizard to deal with any troublesome Pokémon Jon sends," Brock suggested.

"I'd also suggest that you don't limit yourself to using Charizard as your last Pokémon Ash. Maybe you can sneak in a surprise or two," Latias suggested.

"And I suggest you not mess it up," Latios said, looking at Charizard. Charizard glared at him.

Pikachu laughed. "What he means is be careful, you don't want to receive a beating like the one he took before." Latios blushed in embarrassment. All the Pokémon laughed, and the humans joined them when Latias telepathed them what Pikachu said.

Larvitar took advantage of the distraction and spirited away another bite from Pikachu's plate. "Damn Shedinja..." Latios muttered irritably.

"The next move you learn has to be one that breaks Wonder Guard... just in case," Brock announced. "I'll check later what you need to learn."

"Alright," Latios telepathed.

After a few more minutes of chatting, the group finished eating, and Pikachu was again puzzled about the fact that some of his food had disappeared. They spent the next hour or so talking with Ash about things he could do to win. Soon enough, the first semi-final battle approached.

After checking that everything was ready and everyone returned their Pokémon back to their Pokéballs, the group left the hotel. As usual, Latios exited through the balcony. He enjoyed the removal of

his bandages since it meant he could turn invisible and fly freely without having to go into the Pokeball.

As the group walked to the stadium, they noticed many people were heading in the same direction. Today, the two semi-final battles would be fought, and everyone wanted to see them. Some people spared Ash a few glances, recognizing him instantly. Though most of them guessed that he was focused on his battle and didn't interrupt him, not all of them thought like that.

Macey smiled as she walked to the stadium. Usually, most trainers left the city out of spite after their elimination, but she had a reason to stay. She still had yet to ask Ash out on a date. The only days she could find him were the days he fought, and the time in-between battles he was always nowhere to be seen. She had heard he went to the forest to train or something like that... And when she tried to get near him, the red head or the silent girl always ruined her plans, but today that would change! (Or so she thought)

Macey calmly rounded the corner of a building, inspecting the crowds walking toward Silver Stadium. She grinned when she spotted Ash and his friends. She ran forward eagerly, ready to ask him out on a date again... and a bucket of water fell on her. The guy that was cleaning the windows of the building looked down in embarrassment, wondering how the hell the bucket had moved on its own and fallen on that girl.

' *Yes! Direct hit!*' Latias thought proudly, doing a happy dance. Thankfully, she was invisible and no one noticed except her brother. Latios stared at her in clear confusion. He felt she exerted some psychic powers. He didn't have time to pinpoint the target, so he decided to ask what had happened later.

After a few minutes of walking, they neared the Stadium. Ash turned and walked to the entrance to the battlefield. To his surprise, he found a young teen, at least sixteen or so, walking to the entrance as well. He had a blue long-sleeve button-down shirt and messy light-brown hair. He paused when he noticed Ash walking toward him. He

smiled. "Hello, I'm Jon Dickson of Sento Cherry Town, your next opponent. Pleased to meet you."

Ash smiled back and returned the greeting. "Hi! I'm Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town!"

"I'm impressed for such a young kid to come this far, congratulations Ash," Jon said, clearly impressed. "I've never seen anything like this before."

"Thanks!" Ash said proudly.

"But I won't go easy on you. Let's fight an amazing battle, and let the best trainer win!" Jon announced, holding out his hand.

Ash smiled. "I wouldn't want it other way," he said as he shook hands with his opponent. Jon parted and walked to the guard, showing his Pokedex ID. The guard let him pass. Ash did the same, and soon both Ash and Jon entered the battlefield. The crowd cheered loudly.

"Both trainers have entered the battlefield!" the MC announced.

"Everything is set for the start of the first semi-final battle!" The crowd cheered even more. "The two trainers today are impressive individuals: Jon Dickson, who has steadily dominated his battles all the way here, and Ash Ketchum, a young but strong trainer that has a Legendary Pokémon in his possession! Also, with his presence in the semifinals, Ash Ketchum has broken the record for the youngest trainer ever to reach the semifinals at eleven years old!"

"I'm so proud!" Delia squealed in the stands, startling professors Oak and Elm. They smiled at her, understanding why she was happy. Her son was at the top four of the Silver Conference, an impressive feat.

"Well Delia, I'm sure all of Pallet Town is proud. It's been a while since someone from Pallet Town competed in the last rounds of a league," Professor Oak remarked.

"Though without Latios' participation, Ash's fate in this battle doesn't look good," Professor Elm commented gloomily.

"Latios isn't Ash's entire team you know," Gary commented to Professor Elm. "Sure, he's a Legendary, but he's just one in a team of six."

"That is true," Professor Oak agreed. "And if there is one thing Ash has done superbly, it's raising his team."

"All we can do now is sit here and watch the battle play out," Delia said, looking as Ash took the red side of the battlefield, Jon took the green side.

"Besides, Ashy-boy is strong! I know that first hand," Gary commented, trying to cheer them up. "He can beat this guy!"

"Yeah!" Delia squealed, taking out her camera.

"And now, the field will be chosen!" the MC narrated. "And I wonder why we bother to change the field considering both times Ash has battled, it was completely destroyed..." Ash and Latios chuckled nervously and Latias giggled. The huge screen lit up as a segmented wheel appeared. The light started flashing through the segments, stopping on the grass drawing. "The battle will be fought on the Grass Battlefield!" the MC announced.

The field shook as the normal battlefield sunk in the ground, splitting halfway as another field replaced it. The new was lifted until it was ground level with the rest of the stadium floor. The Grass field was basically covered in a layer of grass at least one or two feet tall. Several bushes were planted here and there on the field, and there were several spots where the grass was barely a few inches tall. "And now, which trainer shall make the first move!" the MC wondered.

On the screen, another segmented wheel appeared. A light flashed around it, stopping on a green segment, meaning that the first move was Jon's. "And first move goes to Jon Dickson!"

The Referee checked to see that everything was in place. "This will be a six on six Pokémon battle with substitutions allowed on both sides! The winner will be decided when all six Pokémon from one side are unable to continue battling!" he announced. "A short five-minute rest will be taken when three Pokémon of a side are unable to continue battling!"

Jon grabbed his first Pokeball. "Let's start strong. Go, Rapidash!" he shouted as he threw the Pokeball to the field. A large horse Pokémon appeared, sporting a fiery mane, tail, and hooves. Rapidash's icon appeared on the screen in the first slot of Jon's party.

"And Jon has started with Rapidash!" the MC announced unnecessarily.

Ash hummed in thought. He smirked as he grabbed a Pokeball. "Go, Totodile!" Ash shouted as the small blue Pokémon was released on the field and did a happy dance.

"And a dancing Totodile is Ash's first choice!" the MC narrated as Totodile's icon appeared on the screen, placing itself in the first slot of Ash's team.

"The semifinals match between Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town and Jon Dickson of Sento Cherry Town will now BEGIN!" the Referee bellowed.

"And the battle begins!" the MC cried.

"Rapidash, use Ember!" Jon shouted, ordering the first attack. Rapidash took a deep breath and spat a barrage of fireballs in rapid succession at the Water-Type.

"Totodile, dodge!" Ash ordered. Totodile began to dance, each step of his usual dance allowing him to dodge the Ember attack.

"Rapidash, Flame Wheel!" Jon shouted.

"And that folks, is a creative way to dodge!" the MC remarked. Delia thought it was very cute and took lots of pictures.

However, what Totodile didn't expect was that before he even finished dodging the Ember attack, Rapidash was already charging at him, covered in a veil of fire. "Totodile, use Water Gun on the floor!" Ash shouted. Totodile quickly aimed downwards and spat a stream of water at the ground, catapulting him into the sky as Rapidash passed below him a split second later. Totodile re-aimed his Water Gun, hitting the Fire Horse Pokémon in the back.

"Rapidash use Take Down!" Jon commanded. Rapidash quickly shook off the water stream and charged at the spot where Totodile would eventually fall down, which happened quickly as gravity began to take effect, forcing Totodile to descend.

"Totodile, quick, use Bite!" Ash shouted.

"*You're asking Totodile to bite a Pokémon covered in fire?*" Latias asked incredulously.

Ash sweatdropped. "Er, Totodile, aim for a place with no fire! Aim for the Horn!"

As Rapidash closed in on the falling Pokémon, Totodile took aim, and with a mighty bite, he clamped down on Rapidash's horn, causing the Fire Horse Pokémon to shriek. "Ouch, what a painful bite!" the MC commented. Rapidash thrashed around, trying to knock off the small blue Pokémon, but it was to no avail. The harder Rapidash thrashed, the harder Totodile bit. Rapidash swore that its horn was about to come off!

"Rapidash, use Flame Wheel!" Jon shouted, seeing his Pokémon's distress. Rapidash stopped thrashing and concentrated, the flames that covered its body spreading and turning Rapidash into a fireball.

"Totodile, Water Gun!" Ash shouted. Totodile released the horn and spat a torrent of water inside the flaming prison, creating an

explosion of steam that quickly covered that portion of the field. Totodile emerged from the steam, not looking very fazed. A panting Rapidash soon appeared as well as the steam cloud dissipated.

"What an interesting battle, worthy of the semifinals!" the MC commented. The crowd cheered.

"Totodile, use Water Gun!" Ash commanded. Totodile nodded and spat a torrent of water at the Fire-Type.

"Rapidash, use Take Down!" Jon ordered. Rapidash quickly galloped forward and with a quick move to the side, dodged Totodile's water stream.

"Hide in a bush! Then use Water Gun," Ash shouted. Totodile nodded and jumped to the side, getting behind a bush. He ducked as Rapidash slammed against the bush, and it effectively protected Totodile. Just as Rapidash finished the pass and turned for another go, Totodile fired a stream of water at the Rapidash. It shrieked as the super-effective attack slammed against it.

"Rapidash, shake it off with a Flame Wheel, and then use Fire Blast!" Jon ordered frantically. Rapidash's body detonated in an orb of fire, completely evaporating the Water Gun. A five-pointed star of fire appeared, blazing its way towards the stunned Water-type.

"Wow! What a powerful attack!" the MC remarked.

"Totodile, counter it with Water Gun!" Ash shouted. Totodile nodded and spat a water stream as hard as he could. The attacks collided, a mass of steam bursting from Totodile's Water Gun as it was vaporized by the Fire Blast, though, the Water Gun succeeded in severely weakening the Fire Blast so that by the time it reached Totodile, it was barely a bunch of embers.

Taking advantage of the steam-covered field, Ash issued his next order. "Totodile, use Water Gun!" Totodile quickly spat a torrent of water, aiming it at the form of Rapidash in the cloud.

"Rapidash, use Take Down!" Jon ordered quickly. Rapidash quickly dodged to the side and with a powerful gallop, sprinted forward at blinding speeds toward Totodile.

"Totodile, dance!" Ash shouted. Jon gave him a confused look, as did Ash's friends.

" *What?*" Latias and Latios questioned flatly. Ash chuckled nervously.

Totodile shrugged and did what he liked to do the most: he began to dance, jumping around as Rapidash closed in. "What is Ash planning?" the MC wondered.

Just as Rapidash was a few meters away from Totodile, the Water-Type made a quick spin in mid-dance. The completely unpredictable move was effective as Rapidash passed just beside Totodile. Ash smirked. "Totodile, use Water Gun!" he shouted. The Water-type nodded and spat a powerful torrent of water, catching the Fire Horse Pokémon mid-gallop. The force of the attack caused the Fire-type to stumble and fall to the ground. It tried to get up, but the continuous water attacks were too much, and it fainted.

"Rapidash is unable to continue battling!" the Referee shouted, raising the corresponding flag as the Rapidash's icon faded from the screen, leaving a black silhouette.

"Yes! Good job Totodile!" Ash praised. The Water-Type danced happily. Jon grabbed a Pokeball and returned the defeated fire-type.

"And Rapidash was defeated after an impressive combination courtesy of Ash's Totodile!" the MC commented. The crowd cheered.

" *Nice one,*" Latias commented.

"Thanks," Ash thanked.

" *Who knew dancing would be so effective for something?*" Latios commented.

Jon hummed in thought as he contemplated his next possible choice. *'If I choose Ampharos, he'll switch out, so I'll bring out a little surprise!'* He grabbed his next Pokeball. "Go, Steelix!" Jon shouted, tossing his Pokeball to the field. A huge iron snake divided into boulder-shaped segments, some which had huge spikes growing out of them, materialized. Steelix's icon appeared on the screen atop the stadium, on the second slot of Jon's side.

"Aw, great," Ash muttered, looking at the huge Pokémon before him, and Totodile wasn't doing any better. "I hate those."

"Talk about heavy artillery! Steelix is Jon's second Pokémon!" the MC announced.

"Steelix, use Iron Tail!" Jon ordered. The huge steel-type roared as its tail shined a bright white, becoming harder than it already was. The massive tail was swung down at the Water-Type.

"Dodge and use Water Gun!" Ash ordered. Totodile quickly leaped to the side. Dodging the massive tail by mere millimeters, Totodile quickly turned and fired a stream of water at the Steel-type, hitting it in the head. The Steelix swung his tail to the side, hitting Totodile and stopping the water gun.

The sheer force of getting hit by a massive steel wall was too much for the already weakened Totodile. The Water-Type fainted as he landed with a thud. "Totodile is unable to continue battling!" the Referee shouted. Totodile's icon faded.

" *That was fast,*" Latios muttered telepathically. Ash sweatdropped as he returned the defeated Water-type.

"And Totodile is done for the day!" the MC announced rather unnecessarily.

Ash hummed in thought. He had a good idea as to how to beat Steelix, or at least, good by Ash's standards. *"Can that work?"* Latios asked, reading his mind.

" *You aren't gonna pit Phanpy against a Steelix, right?*" Latias asked worried. "*Right!*"

"Phanpy, I choose you!" Ash shouted, tossing the Pokeball to the field. The small blue Pokémon materialized on the battlefield. Phanpy's icon appeared in the second slot of Ash's side.

"I'm all ready to fight, daddy!" Phanpy chorused, despite having a huge steel serpent in front of him. Latias sweatdropped.

" *This is gonna be good, wish I had some popcorn,*" Latios murmured. Latias laughed.

"And a Phanpy is Ash's next choice. How will such a small Pokémon deal with Steelix!" the MC wondered.

Jon smirked. "Despite having a Type advantage, such a small Pokémon should be no problem," he mused to himself.

"Phanpy, use Rollout!" Ash shouted. Phanpy nodded and took a forward leap, quickly tucking into a tight ball as he started rolling towards the Steelix.

Jon laughed. "Steelix, end this with an Iron Tail!" Jon shouted. Steelix's colossal tail shined a bright white as it swung it, hoping to defeat the small Ground-Type with a single attack.

"Phanpy, stop rolling and use Earthquake!" Ash shouted. Phanpy quickly stopped, the momentum flinging him forwards, and as he landed, he stomped on the ground, sending a powerful tremor across the field. The Steelix roared as the super-effective attack hit it.

Latias remembered this same strategy from the battle against Macey's Rapidash. "*Wow, can't believe it actually worked again,*" she commented.

"Steelix is a rather large Pokémon, so it may have some problems dealing with a Pokémon as small and nimble as Phanpy," Ash noted.

"Be careful, Ash!" Misty called from the bench behind him. "One blow from Steelix can cause a lot of damage!"

Ash nodded. "I will!"

"Steelix, use Dragon Breath!" Jon shouted. Steelix reared back and spat a stream of green fire, aiming directly at the small ground-type.

"Dodge with Rollout!" Ash ordered. Phanpy quickly curled into a ball and rolled out of the way, escaping the flames with ease.

"Wow folks, using Rollout as a defensive attack was a brilliant strategy! Now Steelix can't hit Phanpy!" the MC commented. The crowd cheered.

Jon growled. "Steelix, use Crunch!" he shouted. The huge steel Pokémon lunged forward, jaws open wide.

"Keep rolling!" Ash ordered. Phanpy kept rolling, easily dodging the Crunch attack. The huge Steel-type slammed into the ground, causing a small tremor. "Phanpy, use Hidden Power!" Ash shouted. Phanpy stopped rolling and quickly aimed at the Steelix as his body glowed, forming several white orbs around him. He fired the orbs, hitting the Steel-type directly in the face, causing it to thrash about. "Phanpy, follow it up with an Earthquake!" Ash shouted.

Phanpy leaped and slammed down on the field, generating another tremor, causing a lot more damage to Steelix. Jon growled slightly. Knowing that his Pokémon was having too many difficulties, he did the next best thing and held up a Pokeball. "Steelix, return!" The Steel-type was returned back inside its Pokeball and the light around its icon faded.

"Seeing that Steelix was having too much of a hard time, Jon calls him back!" the MC narrated. "What will his next Pokémon be?"

Jon grabbed his next Pokeball. "Togetic, go!" He hurled the Pokeball. A small white and angelic looking Pokémon appeared. It had a long neck, short stubby arms, slightly larger feet, and a pair of wings on the back. Its body was covered in numerous red and blue triangles, which reminded Ash of the triangles that Latias and Latios had on their chests. Togetic's icon appeared in the third of Jon's slots.

"And Togetic is Jon's third Pokémon!" the MC announced unnecessarily.

Ash blinked as he stared at the small Pokémon, almost the same size as Phanpy. He looked behind him and stared at Misty's Togepi. He sweatdropped. "Is it tough?" he asked.

"Togetics are strong Pokémon Ash. Don't get fooled by their looks, they can learn a large variety of moves!" Latios warned.

"I sense this particular Togetic is well trained, so be very careful," Latias warned as well. *"Togetics are Flying and Normal-Types."*

After hearing Latias and Latios' warnings, Phanpy readied himself, tensing and getting ready to attack at any given moment. "Don't worry daddy, I'll do my best!"

Togetic stared at the small Pokémon in confusion. "Daddy?" she inquired. Due to her special abilities, she could sense that the small Phanpy was a very happy Pokémon and had a strong attachment to his human trainer. She smiled, she enjoyed meeting happy Pokémon. She also took interest that the red haired girl had a Togepi, and for some reason, she could sense two presences beside the human trainer. One of them had a particularly high level of happiness. Latias blushed when she realized Togetic was staring at her.

Phanpy smiled. "Yep, he hatched me so he's my daddy, and I'll win for him!"

Togetic smiled. "Good Luck doing that, but I won't go down easy."

Phanpy grinned and got ready. Seeing that they were finished, Ash took the initiative. "Phanpy, use Hidden Power!" Ash ordered. Phanpy nodded as his body shined brightly. Several white orbs of energy generated around his body, and with a mighty cry, he sent them flying at the small Happiness Pokémon.

"Togetic, dodge!" Jon shouted. Togetic's wings flapped once and the small Pokémon quickly took off, evading the attack as the energy spheres passed where she had been a few seconds ago. "Now, use Silver Wind!" Jon ordered.

Togetic flapped her wings, sending a powerful gust of Silver-colored wind with several dark silver crescent waves at Phanpy. "Phanpy, use Rollout to dodge!" Ash commanded. Phanpy curled into a tight ball and rolled away from the attack, dodging the silvery gusts of wind.

"Togetic, use Metronome!" Jon ordered. Togetic began to wag her stubby arms sideways. Soon they started to glow a light blue.

"And Jon calls for the most unpredictable Pokémon attack!" the MC announced. "What will happen next!"

Suddenly, Togetic stopped moving her arms and with a massive rush of speed, disappeared. Phanpy had no time to react as Togetic slammed into him, knocking him back. "What was that!" Ash wondered.

"It was either ExtremeSpeed or Quick Attack, but since it was so fast that not even I could sense Togetic's movements, it must have been ExtremeSpeed," Latios clarified.

"Damn," Ash muttered. "Phanpy, now that Togetic is on the ground, use Rollout!" he shouted, noticing that the Happiness Pokémon was finally at ground level.

Phanpy curled into a ball and rolled as fast as he could towards the Happiness Pokémon. Jon growled. *'At that distance, Togetic can't fly*

away. If she does, that would just worsen the damage!" he thought frantically. "Togetic, try to stop him!" Togetic nodded and extended her arms, planting her feet firmly and spreading her wings wide. Phanpy crashed against her, pushing her back. Anchoring herself in the grass, she managed to stop, even as the Ground-Type kept rolling, the friction hurting her arms. "Togetic, use Flamethrower!" Jon ordered.

Togetic opened her mouth and spat a stream of fire that washed over the Ground-Type. In spite of this, Phanpy remained strong. "Hidden Power!" Ash ordered. Within the blazing orb, a white glow appeared as Phanpy fired the Hidden Power attack. The attack detonated, catching both Togetic and Phanpy in the blast. Both Pokémon emerged from the resulting smoke rather quickly, Togetic flying to the sky and Phanpy sliding back from the force of the blast. "Hidden Power, again!" Ash bellowed.

Phanpy glowed as he generated several spheres of white energy and fired them skyward, aiming for the airborne Togetic. "Togetic, use Silver Wind!" Jon ordered. Togetic flapped her wings, creating a silvery gust of wind that collided against the Hidden Power orbs, wearing the attack down until it dissipated.

"Wow, impressive! This battle is definitely semi-final material!" the MC commented.

"Togetic, use Psychic!" Jon ordered. Togetic's eyes glowed as she exerted her mental powers.

"Phanpy, use Rollout!" Ash ordered. *'I have two powerful psychics with me. Like a psychic attack would bother me! I already know how to dodge them easily.'*

"Only weak to mid-powered psychic attacks," Latios corrected. *"There are psychic Pokémon stronger than me and Latias, and a simple burst of speed isn't going to get you out of their mental hold anytime soon."*

Ash chuckled nervously. *'Then as long as I don't face one, I'm fine.'*

"Don't worry, there are other tactics besides speed and fast movements to evade psychics. I'll teach what I know to you later if you want," Latios offered.

'Sure,' Ash thought. In the meantime, Phanpy was busy rolling around, and Togetic sighed in frustration. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't get a grip on the Ground-Type's body, he was just moving too fast. She ended her Psychic attack as Phanpy stopped rolling.

"Togetic, use Metronome!" Jon ordered. Togetic wagged her arms as they were surrounded by a blue outline. She stopped and suddenly fired a massive surge of electricity as she used Thunderbolt. Phanpy didn't move and let the attack hit him. As expected, nothing happened. Jon sweatdropped. "Oops, bad luck."

"And Metronome was of no use..." the MC commented.

"Phanpy, Hidden Power again!" Ash shouted.

"Don't you have other attacks?" Latias inquired. *"You've been using that a lot lately."*

"Phanpy doesn't have another long range attack," Ash replied Mareepishly. Latias sweatdropped.

Phanpy fired another barrage of energy spheres at the flying Happiness Pokémon. "Dodge and use Metronome!" Jon ordered. Togetic once again wagged her arms as she frantically flew about, dodging Phanpy's attack. She was hit by one of the energy spheres, knocking her to the grass with a thud. She faced Phanpy as she finished wagging her arms. She grinned, hoping to get a good attack. Phanpy took a step back, getting ready for whatever attack was next... and was confused to see that Togetic started to cry.

"Okay... What's going on?" the MC wondered, confused.

Jon facepalmed. "Now what?"

"Errr," Phanpy muttered, seeing the sobbing Togetic and feeling a pang of guilt for hitting her with the earlier attack. "Did I hit you too hard with that attack? Sorry." Togetic only cried louder.

Ash blinked. "Err, explanation please."

Latios sweatdropped. *"I have no idea what's going on."*

" Maybe its Fake Tears?" Latias suggested.

"They seem pretty real to me..." Ash muttered.

" They 're supposed to," Latias telepathed. Ash sighed in confusion.

"Togetic, stop crying and use Flamethrower!" Jon ordered. Togetic wiped her tears away and spat a stream of fire at the surprised Ground-Type.

"Phanpy, use Defense curl!" Ash shouted.

"Hey, you tricked me!" Phanpy shouted, clearly annoyed as he curled into a tight ball. The flames washed over him but had no overall effect.

"Sorry, that's how the attack's supposed to work," Togetic apologized.

"Togetic, use Metronome!" Jon ordered again. Togetic groaned but complied as she began to wagged her arms yet again.

"Phanpy use Rollout!" Ash ordered, taking advantage of his prior use of Defense curl. Phanpy started rolling towards Togetic, displaying a lot more power than his previous Rollout attacks.

' Please, give me something useful!' Togetic pleaded in her mind, knowing that such a high-powered rollout could knock her out. Her prayers were answered as the second her arm waggling finished, an

orb of water gathered in her arms and formed a Water Pulse. She hurled the orb of water at the incoming Phanpy. He had no time to react as the Water Pulse slammed against him, flinging him back and knocking him out. Togetic sighed in relief.

"Phanpy is unable to continue battling!" the Referee called. Phanpy's icon faded from the screen.

"Finally! Metronome worked!" the MC commented as Ash returned Phanpy back to his pokeball.

Ash hummed in thought as he contemplated his possibilities. He grinned. "Charizard! I choose you!" Ash shouted, throwing his Pokeball to the field. With a flash, the Fire-Type appeared. Everyone was surprised by this move. Charizard's icon appeared in the third of Ash's slots.

"And Ash's Charizard is now on the field!" the MC announced.

Togetic paled in fear at the Fire-Type before her. She hoped she was recalled, there was no way she was going to fight a Pokémon that huge! Especially not after getting tired-out from battling Phanpy! Charizard suppressed a snort of laughter. Togetic took a nervous step back. *'Please return me Jon, please return me Jon, please return me Jon,'* she thought over and over again. Latias and Latios exchanged amused looks and suppressed a laugh after hearing her thoughts.

"Damn Ash, couldn't you have called me to face a tougher opponent!" Charizard bellowed.

"I want to go to the five-minute break winning. I know you can knock two Pokémon out," Ash answered.

Charizard shrugged. "Sure," he said as he turned to look at the frightened Togetic. He grinned, causing a chill to go down her spine.

Jon held up a Pokeball. "Togetic, return!" he shouted. Togetic sighed in pure relief as she was returned to her Pokeball. The light around her icon faded.

" *She was spared a heart attack,*" Latios commented jokingly. Latias and Ash laughed.

Charizard laughed too. "So true. I hope whoever's next is more of an opponent!"

" *Togetic is a very strong opponent, she was just tired. Plus she didn't have any attacks to deal with you effectively, that's why she was scared,*" Latios told him. Charizard shrugged.

Jon grabbed his next Pokeball. "Ampharos, go!" The Pokeball opened and a bipedal yellow Pokémon materialized. It had a white belly and several black stripes on the neck, tail and ears. It also had a red sphere at the tip of its tail and one in its forehead. The Electric-Type's icon appeared on the large screen.

"And Ampharos is Jon's answer to Charizard!" the MC bellowed over the speakers.

"Now that's what I'm talking about!" Charizard said eagerly.

"Good Luck Charizard!" Pikachu shouted. Charizard nodded.

"Ash, be careful with that Type Disadvantage!" Brock shouted. Ash nodded.

"Good luck!" Misty followed.

' *I have to be careful,*' Jon thought. *'That Charizard is strong. Latios took a severe beating against Harrison, I don't know for certain if Ash will use him or not, in the meantime, I must deal with his Charizard.'*

"Charizard! Use Flamethrower!" Ash shouted, starting the battle once more. Charizard roared as he exhaled a huge stream of fire.

"Ampharos, use Thunderbolt!" Jon ordered. Ampharos fired a colossal blast of electricity. Both attacks clashed, holding in a stalemate as they began to weaken out.

"Charizard, quick, use Dragon Rage!" Ash ordered. Charizard stopped the Fire attack and fired a concentrated orb of draconic energy just as the Thunderbolt and the Flamethrower disappeared, both attacks completely spent. The energy sphere passed through, heading towards Ampharos.

"Ampharos, block it with Thunder Punch!" Jon shouted. Ampharos's hands began to shine a bright yellow as a huge amount of Electricity gathered in them. The energy sphere collided with Ampharos as it thrust its arm forward, smashing the Thunder Punch into the Dragon Rage. The Electric-type was pushed back by the sheer force behind the attack, but the energy blast was unable to break his Thunder Punch.

With a mighty cry, Ampharos broke the energy sphere apart, reducing it to simple strands of light that harmlessly passed by the Electric-Type's sides. To Ampharos's shock, Charizard was already flying in its direction. "Flamethrower!" Ash ordered.

"With a powerful series of attacks, now Charizard has an opening to hit Ampharos!" the MC bellowed over the speakers. The crowd cheered.

Charizard roared and spat a very potent stream of fire. Jon growled. With no time to dodge or formulate a defense, only one thought occurred to him. "Use Thunder!"

Hearing the command, Charizard quickly extended his wings, stopping and flying a few feet back as he kept the Flamethrower trained on the Electric-type. Ampharos gave a loud cry as it released a colossal blast of electricity skyward. The stream of fire collided with the electricity, the Thunder dispersing the flames to either side.

"What a powerful shield, this battle is intense!" the MC commented.

"Charizard, look up!" Ash shouted. Charizard took a brief glance upwards, seeing the incoming Electric blast as the Thunder descended towards him.

With a flap of his wings, he dodged sideways, the electrical attack passing where he had been a few seconds ago and slamming harmlessly to the floor. He quickly spread his wings out, stabilizing him in the air again. "Ampharos, Discharge!" Jon ordered.

Ampharos' body glowed a bright yellow as lighting bolts were fired everywhere, Charizard's eyes widened slightly, seeing the incoming barrage of lighting strikes. "Charizard, use Air Slash!" Ash ordered. Charizard began flapping his wings, sending powerful gusts of air in every direction that turned into crescent blades. Both attacks collided, the air blades crashing against the electric attacks and canceling each other out. Ampharos panted as the Discharge ended, worn out after using so many Electric attacks.

"Charizard, Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Charizard opened his jaws and belched a stream of fire at the immobilized Electric-Type.

"Quick Ampharos, use Light Screen!" Jon shouted frantically. Ampharos raised its arms and formed a thick square screen of bright yellow light in front of it. The Fire attack collided with the screen but was unable to break it. The flames were torn apart and divided into many smaller flamethrowers, all passing around the Light Screen. "What an attack, the battle just keeps getting better!" the MC commented.

"Now, use Power Gem! Down that Charizard!" Jon ordered.

As Charizard's Flamethrower died down, Ampharos clapped its arms together, forming an orb of bright brown and white energy.

"Charizard, charge at Ampharos and use Fire Spin, and then spin!" Ash ordered.

" *What? !*" Latios questioned flatly.

' *Just wait and see,*' Ash thought. Charizard quickly dived towards the Ampharos. As he gained speed, he spat out a Fire Spin, and since he was flying rather fast, he caught up to the flames, spinning and turning into a blazing fire projectile. Ampharos fired the Power Gem, hurling the orb of brown and white light forward. To Ampharos' complete shock, Charizard ripped the attack apart, the Power Gem disintegrating completely from the intensity of Charizard's attack.

Having no way to dodge, Ampharos braced itself. The flame missile that was Charizard collided against the Electric-Type, flinging the Ampharos back a dozen feet, landing in the grass completely out cold. Charizard righted himself and flew back to Ash, landing in front of him with a roar of pride and victory. "Ampharos is unable to continue battling!" the Referee called as Jon returned the defeated Electric-type, the icon disappearing from the screen.

"Despite the type disadvantage, Ash's Charizard beat Jon's Ampharos!" the MC summarized, the crowd cheered. "Both trainers are down to four Pokémon each!"

Jon growled lowly. *'I lost Ampharos even with a type advantage... that Charizard is something else, I must once again fight with an advantage if I want to win... in that case...'* Jon thought as he grabbed a Pokeball. "Feraligatr, I choose you!" he shouted, hurling the Pokeball. A bipedal blue crocodilian Pokemon was released onto the field. Feraligatr's icon appeared on the fifth slot of Jon's team.

' *Again with the disadvantage,*' Ash thought.

" *Since when has that stopped you?*" Latios asked rhetorically. He chuckled. *"I think you fight better with a disadvantage than with an advantage."*

Latias giggled. *"Yep, I think so too."*

Ash laughed nervously. "That's reassuring."

"Feraligatr is Jon's next Pokémon to deal with Ash's seemingly unstoppable Charizard!" the MC cried in excitement.

Charizard smirked proudly at the comment. "Hell yeah, I'm ripping this guy's team apart!"

Latos and Latias sweatdropped . *"He said seemingly unstoppable,"* Latios pointed out.

Charizard laughed. "I'll change that soon enough."

"Well, get started on that, use Dragon Rage!" Ash ordered. Charizard nodded and turned to Feraligatr, jaws wide open as he fired a sphere of blazing draconic energy at the Water-Type.

"Feraligatr, use Hydro Pump!" Jon ordered. Feraligatr complied, opening its own jaws and firing a huge torrent of Water, easily blasting through the Dragon Rage.

"Charizard, quick, fly to dodge!" Ash shouted. Charizard flapped his great wings, lifting him off the ground, the torrent of water passing just below him.

"Oh no, I don't think so, Feraligatr, use Blizzard!" Jon shouted. Feraligatr opened its jaws and fired a potent blizzard, the icy winds quickly making their way towards Charizard.

"And Jon has ordered an Ice Attack, this is getting interesting!" the MC commented excitedly.

Despite Charizard's attempts to dodge, he was unable to avoid the attack. The freezing-cold winds collided against him, having a neutral effect due to his part Flying typing. "Charizard, use Fire spin to break out!" Ash ordered. Charizard spat a spiraling blast of fire, easily creating an effective shield from the Blizzard attack. "Change to Flamethrower!" Ash shouted.

Charizard spat a more direct stream of fire. It began pushing back against the Ice-Type attack. Jon had no intention of letting this continue. "Feraligatr, change to Hydro Pump!" he commanded. Feraligatr stopped the Blizzard and fired a potent blast of pressurized water.

The change of attack was good as the Water-Type attack began to slowly push back the Flamethrower, but this made Charizard pour more power into his Flamethrowers, to the point that both attacks were in a perfect stalemate, Charizard's Flamethrower evaporating the water just as fast as Feraligatr was firing it. Soon, after a few seconds, the entire arena was covered in a thick cloud of steam, blocking both trainers' view of their Pokémon. Thankfully, Ash was prepared for that. "Charizard, use Seismic Toss!" Ash ordered. "Feraligatr still hasn't moved!"

Charizard nodded and dived towards where he had last seen the Water-Type. Jon growled lowly. *'From previous matches, I know that he can somehow see his Pokémon, even when they're visually blocked. I have to be careful,'* Jon thought. "Feraligatr, quick, dodge it!" Jon shouted. Feraligatr looked confused, but tried and began to run to the right.

Ash smirked. *'It's no use...'* he mentally chuckled. "Charizard, fly a bit to the right!" Ash shouted.

Jon looked nervous. *'Please, Feraligatr, I so hope you didn't go to the right...'* he thought desperately. A small cry of pain was heard as suddenly, Charizard emerged from the top of the cloud of steam, Feraligatr in his arms. Jon paled. *'Oh, crap.'*

"And Charizard has grabbed hold of Feraligatr! This could be it!" the MC cried excitedly. Charizard began doing loops in the air, adding more momentum to his flight. He flew downwards in a steep dive as he reentered the cloud of steam. A powerful crash was heard as Feraligatr was slammed into the grassy arena. Charizard flew back and landed in front of Ash, gazing at where he had impacted the Water-Type.

To everyone's surprise as the steam cleared, Feraligatr was ready for more. The Water-Type was standing up, even after the rather powerful impact of that Seismic Toss! "And Feraligatr is up! The battle continues!" the MC cried.

Charizard cracked his knuckles. "So, ready for more?"

" *You shouldn't do that,*" Latias warned.

Charizard frowned. "Do what?"

" *The knuckle thing, you'll get a nasty bone disease from that,*" Latias warned.

Charizard laughed nervously. "A few times won't hurt." Latias rolled her eyes.

"Charizard, in the sky you have the advantage, so fly!" Ash ordered. Charizard nodded and spread his wings wide, ready to take off.

"Feraligatr, stop him, fire a Hydro Pump above him then charge at him with a Crunch attack!" Jon ordered. Feraligatr gave a mighty battle cry and lunged forward as he shot a powerful stream of water above Charizard, forcing him to stay in the ground or else be hit by the attack.

"And Feraligatr manages to keep Charizard on the ground, and it's approaching rather fast! It looks like a good close-range battle is about to start!" the MC announced excitedly. The crowd cheered.

"Charizard, get ready for close-range combat!" Ash shouted. Charizard planted his feet in the grass, spread his wings, and readied himself as the Feraligatr closed in. "Dodge backwards!"

Feraligatr lunged with its jaws wide open, ready to take a bite out of Charizard. The large Fire Dragon-like Pokémon took a step back, making the bite miss by a few inches. "Use Scratch!" Jon ordered. Feraligatr swung its arms widely, trying to hit the Fire-Type.

"Charizard, catch them!" Ash shouted. Charizard easily caught Feraligatr's claws with his own. Feraligatr tried to free his arms, but to no avail, Charizard's rough training in the valley had given him immense physical strength, so he was easily able to restrain Feraligatr's arms.

"Feraligatr, use Crunch!" Jon commanded desperately, seeing Charizard was overpowering his Water-Type. Feraligatr lunged forward, jaws wide open, aiming to give Charizard a powerful bite.

"Use your tail, Charizard!" Ash shouted. Charizard quickly released Feraligatr's arms and spun, slamming his tail into the Water-Type's side, causing it to emit a cry of pain.

"Quick, use Hydro Pump!" Jon ordered. Feraligatr quickly righted itself and fired a potent blast of water, catching Charizard off-guard. Charizard was pushed back a few meters from the sheer power behind the Hydro Pump, but there was no way Charizard was falling to it. He placed his wings in front of his body as a shield, and with a mighty roar, flapped them, completely tearing the Hydro Pump apart.

"Charizard has broken the Hydro Pump! Talk about power and endurance!" the MC noted.

Ash smirked. *'It'll take a lot more than that to beat Charizard,'* he thought proudly. "Charizard, use Dragon Rage!" Charizard opened his jaws and fired a blazing orb of orange energy.

"Use Waterfall, Feraligatr!" Jon ordered. Feraligatr started running towards Charizard as a massive torrent of water covered it, turning the Big Jaw Pokémon into a water missile. The Dragon Rage collided against it, but the attack was torn apart in seconds by the superior strength of the Waterfall.

"Charizard, weaken his Waterfall attack with a Fire-spin!" Ash ordered. Charizard nodded and spat a spiraling stream of fire. The attack covered the incoming Feraligatr and started to evaporate the

water, weakening the attack. "Now fly up and shoot a Flamethrower downwards!"

Charizard smirked. With a powerful flap of his wings, he was lifted off the ground, quickly adjusting his neck downwards as Feraligatr passed beneath him and spewing a potent blast of fire. The attack evaporated the rest of the water and hit Feraligatr in the back, imbedding him into the grassy field. Charizard applied more power to his Flamethrower, enveloping the Water-Type completely.

When Charizard stopped the Flamethrower, a knocked-out Feraligatr was revealed. Jon's jaw dropped in disbelief. *'That thing beat another one of my Pokémon, even with a disadvantage!'*

"Feraligatr is unable to continue battling!" the Referee announced as the Big Jaw Pokémon's icon disappeared. "Since three of Jon's Pokemon are down, a short 5 minute rest will be taken!"

"And Ash Ketchum's impressive Charizard has defeated another of Jon Dickson's Pokémon!" the MC cried, clearly impressed. The crowd cheered excitedly.

Ash pumped his fist into the air. "Yeah! Great work Charizard!"

Charizard smirked. "Alright, who's next?"

Latias giggled. *"No one, the five minute break is next. Didn't you hear the Referee?"*

Charizard sighed. "Great, just when I was on a winning streak."

Latias, Latios and Pikachu laughed. Ash chuckled a little and held up a Pokeball. "Its okay, there's still plenty of battle left, return!" The Pokeball shot a red beam towards the Fire-Type as Charizard was recalled back to his Pokeball.

Ash smiled happily as he walked back to the bench and took a seat. "So, how am I doing?"

"Impressive," Misty commented. "Charizard has been very good, he's beaten two Pokémon even with a disadvantage... which just proves that you fight better at a disadvantage."

"Yep," Latios agreed. *"Told you so."*

Ash looked at the scoreboard. He saw that Jon already had five used slots, his fallen Rapidash, Ampharos and Feraligatr, and his still active Steelix and Togetic, while he only had three used slots, the ones for his defeated Phanpy and Totodile, and Charizard. "So far, I have four Pokémon left to deal with Jon's three, I think I'm good," Ash commented.

"Just, don't get overconfident," Brock advised.

Ash smiled. "I know. I won't."

Meanwhile in the stands, Delia was smiling happily. "He's winning! He's just a step away from the finals!"

Gary nodded. "That's Ashy-boy alright, still as impressive as ever!"

Professor Elm sulked. "Jon is another of my trainers that I gave a starter to... Ash already knocked out Jackson, he's after another prospect of mine!"

Professor Oak laughed. "Yes, he'll make Pallet Town's name famous with his current victories, especially with his usage of Latios."

"Why can't any of my trainers catch a Legendary?" Professor Elm lamented.

Delia laughed. "Cheer up! Be happy for him. He's so young, yet he's made it so far."

Professor Elm smiled. "Yeah, that I'll admit."

Gary laughed. "The other two semifinalists are probably begging that Ash loses. None of them want to see Ash and his Latios in the finals,

that's for sure."

Everyone laughed. "That's true," Delia replied, stifling a giggle.

In another part of the stands, Jessie sighed as she returned from another trip of selling popcorn and lemonade. She walked back to the cart where Meowth was waiting to replenish her products at the same time as James. "So, Meowth, how's the cash going?" James asked.

The talking Pokémon smirked. "Perfect, we have a huge load of cash saved, since we've been saving ever since da start of da Silver Conference. Now we can order da Ultimate Team Rocket mecha from Elite Headquarters," Meowth said. He reached under his sales cart and took out a magazine entitled "Team Rocket's Catalog of Mechas of Doom".

"We've been using that thing to get our robots for ages, and they always get destroyed," James pointed out.

"True," Meowth admitted. "But dis time..." the Normal-Type opened the magazine and started flipping through the pages. He smirked and showed them an article at the near end of the catalog. Jessie and James gasped.

"Wow, that thing is on the Ultimate Limited Edition mecha list..." Jessie said, clearly impressed.

"Isn't that thing only for the most Elite of Team Rocket members?" James asked.

"We can dress up and pretend to be Elites," Meowth commented offhandedly. "With dis thing, we can defeat da twerps and deir little legendary friend!"

"True," James admitted. He looked at the description in the book began to read it out loud. "'This is the most powerful machine ever produced by Team Rocket's Elite headquarter. It has never been

reported to have failed a mission. This machine is best designed for defeating Psychic-Type Pokémon, but is also effective against any other type of Pokémon. It features a large number of offensive weapons and several defensive systems that makes it immune to all attacks."

"Immune to all Pokémon attacks, designed for use against Psychics... This is perfect!" Jessie said, eagerly awaiting the time when they could capture not just Latios, but all of Ash's Pokémon.

"But imagine what da boss could do with a Legendary Pokémon like Latios," Meowth started. "Imagine dat da boss is tired and has a lot of work to do?" Meowth said as he imagined a chibi and comic version of Giovanni.

"I'm tired and don't want to do anything today," the Chibi Giovanni said.

"And... dat's when Latios appears!" Meowth chanted, adding a Chibi and Comic Latios. "Latios can use his Psychic Powers to do everything for da boss!" In the daydream, the Chibi Latios began to use his Psychic powers to do paperwork, chores, and other random stuff. "And den," he continued. "Some stupid trainer will challenge da boss to a Gym battle." In the Daydream, Giovanni groaned. "And, of course, Latios is dere as well!" Now, a battle was depicted where Latios easily defeated the trainer's Pokémon with Psychic attacks and a Luster Purge or two. "Den da Boss will say: Meowth and his friends really brought me a powerful and rare Pokémon, for dat dey will get a promotion and bigger numbers in deir paychecks!" Meowth gushed, trying (and failing) to imitate Giovanni's voice. "And I get to be top pet!" Meowth imagined the Chibi Giovanni kicking his Persian out and replacing it with him.

"Yes!" Jessie and James chorused happily.

"When this match is over, we'll order the robot," James announced. "That way, we can catch the twerps as they leave Silver Town!"

"Yep, dat's the idea!" Meowth agreed. They refilled their trays with popcorn and lemonade and decided to keep selling as they plotted their plan. '*Latios... you are now ours...*' they thought.

In the field, the Referee stepped forward. "The five minute break is over. Trainers, resume the battle!"

Ash stood up from the bench and walked back to the box painted on the floor. "Good luck!" his friends chorused. Ash smiled and nodded at them.

Jon walked back to his box. "May the best trainer win, Ash!" he called.

Ash nodded. "Yeah, and that'll be me!"

Jon smirked. "Don't count on it, I still a few surprises left. Steelix, go!" He threw the Pokeball, summoning the large steel serpent back to the field.

Ash smirked. "Charizard, it's time for you to battle again!" he shouted, releasing the Fire-Type.

"So, the second half of the battle between Jon Dickson of Sento Cherry Town and Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town is about to begin with Charizard against Steelix!" the MC announced.

Charizard smirked and cracked his knuckles. "Ah, it's my turn again so soon? Perfect."

" *Charizard!*" Latias scolded. "*What did I tell you!*"

Charizard laughed nervously. He pushed the matter aside and glared at his opponent. Jon growled lowly. '*Not that Charizard again. Steelix is at a disadvantage, but... I think I can win...*'

"Charizard, use Flamethrower!" Ash started. Charizard reared back and spat a powerful stream of fire at the large Steel-Type.

"Steelix, use Sandstorm!" Jon ordered. Steelix roared as the huge spikes protruding from its sides began to spin, slowly picking up speed as a sandstorm surrounded Steelix. The Sandstorm easily pushed back Charizard's Fire-Type attack back. "Follow it up with Iron Tail!" Jon shouted. Steelix quickly stopped the sandstorm as it swung its tail at Charizard, causing the Sandstorm to subside.

"Charizard, Fly!" Ash shouted. Charizard flapped his wings and quickly flew upwards, dodging the massive tail as it slammed where he had been a few seconds ago. "Now, use Flamethrower!" Charizard complied and breathed out another potent stream of fire.

"Steelix, counter with Dragon Breath!" Jon shouted. Steelix reared back and exhaled a blast of green flames. The attacks collided and held for a second, until Charizard's attack began pushing Steelix's Dragon Breath attack back. Jon growled. ' *That damn Charizard!*

"Charizard is overwhelming Steelix!" the MC noted. The Crowd cheered.

"Steelix, use Stone Edge!" Jon ordered. Steelix cut off the Dragon Breath attack as two blue rings of blue light appeared around it, turning into several dozen sharp stones that were flung at Charizard, ripping his Flamethrower apart with ease.

"Charizard, quick, dive back to the ground!" Ash shouted. Charizard nodded and quickly descended, causing the sharp stones to pass above him. "Now, Flamethrower!" Ash ordered. Charizard spat another stream of fire.

"Steelix, use Sandstorm again!" Jon ordered. Steelix nodded as its spiked segments began to spin again, creating a powerful sandstorm and blocking the Flamethrower. Unbeknownst to Jon, that was exactly what Ash wanted.

' *I remember that I beat Jasmine's Steelix by turning its sandstorm against it... Let's do the same here,*' Ash thought. "Charizard, use Fire Spin!"

Charizard reared back and spat a zigzagging stream of fire. The Fire Spin merged with the Sandstorm, creating a tornado of fire and sand surrounding Steelix. "Ash is creating a fire tornado to trap Steelix! Brilliant!" the MC noted. Brock and Misty remembered Ash doing the same to Jasmine, but with Cyndaquil. It had worked pretty well then, too.

"Now, Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Charizard spat a more direct and stronger stream of fire, turning Steelix's Sandstorm into a blazing fire tornado. "Fly towards it!" Charizard flew towards the fire tornado.

"Steelix, use Hyper Beam to break free!" Jon ordered. With a deafening roar, Steelix fired a Hyper Beam inside the tornado. The sheer force of the following explosion repelled the tornado and extinguished the flames. The explosion didn't do much to Steelix because of its Steel Type, but as Steelix looked up, it was shocked to see Charizard a few meters away from its face.

"Flamethrower!" Ash bellowed. Charizard fired the point-blank Flamethrower, hitting Steelix directly in the head and knocking him out. The huge Steel-Type serpent had been defeated.

"Steelix is unable to continue battling!" the Referee announced as Steelix's icon faded from the screen. Jon sighed as he returned his fallen Pokémon.

"Yeah!" Ash cheered. "Great work Charizard!"

"Charizard has now beaten three of Jon Dickson's Pokémon!" the MC noted, clearly impressed.

"Great work Ash!" Misty called. "You too, Charizard!"

"Keep it up!" Bianca added.

"Yeah, keep this up and you'll be ready for the Finals!" Brock cheered, proud for his friend.

Jon smirked. *'You've been fighting really impressively, Ash, but its time you meet my strongest Pokémon...'* He grabbed a Pokeball. "Tyranitar! Go!" Jon shouted, hurling the Pokeball to the center of the field.

A huge bipedal Pokémon appeared. It had menacing-looking fangs and claws. It had a mostly green armored body with spikes growing from the back of the head, shoulders, back and tail-tip. A blue rhombus was depicted on its chest. The huge armored Rock and Dark Type Pokémon gave a loud deafening roar. Charizard was more eager to fight than ever, rather than intimidated, naturally. "So..." Ash murmured. "That's a Tyranitar..."

"This is gonna be good," Charizard commented eagerly, glaring at the Tyranitar.

The Tyranitar glared back. "A Fire-Type... Heh, this shouldn't be too hard."

"Ash, you've been an impressive opponent, and that Charizard of yours is something special, but you will fall here. My Tyranitar is my strongest Pokémon! He will defeat you!" Jon said to Ash.

"That Tyranitar will just be another point for Charizard in his increasing list of beaten Pokémon," Ash countered. "Right, Charizard?"

"Hell yeah!" Charizard agreed, shooting a small stream of fire upwards.

"Charizard versus Tyranitar! Talk about a duel of pure power!" the MC commented. "So far, Jon Dickson's Tyranitar has not been defeated in the current Silver Conference!"

' That will change soon,' Ash thought.

" Ash, be careful, Tyranitar are extremely powerful Pokémon!" Latias warned.

'I know,' Ash thought. *'I have four Pokémon left to deal with him, I can win this!'* "Charizard, use Flamethrower!" Charizard opened his jaws and fired a very powerful stream of flames directly at the Rock and Dark-Type.

"Tyranitar, use Rock Tomb!" Jon ordered. Tyranitar reared back and slammed a fist into the grassy ground, causing a huge stone slab to come out of the earth, creating a shield that effectively blocked the Flamethrower.

The ground beneath Charizard's feet trembled. Somehow, Ash sensed this and knew what was going to happen. "Charizard, fly up fast!" Ash shouted. Charizard wasted not a single second. He stopped the Flamethrower and flew up. A second later, four pillars of stone rose from where he had been standing and crashed against each other.

"Tyranitar, use Stone Edge!" Jon ordered. Two blue rings of energy materialized around Tyranitar, forming several dozen sharp stones that were flung in rapid succession at the airborne Fire and Flying-Type.

"Charizard, use Air Slash!" Ash ordered. Charizard began to flap his wings, sending a barrage of crescent air blades at the incoming Stone Edge. The air blades collided with the Stone Edges, slicing the rocks into pieces due to their rather small size. "Now use Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Charizard reared back and spat a powerful stream of fire downwards. The attack hit Tyranitar, but surprisingly, the Armor Pokémon didn't move or look troubled by the attack.

"Tyranitar is hit! But its rock-hard armor holds strong!" the MC announced.

"Tyranitar, use Hyper Beam!" Jon ordered. Tyranitar opened his maw and began to form an orb of volatile energy. A second later a huge orange energy beam was fired.

"Charizard, dodge!" Ash shouted. Charizard quickly flew to the side, dodging the huge beam. Tyranitar adjusted his aim, moving his head in the direction of Charizard, but the Fire-Type was faster, he managed to successfully dodge the attack. "Now, use Fire Spin!" Ash shouted.

Charizard spat a spiraling blast of fire. The attack quickly enveloped the Rock and Dark-Type in a tornado of flames. Charizard smirked. "Gotcha."

"Tyranitar, break free with Stone Edge!" Jon shouted. Inside the tornado, a small blue light appeared. Suddenly, the pillar of fire was blasted apart as a barrage of sharp stones was sent flying everywhere. "Dark Pulse!" Tyranitar opened his jaws as a sphere of black and purple rings appeared in it. With a mighty roar, he fired a beam composed of the rings. Charizard tried to move out of the way, but felt completely stiff before the power of the Dark-Type attack, Dark Pulse's flinching effect was taking place.

The attack hit Charizard and created a terrible explosion mid-air as Charizard was knocked from the sky. "Charizard!" Ash shouted in concern. Charizard quickly righted himself and spread his wings, stopping his fall.

Charizard panted. *'Damn, after so many battles, I'm starting to get tired...'*

"Charizard took a rather hard hit from that Dark Pulse!" the MC cried.

'I've never seen an attack like that...' Ash thought, growling slightly.

"That Tyranitar must be very well trained to know attacks like that," Latios commented.

"He's also taking Charizard's attack easily. Well, that's obvious because of the disadvantage, but even so... he doesn't seem to be feeling them at all!" Latias added.

"Tyranitar, Dark Pulse again!" Jon shouted, glad that he finally had a chance against Charizard. Tyranitar fired another beam of black and purple rings, aiming for the airborne Fire-Type.

"Charizard, Flamethrower!" Ash commanded. Charizard quickly spat a stream of fire at the incoming Dark-Type attack. The attacks crashed, making a thunderous sound as they exploded.

"Stone Edge!" Jon ordered. Tyranitar quickly charged the attack, forming two blue rings around him that materialized into sharp stones which he fired skywards. Charizard was looking at the smoke cloud resulting from the explosion and suddenly a barrage of sharp stones appeared. He had no time to react as the stones pummeled him, leaving several bleeding gashes and bruises. He panted tiredly, but even so, he refused to go down.

"Charizard took another hard hit!" the MC cried.

Ash growled lowly. "I need something to do some serious damage to Tyranitar..." He then noticed something as he looked to the sky, to where the Fire and Flying-Type was. Charizard's body began shining a bright red as his Blaze ability activated, making his tail flame grow about ten times its size. Ash grinned. *'Perfect, but I still need something else...'* He looked down at the field and noticed something. The grassy field, while it was mostly intact, had a few burnt patches of grass from the extensive Fire attacks. It was severely dry, and a few embers were lit here and there from Charizard's most recent attacks. Ash got a devilish idea. "Let's make roasted Tyranitar. Charizard, use Flamethrower on the battlefield!"

Jon's eyes widened. "He's gonna attack the field again?" *'In his previous two matches, Ash destroyed the battlefield to gain an upper hand over his opponents, but what can burning a bunch of grass do?'*

Charizard found the command rather stupid. He had his Blaze boost, he should be attacking Tyranitar! But, as most of Ash's Pokémon knew, they had a rather special trainer, and Charizard knew that

while the command was rather odd, it meant his trainer had a good plan, so he pushed his doubts aside and spat a powerful blast of fire directly at the battlefield.

"Charizard has been ordered to attack the field! Ash has a thing for destroying battlefields doesn't he?" the MC commented. Ash sweatdropped.

Charizard began to shoot Flamethrowers all across the battlefield, much to Jon's confusion. Soon, the battlefield was transformed a blazing inferno. Ash, Jon and the Referee began to sweat from the sheer heat of the burning field. Jon and the Referee took a few steps back from the battlefield. Ash didn't, he knew by instinct that if the flames got too close, Latias or Latios would push them away with Psychic. *'Damn, trainers these days are crazy!'* the Referee thought, clearly terrified by the burning battlefield.

"Impressive, the entire battlefield is now an inferno!" the MC cried. The crowd cheered wildly.

Tyranitar wasn't fairing too well either. Yes, he was heat-resistant, but being inside an inferno was another thing. He could feel his rock armor began to heat up from the intense flames it was being submitted to. "Charizard, use Flamethrower on Tyranitar!" Ash shouted. Charizard opened his jaws and fired a colossal stream of fire. The attack collided with the immobile Tyranitar, who gave a screech of pain. *'Not so tough now... Hehehe.'*

'Can't take the heat?' Charizard thought, impressed by Ash's idea.

"Damn what is Ash doing!" Professor Oak asked, sweating slightly from the sheer heat.

"This is amazing," Gary admitted. "I know Tyranitar is resistant to heat, but a burning field is too much for any Pokémon!"

"This is one dramatic and epic photo!" Delia chimed, taking pictures of the battle taking place. They sweatdropped (Or was it simple

sweat from the heat?).

"At the rate this is going, the fire is going to drain all of Tyranitar's strength! Jon has to stop this quickly!" Professor Elm said anxiously.

'Come on Ashy-boy, you can do it, go ahead and make it to the finals, a Tyranitar and a Togetic are all that stands in your way,' Gary thought.

Jon growled. "Tyranitar, use Stone Edge, down that Charizard!" Tyranitar gave a massive roar as two blue rings surrounded him that materialized into extremely sharp stoned. He launched them, easily cutting through the fires as they collided with the Fire-Type. Charizard gave a cry of pain as he hit the floor rather hard. The fires enveloped him, but he had been submerged in lava before, so this was nothing.

"Damn Ash, did you have to burn the field like this, my fur just makes it worse!" Pikachu complained. Ash laughed.

Charizard stood up and tried to flap off the ground, but to his terror, he felt a sharp pain in his right wing. He immediately folded it. *'Damn, that last Stone Edge got my wing! And I'm too tired... No, I will knock out that Tyranitar!'* Charizard gave a massive roar as he began to shine a very bright shade of red, his tail flame growing to almost the same size as him. The fires across the field began to extinguish as they started to burn themselves out, but the heat was, if anything getting worse from whatever Charizard was doing.

"What's Charizard doing!" Ash wondered.

"I don't know!" Latias telepathed. She found herself relieved that her feathers were heat-proof, though she and Latios were psychically making sure the heat didn't get to Ash.

"What is that!" Misty asked, completely awed by Charizard's power.

"I don't know either!" Brock answered.

"Tyranitar, use Dark Pulse!" Jon shouted. Tyranitar quickly readied the attack, charging the ring beam. He fired it, aiming directly at Charizard.

Soon, the field had completely burnt itself out because most of the grass was consumed and the heat from Charizard's attack was using up all the oxygen, choking the flames. With a roar that rivaled Tyranitar's (And probably a few other Legendaries that Latios knew of), Charizard fired a huge blast of flames so hot that the fire was a pure white and surrounded by a series of red and yellow rings. Charizard had just learned one of the most devastating Fire Moves: Overheat. The Dark Pulse never stood a chance as it was completely destroyed by the Overheat attack.

Tyranitar shrieked as he was hit by the massive fire attack. He was pushed back at least a dozen meters back and enveloped in a huge maelstrom of fire. The colossal attack forced everyone to cover their eyes from the sheer intensity of the flames. A minute later, the intense blast died down. Tyranitar was surprisingly still standing, his chest completely singed a burnt black to the point where his blue rhombus was completely gone and he was panting.

The battlefield was now a scorched wasteland as well, and Charizard was lying facedown, completely out. The sheer force of his attack had drained what energies he had left. The referee raised the corresponding flag. "Charizard is unable to continue battling!" he shouted as his icon faded from the screen.

Ash smiled as he returned the fallen fire-type. "Great work Charizard, I'm proud of you," Ash whispered to the Pokeball.

"After an impressive display of power, Charizard simply couldn't take the heat anymore!" the MC commented. The crowd cheered.

"Tauros, I choose you!" Ash shouted. The large brown bull Pokémon appeared on the field and the Normal-Type's icon appeared in the fourth of Ash's slots.

"And Tauros is Ash's fourth pokemon!" The MC announced rather unnecessarily.

' If Ash uses Latios, I'm doomed... I have only Tyranitar, who's looking tired, and Togetic. By now she should be well rested, but even so, I don't think they can take down Latios,' Jon thought.

"Tyranitar, use Dark Pulse!" Jon shouted. Tyranitar quickly generated the orb of rings and fired it, shaping a beam of black and purple rings.

"Tauros, dodge!" Ash shouted. The bull Pokémon quickly ran to the side, escaping the attack. "Now, use Earthquake!"

"Tyranitar, use Rock tomb!" Jon ordered. Tyranitar slammed a fist into the ground. Before Tauros could use the Earthquake attack, four stone pillars surrounded the Normal-Type, and they slammed together, trapping him in a prison of stone.

Ash growled slightly. *'Even after Charizard's attacks, that Tyranitar still has the power to fight back!'* he thought, clearly surprised.

" *Think clearly Ash, you can still win,*" Latias said.

Ash nodded. "Tauros, blast that thing apart with a Hyper Beam!" Ash shouted. A few seconds later, the prison blew up, revealing the Bull Pokémon. "Now, use Take Down!" Ash shouted.

Tauros charged at the Tyranitar like a bulldozer, lots of power behind the attack, so much that the ground trembled slightly. "Tyranitar, brace yourself!" Jon shouted.

"Wow, what power!" the MC cried, impressed.

Tyranitar got ready and just as Tauros crashed against him, he caught the Bull Pokémon by the horns. The Rock and Dark-Type was actually pushed back a few meters from the sheer force behind

the Normal-Type, but he still managed to halt the attack. Tauros' eyes widened in surprise. "Lift it up!" Jon ordered.

"Ouch, talk about taking the Tauros by the horns," Pikachu commented.

"Quick Tauros, break free!" Ash shouted.

Tyranitar released one of Tauros' horns and placed his hand underneath Tauros's body, easily lifting the Bull Pokémon high above him. "Now, slam him down and use Hyper Beam!" Jon ordered. Tyranitar slammed Tauros to the ground very hard. An energy orb formed in Tyranitar's maw as he fired a point black Hyper Beam, creating a terrible explosion.

When the explosion cleared, Tyranitar was standing triumphantly over a knocked out Tauros. Ash growled. *'Man that was powerful.'*

"Tauros is unable to continue battling!" the Referee declared. Tauros's icon disappeared from the screen. Ash returned the defeated Normal-Type.

"Now, with Tauros's defeat, both trainers are tied with two Pokémon each!" the MC commented.

Ash grabbed his next Pokeball. "Go, Noctowl!" Ash shouted, sending out the shiny owl Pokémon. The Owl's icon appeared in the fifth of Ash's slots.

"Wow! A shiny Noctowl is Ash's fifth Pokémon choice!" the MC cried, clearly impressed.

' I only have Noctowl and Larvitar left against that Tyranitar, this looks bad!' Ash thought desperately. *'And Toggetic is still left!'*

"Tyranitar, use Stone Edge!" Jon ordered. Two blue rings formed around the Rock-Type. Seconds later, a barrage of sharp stones was fired towards the small owl Pokémon.

"Noctowl, stop them with Confusion!" Ash shouted. The crest above Noctowl's eyes shined a bright blue as a powerful blast of blue light was fired, deflecting most of the stones that were sent his way. Noctowl dodged the remainder of the Stone Edge that his beam didn't destroy.

Noctowl's keen eyes noted something. "Ash!" the Owl Pokémon called. "As I am now, I can't beat a Tyranitar, but that Tyranitar's armor has extensive damage in the neck and chest!"

Ash focused and noticed that Tyranitar's chest and neck armor had several cracks running along it. *'That Hyper Beam he detonated must have caused them, his body armor was already weakened by Charizard's attacks...'* Ash realized.

"Noctow, use Steel Wing! Aim for a weak spot," Ash ordered. Noctowl flew towards the Rock-Type as his wings shone a bright white, hardening to metal.

"Tyranitar, use Stone Edge!" Jon ordered. Once again, Tyranitar charged the Rock-type attack, flinging a barrage of extremely sharp stones at the incoming Flying type.

Noctowl took a brief glance at the attack, memorizing the position of every single stone, and quickly calculated a safe spot within the attack, taking into account that his wings were safe because of the Steel Wing. Noctowl moved slightly to the right and downwards. "Noctowl!" Ash cried, concerned for his Pokémon, seeing that he was heading directly into an attack that due to its power and Noctowl's frail body could knock him out in a single blow.

To everyone's surprise, not a single stone hit the Flying-Type. He passed through the only space in which there was no stone to dodge. A few hit his wings, but the stones were pulverized by his Steel Wing. Latias and Latios' jaws dropped. Sure, they had known the owl was a smart Pokémon, but since they were psychics, they sensed the sheer amount of calculations and computations that had

crossed the owl's mind as he dodged the attack. They were clearly impressed. The owl had an astounding mind for a Normal type.

Noctowl quickly adjusted his trajectory and slammed one of his wings across Tyranitar's chest. The armor cracked slightly.

"Tyranitar, use Dark Pulse!" Jon shouted. Tyranitar fired the ringed beam towards the owl Pokémon.

"Noctowl, dodge and make another pass with Steel Wing!" Ash shouted. Noctowl quickly dropped into a steep dive, causing the Dark Pulse to fly overhead. He once again flew towards the Tyranitar, wings glowing a bright white. He slammed them into the Rock and Dark-Type's chest again, cracking the armor further.

"And Ash Ketchum is seemingly starting to wear Tyranitar down!" the MC cried.

"Noctowl, use Steel wing again!" Ash ordered. Noctowl made another pass, wing bright.

"Oh no you don't, Tyranitar, use Stone Edge!" Jon ordered. Noctowl took notice that if he attacked Tyranitar's chest again, he was going to be hit by the Stone Edge attack, so he changed his target. He dodged the Stone Edge as it was fired and slammed his Steel Wing into Tyranitar's neck, cracking the armor there as well and causing Tyranitar to stumble back. "Hyper Beam!" Jon ordered. Tyranitar quickly charged the Hyper Beam, much to Noctowl's surprise.

The Normal and Flying Type knew immediately there was no way he could dodge that Hyper Beam at such a close range, so, he chose to give Ash one final advantage to ensure that his last Pokémon could beat Tyranitar. He flew towards Tyranitar and slammed another Steel Wing into his chest, but he didn't fly away. Noctowl braced himself as Tyranitar aimed downwards and fired the Hyper Beam. The attack knocked Noctowl out instantly, but the resulting explosion did what Noctowl knew it would do: Tyranitar's armor took severe damage.

"Wow, what an attack! Now Ash Ketchum is down to his final Pokémon!" the MC cried.

"Noctowl is unable to continue battling!" the Referee called. Ash returned the fallen Owl Pokémon, wondering why he had attacked Tyranitar like that without a prior command.

" *Ash, Noctowl wanted to weaken Tyranitar s everely, that's why he chose to take that Hyper Beam, and he just did, look,*" Latias told him. Ash noticed that Tyranitar's neck and chest were severely cracked, and that the Armor Pokémon was panting heavily.

Ash grabbed his final Pokeball. "Larvitar, I choose you!" Ash shouted, sending the small Rock and Ground-Type to the battlefield.

Larvitar's jaw dropped when he saw his opponent. It didn't bring him good memories, but he pushed all of this back. "Ready to fight, daddy!" Larvitar said. The Rock and Ground-Type's icon appeared in Ash's final slot.

"And Larvitar is Ash's final Pokémon!" the MC cried. "Maybe, due to the damage Latios took from the prior battle, Ash has decided to keep him out of this battle. That sure is noble of him!" the MC remarked. Some people in the stand groaned in disappointment. They had wanted to see Latios again. Others were impressed that Ash was willing to give his strongest Pokémon a rest, despite the importance of the battle.

Tyranitar laughed. "You have got to be kidding me. Well, this should be a quick win."

Larivitar did one of his I-don't-care-about-a-thing looks, ignoring the Tyranitar's comment. The Armor Pokémon growled. Tyranitar growled. "Damn kid, I'm so gonna beat you up." Larvitar looked at him, his face almost emotionless. *'Damn, the kid's tough...* ' the Tyranitar admitted. Larvitar chuckled, he knew that this particular attitude of his was good at unnerving people.

"Brings back memories..." Jon commented nostalgically. He remembered when he had first caught his Larvitar and raised him to his current state. "Rock Tomb!" Jon shouted.

"Larvitar, dodge!" Ash shouted. Larvitar easily sensed, through ground vibrations, where each stone pillar would emerge from, he ran to the side, dodging the stone prison.

"Tyranitar, use Earthquake!" Jon ordered. Tyranitar slammed a fist to the ground, creating a powerful tremor. Larvitar cried as the super-effective attack hit him. He lost his footing and fell, as did Ash, Jon, and the Referee. "Now, Dark Pulse!" Jon ordered as he stood up.

Larvitar didn't get up in time. He shrieked as he was hit by the ringed Dark-Type beam. The attack exploded, blocking everyone's view. "Larvitar!" Ash shouted. He closed his eyes, sensing that, while a bit tattered and disorientated, Larvitar had survived the blow. "Larvitar, use Dig then Rock Smash!" Ash shouted. Larvitar quickly took a small dive towards the earth, and when the smoke cleared, he was nowhere to be seen, nothing but a small hole in the scorched ground.

' *So, he did manage to survive the attack...* ' Jon thought. "Finish this with Earthquake!" Tyranitar slammed a fist to the ground, creating a powerful tremor, causing the tunnel Larvitar was digging to collapse and inflicting a lot of damage. Jon smirked. '*That should do the trick...* ' "Seems like I've won," he commented with a smirk.

Ash's eyes widened. "No..." Suddenly, the ground in front of Tyranitar cracked. Everyone was shocked to see the ground burst open as Larvitar emerged with a powerful leap, jumping towards Tyranitar's face, his fist shining a bright white from a Rock Smash attack.

Tyranitar and Jon's eyes widened in surprise. With a mighty cry, Larvitar hit Tyranitar with an uppercut using his Rock Smash, hitting him where his neck armor was cracked. The armor gave in and was destroyed completely, revealing the tender flesh underneath.

Tyranitar howled in pain as he staggered back a few steps. The Rock Smash was quadruple effective, and the Dig attack was super effective, so the total damage was huge. However, Larvitar was not done. As he landed, he ran forward, taking another impressive leap and slamming another Rock Smash into Tyranitar's chest, destroying his prized armor completely.

With a deafening screech of pain, Tyranitar fainted, landing face down, eyes turned to swirls. The entire stadium burst into impressed cheers. A Larvitar had defeated a Tyranitar! "Tyranitar is unable to continue battling!" the Referee announced.

"Impressive! Ash's Larvitar has defeated Jon's Tyranitar!" the MC cried. Larvitar landed and panted in tiredness, barely managing to stand up. The few attacks Tyranitar had landed on him had caused a lot of damage. "Now, both trainers are down to their last Pokémon!"

"Congratulations kiddo!" Pikachu shouted. "Nice job!"

" *Way to go! You were awesome!*" Latias complimented, sending Larvitar a mental cheer.

" *Congratulation!*" Latios commented as well.

"Yeah, great work Larvitar!" Ash shouted. Ash's friends from the bench shouted similar words of encouragement and congratulation for the small Rock and Ground-Type. Larvitar blushed from the attention and smiled happily.

Jon returned the fallen Tyranitar. He was impressed that he had been defeated. He wasn't worrying about the armor; Tyranitars could re-grow it rather fast. He grabbed his next and last Pokeball. "Togetic, I choose you!" Jon shouted, summoning the small Happiness Pokémon.

"Larvitar get ready!" Ash shouted. Larvitar nodded, despite the tiredness. "Use Rock tomb!" Larvitar slammed his fist into the

ground, causing four pillars to erupt from the ground, threatening to trap Togetic. "Now, Rock Smash!"

"Togetic, blast them apart with Psychic!" Jon ordered. Togetic emitted a powerful psychic blast, ripping the stones in half and sending them away. Suddenly, Larvitar was a few feet away from Togetic, his fist shining white as he prepared to punch her. "Togetic, push him away with Shadow Ball!" Jon ordered. Togetic quickly formed a Shadow Ball between her arms.

"Don't you know you shouldn't hit a girl!" she reprimanded. With one of her arms, she grabbed Larvitar's hand and spun, causing him to pass beside her. As this was happening, she slammed the Shadow Ball into Larvitar. He cried in pain as he was struck by the attack and sent flying backwards after a small explosion.

"And with a great maneuver, Togetic sends Larvitar away!" the MC commented.

"Larvitar!" Ash cried in concern. "Use Hidden Power!" Larvitar summoned the last of his strength as he glowed a bright white. Several energy spheres materialized.

"Togetic, Silver Wind!" Jon shouted. Togetic flapped her wings, creating a silver-tinted wind along with several crescent blades, sending them towards Larvitar.

The attacks passed each other. The spheres collided with Togetic and the Silver Wind hit Larvitar head on. Both Pokémon were pushed back a few feet after suffering the after effects of the attacks, they panted and looked at each other. With a last breath, Larvitar fell, knocked out. Larvitar was too weak and tired to survive the blow, while Togetic was still fresh and rested enough to take the attack and survive.

The Referee nodded. "Larvitar is unable to continue battling. The victory goes to Jon Dickson of Sento Cheery Town!"

"YEAH!" Jon shouted excitedly, raising his arms as the crowd cheered. Togetic flew over to her cheering trainer and was surprised when he hugged her. She returned the show of affection.

"And finally! Someone was able to stop the impressive trainer Ash Ketchum! Though I am sure we all agree on one thing, this battle might had gone differently if Ash had been able to use his prized Legendary Pokémon: Latios," the MC said over the speakers. Several fangirls in the crowd were crying like there was no tomorrow (Macey included). Also, Professor Elm was cheering that one of his trainers was making it to the finals, while Professor Oak and Gary tried to console Delia, who was crying at Ash's elimination.

Ash sighed sadly. He grabbed a Pokeball and returned the defeated Rock and Ground Type. "You were amazing, you battled great and I am proud of you..." Ash whispered to the Pokeball.

Pikachu patted Ash on the back. "Lost again... maybe next time... right?"

"I hope," Ash muttered.

Jon walked up to him. Togetic left his arm and rested on top of his head, like a Togetic hat. Jon held out his hand. Ash caught the gesture and shook hands with his opponent. "You battled amazingly, you were a very strong opponent, and you certainly had all the qualifications to win this league. I wish you the best of luck on your next Pokémon League," Jon said.

Ash nodded. "Thanks a lot, I wish you luck in the finals."

"Thanks," Jon replied. The crowd cheered, pleased by this sportsmanship between opponents.

Ash turned and rejoined his friends as he walked to the exit of the stadium. "Too bad Ash, you battled so hard..." Misty lamented.

"Yeah, you were close to defeating that Jon guy," Bianca agreed.

" *Not to mention that Ash had Jon on the edge as Charizard beat almost everything Jon threw at him,*" Latias commented.

Ash sighed. "But... I was so close... I even had Latios to help me in earlier battles... and I still lost..."

Brock smiled sadly and put a hand on Ash's shoulder. "You know Ash, you already reprimand people for focusing on your losses instead of your victories. You should do the same. Look at the bright side of all this, you defeated Gary, a stronger trainer like Harrison, and even came close to making it to the finals."

"Yeah," Misty agreed.

"Also," Brock continued. "Remember that you broke a world record."

Ash looked up. "I did?"

"Yeah, you're the youngest trainer ever to make it to the top four of any league," Brock reminded him.

"Yep," Bianca agreed.

Brock smiled. "And keep something else in mind Ash. Yes, you lost, but this *isn't* your last Pokémon league. You still lack the experience to really win a League, experience that we all hope you have gained today. Also, keep in mind that Latios isn't on a fully competitive level yet, he just started battling almost two months ago," Brock reminded him.

"Yes, when Latios is fully trained, he'll be a lot stronger than he is now, and with you having a lot more experienced, you'll have a better chance of winning the next league you face," Misty pointed out.

Ash smiled fondly at his friends. "Thanks a lot."

" *See Ash, don't feel bad, so cheer up!*" Latias said.

Ash smiled, glad that he was being supported so much by his friends at this hard time. But hey, that's what friends were for, right?

The rest of the day was quiet. Ash wasn't very talkative, which was to be expected. After a trip to the Pokémon Center, the group decided to enjoy what Silver Town had to offer. For now they would stay in town until the end of the Conference so they could see the Award Ceremony.

Night fell, and the group was sleeping soundly at their hotel room, everyone except Ash. He was simply looking at the ceiling, thinking of what he could have done better to win, but that wasn't really going to change anything. He decided that he needed some time to relax. He decided to walk over to his favorite place in all of Silver Town, the lake. He stood up and very quietly walked to the door, and as quietly as he could, he left the hotel. After a few minutes, he was at the lake. He smiled fondly at the beautiful night scene as he took a seat at the edge of the lake, enjoying the cool night air.

' *I wish I could have won...* ' Ash lamented sadly. Brock's words were still vivid in his mind. He was happy for them, that meant that he, a former Gym leader, considered him a serious candidate to win the next League he was going to participate in...

But that didn't mean he didn't still wish he could have won *this* League.

"Hi!" a voice said behind Ash. The cap-wearing trainer nearly jumped out of his skin in fright.

"Latias!" Ash hissed. "Don't do that!"

Latias giggled. "Why were you scared if you can sense me?"

There was a moment of awkward silence. "Ugh..." Ash muttered.

Latias smiled and rested herself beside him. "Can't sleep?" she asked. "It's almost midnight."

"It's just... I'm still a bit shaken up after my defeat..." Ash muttered, a sigh escaping him.

Latias smiled tenderly at him and gave him a hug. "It's okay. Defeat must be very hard to deal with, but remember what Brock said, you still have more leagues left to win."

"Yeah..." Ash agreed.

"Didn't you and Brock decide that after the Johto league was over, you were going to start gathering badges to compete in the Hoenn League, especially after seeing the Pokémon Harrison had?" Latias asked.

"Yes," Ash replied.

"Then your next goal will be to win the Hoenn League!" Latias said cheerfully. "Besides, my brother was sad too with your defeat. He partially blames himself for it, so that will just motivate him more to become stronger, as he gets stronger, he will be a better battler and he will give you a better chance to win the Hoenn League!"

Ash nodded. "Yeah."

"Ash, you are still eleven, barely twelve, and yet look how far you've come. You're in the top four of the Silver Conference! Next time, I'm sure you'll do better! You still have a long way to go," Latias pointed out.

Ash smiled. "Thanks a lot, Latias."

"So cheer up and stop acting all depressed, you know I hate seeing people sad," Latias told him.

Ash nodded. "I will," he replied. Latias smiled and nuzzled him affectionately. Ash hugged her, running his hands across her long

and slender neck, loving the feel of her small and fine feathers. Ash accidentally brushed against his necklace. He smiled as he parted from the hug and looked at the necklace. He grabbed it and looked at it fondly, fingering the little crystal figurines of Latias and Latios. "You know Latias, this necklace is very special to me. It reminds me of the bond I share with you and Latios, especially after the soul fusion to save Latios' life."

Latias smiled. "I know, you haven't taken it off ever since I gave it to you."

"It was a very special thank-you gift..." Ash muttered. "Latias, thanks a lot for cheering me up, I'll look ahead instead of looking back." He gently stroked Latias' long feathery neck, she gave a small squeal of delight. Ash smiled. He looked at this necklace and remembered both thank-you gifts she had given him that day. Ash surprised Latias by giving her a quick kiss on her cheek. "Thanks you for always being there for me." Latias blushed a deep shade of scarlet. He smiled innocently at her. "Guess I returned that thank-you kiss you gave me in Altomare." He yawned. "Well, I guess that I can finally sleep now. Thanks a lot for the talk Latias, it made me feel a lot better." With that, Ash stood up and walked back to the hotel.

Latias just floated there, a little stunned. She smiled and began doing small excited twirls in the air, feeling incredibly happy.

Meanwhile, on the balcony of their suite, Latios watched the scene with interest. He was a bit surprised, but either way, he enjoyed seeing Latias flying about happily. That was what made him the happiest brother in the world, simply seeing her happy. He chuckled as he turned around and headed back inside to sleep, Ash could return anytime now and he didn't want him to know that he'd seen their little 'moment.'

The next day...

While today was one of the two rest days to let the two finalists get ready for the grand final of the Silver Conference, a special guest was flying to Silver Town as his presence was required for the aforementioned event. He was Lance, champion of the Johto League, riding on his trusty Dragonite. As the champion, it was proper that he be present at the award ceremony to coronate the winner of the Conference, as well as to ask him if he was willing to take on the Challenge of claiming Lance's title as champion, which consisted of fighting the Elite Four and the Champion consecutively, five battles in five days, with a single loss meaning the challenger had no chance whatsoever of winning the title.

"We're almost there Dragonite, just a little more," Lance said, spotting Mt. Silver in the distance.

"It's been a while since I've flown this much," the Dragonite commented.

"Well, I haven't had the need to travel much until now," Lance replied. As a master Dragon trainer, Lance had the unique skill of understanding the Poke-speech of all Dragon and Dragon-like Pokémon, a very useful ability.

"You seem very eager to get to Silver Town master, may I ask why?" the Dragonite inquired. He had noted that throughout the trip, Lance had been rather impatient to reach Silver Town, a lot more than he had for the previous Silver Conferences.

"There is someone I am dying to see again," Lance answered. "Remember Ash?"

"The kid with the Pikachu we saw at the Lake with the red Gyarados?" the Dragonite asked.

"Yes," Lance confirmed. "He has done something that's left me speechless."

"What is that?" Dragonite asked, clearly confused.

"He captured a Legendary Pokémon, but not just any legendary, but a legendary *Dragon* Pokémon," Lance answered.

Dragonite raised an eyebrow, impressed. "Which one?"

"A Latios," Lance answered. "The events regarding Latios' capture are unknown, as Ash has apparently evaded the media for the entire conference. How he's eluded them is also unknown."

"A kid captured a Latios? That's odd," the Dragonite commented.

"But... how? I am a master Dragon trainer and I have never even seen a Legendary Dragon, yet some kid appears out of nowhere using a Latios freely in a tournament! Yet, that Latios is still in training, at least from what I saw in the battles he was used in he is," Lance said, clenching a fist angrily. "It should be me who's training a Legendary Dragon."

"It'd be cool to have a Latios on the team," Dragonite admitted.

"I'm sure we can convince Ash to leave Latios to a more experienced and adequate trainer," Lance commented, chuckling. "Like me. I am a master dragon trainer, after all."

"What if he disagrees?" Dragonite asked.

"We'll have to do it the hard way then," Lance said off-handedly.

Dragonite frowned. "Isn't this a bit... unfair?"

"No, Latios deserves a better trainer. He will become my Pokémon!" Lance decided, more determined than ever to add a new dragon to his team... no matter what the cost.

And Chapter 21 has ended! I hope you all like it, and, again I apologize for the delay.

Anyway, I hope that with this chapter the question you have all been probably wondering has been answered. YES. I will write the Hoenn Region. I have many plans for it actually. So, don't worry, this story will still go for a good long way. So Yay! There will be Hoenn Region for all of you.

Also, I made a joint account with two of my friends, Shakari and Lady Venamisa, both are on my fav authors list, its called venakari, if we make co-writes, they will be posted there, actually, Lady Venamisa and Shakari was working on a nice fanfic called Shades of Grey, its on venakari, check it out!

Also, the blind Poll I made about the shippings with Ash has been made visible, so, go there and see the results so far! And those who haven't voted, go and leave a vote (Or 5)! The Poll will remain open for at least the rest of November, and After that maybe start a new one with a Topic just as interesting.

And Finally, don't forget to tell me what you think in a **REVIEW!**

Happy Dance =D

The Silver Conference Ends

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: Here I am with chapter 22! Well, this chapter concludes the Silver Conference arc. How was the arc overall? I hope you all liked it a lot.

Lance smirked as he neared Silver Town, looking at the settlement from high above the clouds as he soared on the back of his signature Dragonite. "There's Silver Town, still as nice a town as ever," he commented

"Indeed," Dragonite agreed. "So, where to?"

"Let's go to the Elite Four building. I want to see which of the Johto Elite Four have come to Silver Town. After all, the Award Ceremony is the day after tomorrow, along with the grand final of the Silver Conference," Lance answered. Dragonite nodded and sped towards the building.

"Too bad the kid with the Latios lost... I would have liked to see him make it to the finals," Dragonite commented. "But... if he lost, that means someone defeated Latios. Who did it?"

"No one. You see, Ash didn't use him in the Semifinals because Latios had sustained some injuries in the previous battle," Lance answered.

"That was noble of him," Dragonite admitted.

"Yeah, and when I'm training that Latios, I will become the strongest champion, and Latios will be one of the strongest Dragons of the world," Lance said determinedly.

Dragonite sighed. "Are we really going to do this?" the Dragon asked, doubt filling his voice.

"Yes," Lance said firmly. "Why the sad tone?"

"I don't know, this doesn't feel right. I mean, that kid got his merit for capturing Latios, and we're going to try and take him away?" Dragonite replied.

Lance winced slightly, feeling a pang of guilt. He quickly ignored it. "I know it's a bit extreme, but it's for the best. What's better than having a Latios trained properly? Besides, you know how long I've searched for Legendary Dragon Pokémon, and yet I haven't found one, until now," Lance replied. "Can I count on you?"

Dragonite sighed, feeling torn on what to do. He knew it was common sense that they were about to do something bad, but Lance had been his best friend ever since he was a baby Dratini. "Alright, I'll help," he said reluctantly. He was confused about Lance's behavior; it was so... uncharacteristic of him, so out of character. *'Must be a severe case of human stupidity then.'*

"Thanks for helping me," Lance said, smiling down at his Dragonite.

"Even if he isn't fully trained, keep in mind what we're going to attack," Dragonite warned. A Latios was always a formidable opponent.

Lance nodded. "I know."

"So, how are we going to find him?" Dragonite asked. Looking for just one trainer in all of Silver Town was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

"I want to see if Will has arrived at the Elite Four headquarters. If he's there, I'll ask him to find Latios for us. Since Latios is a powerful Psychic, he or one of his Pokémon should be able to find him easily," Lance answered.

"He isn't going to help us with this," Dragonite said flatly.

"He doesn't need to know. I'll tell him I want to congratulate that trainer or something. I'll improvise," Lance said quickly.

Dragonite sweatdropped. *'We are so screwed, '* the Dragon thought as he neared their target. *'Messing with Legendary Pokémon is never a good idea.'*

"Ah, that was so good!" Ash said as he exited the most luxurious restaurant in town, his belly filled with some of the best food available.

"Ohhh yeah! I've never eaten in such a good restaurant before," Misty agreed.

"Maybe because we never have money, and when we do, it's in near-negative numbers," Brock said. "But today's meal was... unforgettable."

"Yeah," Bianca agreed.

" *It was good,*" Latios admitted.

" *And the deserts bar was delicious!*" Latias said joyfully.

"Oh, so good, but my cooking is better," Delia said.

After wandering around enjoying Silver Town for a while, Ash had begun complaining that he was hungry and the group began to look for a nice place to eat. Keeping in mind how much they could afford, when they passed the fanciest restaurant in town, they didn't even

bother to spare a look as they knew that they couldn't afford the food there. But when Ash complained about how hungry was, the owner, who had been standing at the door, heard him and was immediately excited about seeing Ash, know popularly as 'the boy with the Legendary Pokémon', so they made a deal: if Ash showed him Latios, they could eat for free. Latios was reluctant at first, but he was convinced rather quickly after he saw the kind of food they served there.

"So, where to now?" Bianca asked, looking around.

"How about we go shopping? We just saved a lot by eating for free," Misty suggested.

"Yeah, I agree," Delia said eagerly.

' Why do girls like to go shopping a lot? It's even weirder when they go shopping for hours and they don't buy a thing... ' Ash thought, knowing that his question was going to be picked up by either of the Eon twins.

" Honestly... I don't know," Latios replied.

" It's a girl thing, guys will never understand," Latias said coolly. Ash and Latios shrugged.

"Want to come with us Latias?" Bianca asked kindly.

" No, I'd like to stay with Ash for now," Latias replied, gently tapping Bianca's shoulder.

"Alright," Bianca said. As she turned to where she felt the tap, she reached forwards and smiled as she felt Latias' soft feathers.

"Let's go then. Later, honey!" Delia said as she, Misty, and Bianca started to walk towards the shopping district.

"I'll go with them," Brock said quickly, walking after them.

Ash looked at his departing friend with confusion. "What was that about?"

"He's going because he thinks they'll see lots of girls, and he would be away from me," Latias answered.

"Shouldn't you keep an eye on him?" Pikachu asked.

"Nah, Misty can handle him pretty well on her own," Latias answered, giggling softly.

"So, what are we going to do?" Latios asked.

"Well," Ash started. "We could go to the lake to pass the time. Besides, I want to spend time with my Pokémon."

"Not the lake! It's a rest day, many people are having picnics there, or taking a swim," Latios reminded him.

Ash sighed. "Awww, too bad."

"We could go the forest," Latias suggested. *"It's a nice place. We could find a clearing, one that's closer than the one we used to train."*

"Sure," Ash said as he began walking towards the forest. He was sure his Pokémon would enjoy some nature without the pressure of training.

After a few minutes of walking Ash arrived at a small and decent clearing. He smiled at the sight. "This will do," Pikachu commented. Ash nodded and tossed four Pokeballs, releasing the team he was going to have for the next few days. He had decided to switch after the battle against Jon after healing his Pokémon.

Bayleef, Larvitar, Phanpy and Charizard appeared in bright flashes as they materialized into the small clearing. Latias and Latios dropped their invisibility, appearing in a bright display of blue lights. "Ash!" Bayleef squealed as she tackled him, nuzzling him lovingly. "I missed you!"

Ash laughed as he was knocked to the ground, taking it in good stride as he usually did. He hugged her back. "Hi Bayleef!"

"There she goes again," Charizard muttered. He shrugged and stretched, enjoying his time out of a Pokeball. "Hey, did we win?" he asked.

Larvitar cast a downwards look. "No... we lost. I was knocked out last..."

"Damn, not again," Charizard grumbled.

"At least this time it wasn't because someone played lazy. We lost in a fair battle," Pikachu commented dryly. Charizard looked around like he wasn't mentioned. Pikachu rolled his eyes.

"And I worked so hard to try to knock out that Tyranitar," Charizard muttered. Larvitar winced.

Ash smiled as he gently pushed Bayleef aside and patted Larvitar on the head. "Its okay, you did your best, and I'm proud of you," Ash said gently.

Larvitar smiled and jumped into Ash's arms, hugging him. Thankfully, Latias reacted in time to prevent Ash from getting the wind knocked out of him by the heavy infant. "Thanks, Daddy."

"Yeah, you did manage to beat that Tyranitar after all," Ash congratulated. Charizard's jaw dropped in awe. Latias and Latios laughed.

"Yeah, it was amazing," Bayleef agreed.

They stared at her. "Uh, you didn't fight... how did you see it?" Pikachu asked.

"Tracey was kind enough to let us into the lab and watch the battle with the rest of Pallet Town," Bayleef answered. "And by 'kind

enough,' I mean that Bulbasaur and I hung him upside-down with our Vine Whip until he got the message." Everyone sweatdropped.

"So, after this, what are we going to do?" Larvitar asked curiously.

"We're going to go to the Hoenn Region to gather the badges and compete for the League there," Ash answered.

"And search for the poacher that has your mother," Latios continued. Larvitar smiled happily. Latios grinned viciously. "I am *eager* to meet him."

"Latios! What did I tell you about you harming others like that!" Ash shouted, rather annoyed. He could still remember Latios mind-crushing the three Poachers as they screamed in pain from his mental assault... it hadn't been a pretty sight.

"They deserved it! And this other poacher deserves it too," Latios countered. *'If it weren't for your kindness, I would have killed them...'* Latios thought.

"You might be right," Ash admitted. "But... hurting someone that way... it's simply not right, I forbid you to do that again." Latios sighed but made no response.

"I just want my mother to be rescued," Larvitar interrupted.

"Don't worry sweetie, we'll get her back," Latias said gently, giving him a smile. "That poacher is in for some serious trouble."

"Yup!" Phanpy said merrily.

Larvitar smiled fondly at his 'family'. "Thank you all."

"Hoenn sounds like a good place. Wish I could go," Charizard lamented. "Lots of strong opponents."

"Yeah, how's the training at the valley?" Bayleef asked curiously. "I remember the first day when we left you there the other Charizards

bullied you around." Everyone laughed. Charizard fumed.

"Hey, how strong are you there?" Ash asked.

"Well, you could say I'm at the middle of the pack. I'm not the strongest Charizard, nor am I the weakest. There are some Charizards I can beat easily, and others that can beat me easily," Charizard answered. "I can't wait to show off my new Overheat attack!"

"Remember the attack gets weaker every time it's used, so be careful," Pikachu reminded him.

Charizard nodded. "I know."

"So, when are you going back to the Valley?" Ash asked.

"In a few days. It's a bit of a long flight, and I want to be fully rested. I'm still a bit tired from yesterday's battle, it was damn tough, and I think my right wing is still a bit sore," Charizard answered, folding and extending his wing a few times, wincing a little. *'Damn Stone Edge.'*

"I thought the Pokémon Center could fix that," Ash commented, confused.

"Well, while they can heal most injuries and some partial tiredness, they can't completely heal exhaustion. Why do you think there are rest days between battles? Its not just so the trainers can plan, it's also so the Pokémon can get a bit more rest," Latias clarified for him. "Besides, Charizard overexerted himself a lot in that battle, so his wing is recovering from that too."

"And we spend most of the rest time training," Pikachu commented dryly.

"The training was nothing compared to the intense battles, except for Steel Wing training..." Latios continued.

"Or Iron Tail training," Pikachu deadpanned. Latias giggled happily as she recalled their training, and how she'd made sure they didn't slack off.

"Yeah," Charizard agreed. "I wonder how the valley has been."

Ash chuckled. "Aren't we eager to get back?"

"Of course I am," Charizard answered. "I wonder how Charla is."

"Who's Charla?" Latias asked.

"She's the Charizard of the human that runs the valley. She's also my mate," Charizard said.

"Wow, got yourself a girlfriend! Nice," Pikachu commented.

"Wow, that was fast," Bayleef said.

"What's a mate?" Ash asked, confused.

"Yeah, what's that?" Phanpy asked as well.

"I want to know too," Larvitar added. Everyone else sweatdropped.

Latios decided to be the one to explain it this time. "Well, remember the concept of girlfriend and boyfriend that Latias told you about?" Latios asked. Ash nodded. "In human relationships, that is what a couple goes by depending on gender. However, in relationships between Pokémon, it's simply called 'mates.' it applies to both genders," Latios explained. "Some Pokémon use the girlfriend and boyfriend terms, but, it's usually those that are very close to humans, like trained Pokémon. Those two words are unknown among wild Pokémon."

"Charizard is a trained Pokémon, why didn't he use it?" Ash asked.

"He's been living among other Charizards for a while now. He might have forgotten it," Latias suggested. Charizard nodded Mareepishly.

"And he said some, not all," Latias continued.

Larvitar raised his hand. "Yes?" Latias asked.

"What's a girlfriend?" the small Rock and Ground-Type asked, looking confused.

"I didn't get what mate is... and what's a boyfriend?" Phanpy asked.

Latias smiled at them. "You two... will understand when you are older..."

Both Ground-Types groaned. Everyone else laughed. As they regained their breaths, Latias and Latios turned to look in the direction of Silver Town. "Something is coming," Latios muttered. "Hide." Latias immediately activated her light-refracting feathers, assuming complete invisibility. Latios followed suit, both turning invisible to the naked eye. Out of precaution, Ash grabbed three Pokéballs and returned Bayleef, Larvitar and Phanpy.

They saw a dragon shaped-silhouette in the sky, approaching rather quickly. Up in the sky, Lance smirked. *'I found you.'*

'How I wish Will hadn't been at the Elite Four building,' Dragonite thought. He saw the boy down in the forest clearing. *'Where is his Latios? Hm, Probably invisible...'*

With a flap of his wings, Dragonite landed a few dozen meters away from the boy. Lance jumped off. Latias tilted her head. *"Isn't that Lance, the Champion of Johto?"* She wondered.

"Yes," Latios answered. Subtly, Latios read Lance's mind. He was curious as to why the Champion would be coming to meet them. His eyes narrowed and he tensed for a fight when he learned of Lance's most recent memories. *'Let him try...'*

Latias looked at her brother, wondering why he was so tense. *"What's up?"*

" *Read his mind and find out for yourself,*" Latios answered.

" *Isn't that rude?*" Latias replied.

" *Just do it,*" Latios said in a firm tone. Latias shrugged and read Lance's mind as the Champion walked to them, his Dragonite behind him. She growled lowly. "*Charizard,*" Latios said in the Fire-Type's mind, startling him. "*Get ready for a fight. Lance has come here to try and take me from Ash .*" Charizard nodded silently. "*Sister, don't reveal yourself, he doesn't know Ash has a Latias too,*" Latios commanded. Latias nodded.

Unaware of the rising tension of the Eon twins, Ash walked up to Lance, smiling. "Hey, Lance!"

"Hello Ash," Lance returned the greeting.

"How have you been, and how's the Red Gyarados?" Ash asked, remembering the last time he had seen Lance at the Lake of Rage.

"He's fine, he's been slowly becoming calmer," Lance answered. "And as for you... congratulations on reaching the Top Four of the Silver Conference, it was amazing!"

Ash smiled. "Thanks!"

"And I congratulate you on your catch of a Latios," Lance said, though it sounded a little forced.

Ash beamed. "Thanks! Clair was impressed too. She's your cousin, right?"

"Yeah. You used Latios to beat her, too?" Lance inquired.

"Well, only her Dragonair," Ash answered.

"You know," Lance started. "I took a great deal of interest in your battles after you beat the first trainer with Latios, the one you battled

on the ice field. Latios is certainly an interesting Pokémon. How did you catch him?"

"Well, I became his friend, and after we became close, he decided that he wanted to come with me," Ash answered. "I caught him with friendship, not with a battle."

"Wow! You know, he seemed to lack a bit of skill in his battles..." Lance commented.

Ash chuckled Mareepishly. "Well, that's because he just learned to battle about two months ago, he just started his training."

Latios mentally chuckled. *'Try to sweet-talk him into handing me over willingly... it won't work,'* the blue Eon dragon thought coldly.

"Tell me, would you be interested in him becoming an extremely Powerful Dragon?" Lance inquired, oddly eager.

"Yes, of course," Ash replied, wondering what Lance was getting at, something seemed suspicious... for some reason, he could pick up some weird vibes from Lance and his Dragonite.

Lance smiled. "Then would you like me to take care of him for you? I promise I'll turn him into an amazingly powerful Pokémon."

Ash shook his head. "I'm sorry, but he's my friend and I want to be the one to train him. And besides, I already consider him a powerful Pokémon as he is. Latios doesn't need your help."

Latios nodded in agreement. *"You tell him Ash!"*

Lance bristled. "Think what you are saying. Don't you want Latios to receive special training?"

Ash shook his head again. "No."

Lance sighed. "I'd hoped it wouldn't come to this... sorry Ash, but Latios *will* have a new trainer."

Ash looked at Lance, utterly confused. "What do you mean?"

" *Ash! He is planning to take me away forcefully!*" Latios explained to Ash.

Ash gasped and looked at Lance in shock. "You aren't taking Latios away! How can you even think that!"

Lance's eyes widened slightly. *'He figured it out without me telling him! It must have been Latios...'* Lance thought.

Latias bristled . *"Ash, be careful, if he indeed fights us, his Dragonite is a very powerful Pokémon. He has vast experience and has fought many opponents. Remember that Latios might still be a little delicate from his injury. After all, today is still a borderline day for his recovery according to Nurse Joy, and Charizard is still tired from his overexertion in the past battle!"* Latias informed Ash, clearly alarmed.

' Damn, I'm not in the best position to fight him,' Ash thought. *'Even if they aren't in their top form, they can still fight. Why would Lance do this? This isn't the Lance I remember...'*

" *He isn't thinking clearly, he's jealous of you Ash,*" Latias told him, sensing Lance's emotions. *"He is outraged at the fact that you have my brother, yet he hasn't caught a Legendary Pokémon, more specifically, a Dragon-Type."*

Lance sighed and began walking backwards. Dragonite stayed where he was, facing Ash, empathy in his eyes. Latios tilted his head. *'Interesting,'* he thought, seeing Dragonite's torn expression. He quickly read Dragonite's most recent memories and grinned, seeing an opportunity. With a shower of bright blue lights, Latios revealed himself. Lance's eyes widened in awe at finally seeing for the first time in his life a Legendary Dragon-Type Pokémon. Dragonite started, amazed by Latios' sudden appearance.

"You are conscious that your trainer's actions aren't the correct ones," Latios stated calmly.

Dragonite's jaw dropped. "How did you know?"

"I read your mind. You don't have to follow your trainer's orders if you believe they are wrong," Latios told the other Dragon-Type. "If my trainer did something that was wrong, I would personally knock some sense into him."

Dragonite cast a downwards look. Lance growled lowly. "Don't listen to him!"

Latios glared at Lance, causing the human to stiffen slightly in fright. "Shut up! Think of your actions! You are supposed to be a Champion, yet look what you're contemplating to do out of something as stupid as jealousy!"

Due to Lance's ability to understand Dragon Pokémon, he comprehended Latios' words perfectly. "I'm not jealous!" Lance countered, clearly angered.

"Then what is it? If it's not that, then it must be human stupidity," Latios said, chuckling a little.

A vein appeared on Lance's forehead out of anger. *'Hehe, just what I was thinking too...'* Dragonite thought.

"Hey! What do you mean by 'Human stupidity'?" Ash yelled. The eon dragon ignored him, much to his irritation.

"Think about it Latios!" Lance shouted. "I can train you to be an extremely powerful Dragon; I can train you far better than Ash can!"

Latios chuckled. "I know."

Lance smiled. "Then will you come with me willingly?"

"Never," Latios said firmly, not a single doubt in his voice.

"Why?" Lance questioned, looking surprised.

"I don't care if you can train me better than Ash, I'm perfectly happy with my current trainer, Ash is my friend and I won't leave him just to become stronger. Besides, I'll eventually become as strong as you claim, Lance. With Ash it might take a while longer than it would with you, but I don't care," Latios answered. Ash smiled at Latios, touched.

"Then I will have to knock you out and force Ash to release you. Dragonite, get ready!" Lance ordered. Dragonite reluctantly readied himself for a battle. "I'll show you what a Dragon trained by me can do, I'll beat everything you throw at me with just Dragonite!"

"Dragonite don't!" Latios said firmly, hoping that his status as a Legendary Pokémon might intimidate the Dragon and Flying-Type to standing down.

"I'm sorry Latios... but just like you choose to stay with your trainer out of friendship, I am in the same position. I will follow Lance's orders. He is my friend," Dragonite said reluctantly.

Latios sighed. "I understand..."

"Guess we'll have to fight him, then..." Pikachu commented.
"Damn..."

"Looks like it," Ash agreed. "Charizard! Latios! Pikachu! Get Ready!"

"Dragonite, Dragon Claw!" Lance shouted. Dragonite nodded and with a mighty flap of his wings he charged at the eon dragon, his claws shining a bright white as he powered up the attack.

"Latios, dodge!" Ash shouted. Latios quickly altered his levitation, causing him to move sideways out of the way of the Dragon Claw... setting Dragonite up for Pikachu and Charizard's attack. "Use Flamethrower and Thunderbolt!" Ash shouted. Pikachu jumped off Ash's shoulder as his cheeks sparkled violently. Charizard exhaled a potent stream of fire as Pikachu released a tremendous blast of electricity.

"Dragonite, fly up!" Lance shouted. Dragonite quickly flapped his wings, rocketing skywards.

' *Ice Beam!*' Ash thought, not calling the attack out loud so Lance didn't know it was coming. To Dragonite's utter shock, Latios was already above him. He formed an orb of freezing energy as he fired the three-pronged zigzagging beam of ice downwards.

"Dragonite, Fire Blast!" Lance shouted.

Ash smirked. "Oh no you don't! Psychic!"

Latios' eyes glowed as he got ready to use his mental powers. Dragonite took a deep breath and exhaled an extremely potent star-shaped plume of fire. The fire was immediately extinguished as Latios' Psychic attack cut the oxygen needed to power the flames.

Lance's eyes widened in alarm. "Whirlwind!" he shouted. Dragonite flapped his wings with astounding force, creating a tornado in front of him barely in time as the Ice Beam reached him. The Ice-Type attack was dissipated by the raging winds of the Dragon and Flying-Type's attack.

"Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Charizard, who was now flying behind Dragonite, released a stream of fire.

"Dodge!" Lance shouted. He had to admit, Ash was a lot better than he had expected. Dragonite flew downwards, causing the Flamethrower to fly overhead. "Use Dragon Pulse!" Dragonite took a deep breath and formed an orb of green energy in front of his mouth.

"What's that!" Ash wondered.

" *It's a more advanced Dragon-type move. Be wary, it's very powerful,*" Latias answered.

"Dodge it!" Ash shouted. Dragonite fired the orb skywards, aiming at Latios. The Eon dragon quickly dodged to the side, evading the

attack. "Charizard, use Flamethrower!" Ash commanded. Charizard quickly reared back and spat a powerful stream of fire.

"Dragonite, quick, use Dragon Claw!" Lance ordered. Dragonite's claw shined a bright white as he thrust them forward, ripping the Fire attack apart with ease. With a powerful flap of his wings, Dragonite charged forward and slammed the Dragon Claw attack into Charizard's chest, knocking the wind out of him as he fell. Dragonite smirked, and gasped as he felt a powerful Dragonbreath slam into his back, courtesy of Latios at Ash's mental command.

"Latios, Psychic!" Ash shouted. Latios' eyes glowed as he bombarded Dragonite's body with his mental powers, causing the large Dragon to let out a shriek of pain. Latios slammed Dragonite to the floor of the clearing rather hard. "Luster Purge, Thunder and Overheat!" Ash shouted. Latios' body began to glow with a gentle white light, Charizard began to glow with a blazing red aura, and Pikachu's cheeks began to spark violently.

Pikachu glanced at Latios and Charizard and let out a groaned. "Why I am the only one not glowing?" he complained. Latias giggled.

The three Pokémon let out a battle cry as they released their respective attacks. Latios hurled a powerful blast sphere of bright light, Pikachu flung an enormous lightning strike and Charizard expelled a blazing blast so hot it was a bright white. Lance's eyes widened in terror as he saw the three attacks heading towards his Dragon-type. He decided that it was time he pulled his ultimate trump card. "Dragonite, use Draco Meteor!"

Dragonite roared as his body was covered in a red aura, waves of draconic power rippling through his body. A sphere of red power covered his body as the three attacks from Ash's Pokémon collided against him, releasing a tremendous explosion. Lance and Ash covered their eyes as the shockwave from the attack hit them, though Ash had an easier time considering that Latias blocked most of it with her psychic powers.

As the center of the clearing was covered in a cloud smoke, Ash's Pokémon, who were a few feet away from the smoke, looked around anxiously to see if they had managed to beat Lance's famed Dragonite. Suddenly, a huge red orb shot into the sky, startling Ash's Pokémon. The orb exploded and dozens of red meteor-like projectiles rained towards the ground.

Latios' eyes glowed as he used his Psychic powers to stop the meteors, but to his horror, the sheer power behind the attack was so much that he could barely stop the first ones. He was immediately hit by the shower of meteoric projectiles, along with Pikachu and Charizard. The field was covered in a series of explosions as the Draco Meteor engulfed most of the field in its range of destruction. Thankfully, Ash was out of range of the attacks, as well as Lance.

Once the explosions ended, the field was covered in an even thicker smoke, a deathly silence falling as Ash and Lance looked to see what had become of their Pokémon. After a few minutes, the smoke began to clear, revealing a battered and bruised Dragonite. He was panting in exhaustion from using the Draco Meteor and from taking that triple attack.

To Ash's complete shock, Charizard and Pikachu were knocked out cold and Latios was on the ground, panting heavily. Unlike Pikachu and Charizard, he had managed to lessen the damage from the Draco Meteor by stopping the attacks with his mind, though he had been unable to stop most of them. Ash's jaw dropped. *'A single Pokémon of Lance's defeated my strongest three! And at the same time!'* he thought in awe. *'I can't believe it... are the Champion and Elite Four really this powerful? I thought I was becoming strong, but... now I see why I couldn't win the Silver Conference. I'm a long way from becoming as strong as them.'*

" Draco Meteor is an impressively powerful attack. And besides, as you said, Lance is a Champion. His Dragonite has a lot more experience than Charizard, Pikachu, and Latios put together, but don't think too lowly of yourself... you will one day become that

strong, you'll see," Latias said to Ash mentally, portraying a smile inside his mind.

Lance smirked. "See, that's what I told you about. Dragonite, finish Latios off with Dragon Claw!" Dragonite walked to where the downed, but still conscious, Latios was. Dragonite's claws glowed a bright white as he readied the attack. Once he was in front of Latios, he raised his arm, ready to knock Latios out... when something collided against him in the chest so hard that he coughed up some blood as he screeched in pain.

Lance's blood went cold as Dragonite's assailant revealed herself, Latias appearing in a shower of blue sparkling lights, ready to protect her family and friends. Lance's eyes widened . *'H-h-he has a La-Latias too!'* he thought in pure shock. Ash took the moment of distraction to return Charizard back to his Pokeball and cradle Pikachu in his arms.

"Latias, what are you doing!" Latios shouted in astonishment, his voice filled with worry.

"It's *my* turn to protect *you*,"she said firmly.

"Sister, you're going to fight a Pokémon that beat me, Pikachu and Charizard?" Latios asked, voiced filled with fear for Latias' safety. Latios mustered every single bit of strength he had left as he activated his levitation and rose off the ground. He was not going to let Latias fight a Pokémon as strong as Lance's Dragonite, even if he had to overexert himself into a coma.

"Brother, you are too injured and tired to battle. Besides, you three already softened him up for me, I should be fine," Latias said. She smiled, clearly touched as she saw Latios forcing himself to fly just to fight instead of her. She gently used her psychic abilities to lower Latios back to the grass. He tried to fight her off with his psychic powers, but due to his exhaustion, his mental abilities were easily overpowered by hers.

"Sis, don't do this!" Latios said as he tried to weakly struggle against Latias' mental hold.

She gently deposited him back to the grass and smiled at him lovingly. "I trained with you all, through not as hard. I am not defenseless anymore Latios. I will protect you now, for all the times you've protected me."

Dragonite narrowed his eyes. *'Damn, I'm tired... those three attacks really hit me hard... I have to finish her off fast...'*

Latias got into a battle position. "I'm ready, Ash!"

Ash was still a bit shocked about Latias' sudden courage to fight off Lance's Dragonite. Her voice snapped him out of it. He nodded. "Alright Latias, here we go. Use Dragon Breath!"

Latias took a deep breath and exhaled a stream of white flames at the Dragonite. "Dragonite, use Dragon Pulse!" Lance shouted. Dragonite quickly reared back and fired an orb of compressed green energy. The Dragon Pulse easily tore through Latias' Dragon Breath, heading directly at her.

"Latias, use Psychic!" Ash shouted. Latias' eyes glowed as she ripped the Dragon Pulse apart with a single thought.

"Dragonite, use Dragon Claw!" Lance shouted.

"Latias, dodge!" Ash commanded. Dragonite charged at Latias, his claws glowing a bright white. He swiped at Latias, the red and white dragon quickly adjusting her levitation so the attack passed over her. Dragonite attempted another swipe, but Latias shifted her levitation, again changing her movement without warning and causing Dragonite's attack to miss. She flew back, putting some distance between herself and Dragonite.

"Dragonite, use Ice Beam!" Lance shouted. Dragonite gathered an orb of freezing energy in his mouth and fired three zigzagging beams

at Latias.

"Latias, dodge and use Mist Ball!" Ash shouted.

Latias smirked as Ash called her strongest attack. She quickly flew to the side, dodging the ice attack with ease. Her body gave off a soft ethereal glow as she held her claws forward. A small orb of white psychic energy appeared and was engulfed by an extremely thick reddish-white mist. As she finished charging her attack, a large ball of compressed mists swirling wildly between her claws, Dragonite tensed. *'What is that?'*

"Take this!" Latias shouted as she hurled the orb towards Dragonite, the Mist Ball leaving a trail of mist in its wake as it flew at the Dragon and Flying-Type.

"Dragonite dodge it!" Lance shouted. Dragonite sidestepped, causing the Mist Ball to pass him.

Latias smirked. *'You think you can dodge it? Think again... HA!'* With a thought, she detonated her Mist Ball. The Mist Ball exploded like a smoke grenade, releasing a reddish mist in every direction. The impact of the resulting shock wave wasn't much, Dragonite was barely pushed back. He winced as he took the damage from the attack.

"That's all?" Dragonite taunted, expecting the attack to have damaged him more. It came from a Legendary Pokémon after all.

"Yep, that's all. I've won," Latias said calmly. Lance and Dragonite stared at her in confusion.

"Heh, you must be hallucinating," Lance commented as the mists slowly dissipated. "Dragonite, Hyper Beam!"

"Heh, I'll finish you off with a single attack," the Dragon and Flying-Type said smugly. Dragonite opened his mouth and began forming

an orb of volatile orange energy... only for it to dissipate before him. Dragonite and Lance's eyes widened in terror.

"While my Mist Ball isn't very harmful when it comes to direct damage, it has a devastating side-effect. Anything touched by the mist is severely weakened, and added to your prior exhaustion, that means you have no energy left to battle," Latias explained.

Dragonite's eyes widened as his exhaustion began to intensify. Soon, he was too tired to move, let alone form an attack. "Why you..." Dragonite growled. "It was just mist, how can it do this?"

"It's not regular mist, it's hyper-charged with my Psychic powers," Latias clarified. "And now it's my turn to finish *you* off."

"Nice job, Latias! We got him!" Ash congratulated as they smiled at each other. "Use Ice Beam!" Latias opened her mouth and gathered an orb of freezing energies, firing three beams of cold energy at the exhaustion-paralyzed Dragon. The attack hit Dragonite in the chest, creating a layer of ice over his chest and neck as he stumbled back.

"Now, Psychic!" Ash commanded. Latias' eyes glowed a bright white as she fired a powerful wave of psychokinetic energy. The power Latias put behind the attack was colossal as Dragonite felt like he had been hit by a mountain. The psychic attack ripped the ice apart and flung him back a few dozen yards, crashing a few feet in front of a shocked Lance. He tried to stand up, but he couldn't even move a muscle.

Latias smiled, awed by his sister's performance. "Wow... just, wow! Who knew you had it in you sis?" he commented. Latias blushed slightly.

Lance looked utterly shocked at his defeated Dragonite. It had been ages since his Dragonite had been defeated. Latias glanced at Lance and began to glide towards him. Lance noticed this and quickly reached for another Pokeball. "Too slow... far too slow,"

Latias said, shaking her head. Lance's body was suddenly completely paralyzed. She stopped a meter away from him.

"You have a Latias too!" Lance said in astonishment.

"Yes, so?" Ash said as he walked to them, followed weakly by Latios, through Latias was helping him levitate.

"Lance, your actions are shocking, to go this far just to get a Legendary Pokémon..." Latias said, shaking her head sadly.

"Why did you do it?" Ash asked.

"I was... angry that you could get a Legendary Dragon Pokémon being so young, yet I, who has been a master dragon trainer for years, has not even seen one," Lance answered. He would have gazed downwards, but Latias wasn't allowing that.

"You should have listened to your Pokémon. He knew this was wrong, yet he was willing to do it for you anyway," Latias commented.

"I know... but I was so eager to have a Pokémon like Latios on my team," Lance said, starting to feel regret for his actions.

"You were blinded by your jealousy. I don't need my psychic powers to tell you are a good person, but you made a big mistake," Latias told him. "Latios would never have gone to you even if you had won. Did you really think that after something like this he would obey you?"

"Well..." Lance began, not really knowing how to answer that.

"Of course not! He'd never follow your commands," Latias said, irritated. "Now, what should we do with you?"

"Maybe we should tell everyone what he did," Latios suggested, smirking.

Lance paled in terror. That would destroy his public image, and who knew what the Pokémon League would do to him? "Anything but that!"

"You aren't in much of a position to negotiate," Latias said dryly. Lance gulped.

"Come on, don't do that. I admit my mistake, I honestly do, I was stupid for trying to do this, and I'm sorry!" Lance said desperately. Latias smiled. She could sense he was truly sorry.

"Ash, what should we do with him?" Latias asked, giving him the final choice.

"Let him go," Ash said. He had always been very forgiving. "He admitted his mistake and he said he was sorry, give him another chance."

Latias nodded and released Lance. The human breathed a sigh of relief as he felt he could move again. "Lance, will you promise not to do some stunt like this again?" Latios asked.

Lance shook his head. "No, I guess... I let my emotions get the best of me and got carried away... I feel horrible. Is there some way I can make it up to you Ash?"

Ash thought. "Not really. Just don't do something like this again and we'll keep this a secret."

Lance smiled. "Thanks." He held out a Pokeball and returned his knocked-out Dragonite. "Latias, Latios and Ash, I am sincerely sorry for this."

"It's okay," Latias said. "If Ash forgives you, then so do me and Latios."

"Well, I don-" Latios began. Latias glared at him, and he decided that it was best to shut up, considering he was the weakened one now.

"I hope that the next time we battle Ash, it will be a fair six on six, and I expect you to be strong enough to beat me fairly," Lance said with a smile. "And I'm eager to see how much Latias and Latios have developed by then."

Ash nodded. "I'll be strong enough."

Lance hummed. "Hey, I know how I can make it up to you." He reached into one of the hidden pockets of his jacket, concealed underneath his cape. He took out a small book, it wasn't very thick and was about pocket size.

"What's that?" Ash asked.

Lance smiled. "It's a guide with numerous tips for raising Dragons to their full potential."

Ash smiled. "Awesome!"

"And at the end, it contains detailed instructions to teach a Dragon Pokémon Draco Meteor, the technique Dragonite used to beat all three of your Pokémon so fast," Lance continued.

Ash grinned eagerly, giddy at the thought of having such an attack at his disposal. Lance chuckled at the amused boy's face. "However, I don't think Latias and Latios are ready yet to learn Draco Meteor. They still need more experience. When you think the time is right, teach them the ultimate Dragon move," he suggested.

Ash took the book. "Thanks a lot, Lance."

"And thank *you* for keeping all this quiet and giving me a second chance," Lance said. "Well, I'd better get going... Latias and Latios, I promise our next meeting will be a more pleasant one. It was an honor to meet and battle you, despite losing." He turned and walked away. Ash didn't notice as he was too busy checking out the book, though it was tough to understand.

Latias giggled. "Give it to Brock, he could understand it a lot better," she suggested.

Ash reluctantly nodded. "I agree. Do you really think I can become as strong as him? He beat my strongest three Pokémon at the same time with just one. If this had been a full six on six battle, he would have destroyed my team with just his Dragonite."

"Yes, I believe you can," Latias said, not a single doubt in her voice. "He has like ten more years of experience than you. When you have those years, you'll be as strong as him, if not stronger, you'll see."

Latias smiled and put a claw on Ash's shoulder. "The key to becoming that strong is simple: patience."

Ash nodded. "Thanks a lot."

With that, he walked back to Silver Town, heading to the Pokémon Center to get his Pokémon healed. It'd be tough to explain this to his friends without mentioning Lance's actions, plus his possession of the book. He'd improvise (as usual).

Two days later...

"This has been one epic match, folks!" the MC roared over the speakers. "This is certainly worthy of the grand finale of the Silver Conference!"

On the scoreboard atop of the stadium, two pictures were displayed. One of them was Jon Dickson's. Both trainers had already lost five Pokémon and were down to their last ones.

Ash was currently in a special VIP booth with the best view of the battlefield along with the other 13 finalists. Their presence was required at the award ceremony, so they were in a room with easy access to the field.

' *Wow, nice battle,*' Ash thought.

" *Yeah, I agree,*" Latias replied. Both she and Latios were invisible and inside the room, it was large enough for them to hover safely out of the reach of the other trainers.

"Togetic, use Silver Wind!" Jon shouted. Togetic flapped her wings and fired a powerful silver gust of wind filled with crescent blades of wind at her opponent, a Venasaur. While the Grass-Type wasn't looking very tired, Togetic was panting heavily.

"Venasaur, use Hyper Beam!" the Grass-Type's trainer, a man of at least twenty years named Kyle, shouted. Venasaur opened its mouth and gathered energy into an orange ball. A large orange beam was fired, tearing the Silver Wind apart and colliding with Togetic, creating an explosion. She fell from the sky and landed on the rocky terrain of the field they were in.

Togetic shakily stood up, panting heavily and looking dazed, on the border of collapse. Jon growled. *'Togetic is barely standing and Venusaur is mostly fine... I'll have to risk it all or nothing...'* he thought. "Togetic, use Metronome!"

"And this is it, Togetic's last attack. Venusaur has to recharge, so Togetic has time to execute its technique, but if it fails to defeat Venasaur then it's all over!" the MC cried anxiously.

Togetic's small stubby arms began to shine blue as her attack was finishing its charge. She finished moving her arms as the glow dissipated. Her next attack had been selected. Togetic's exhaustion began to fade as her body began to glow a bright white, a huge amount of power forming within her. Her body was encased in a huge sphere of white light that was fired at the Venasaur in a Metronome-selected Luster Purge.

Latios' jaw dropped . *"HOW DARE SHE USE MY ATTACK!"* he bellowed angrily. Latias and Ash had to put a claw/hand over their

mouths to stop their laughter. Some trainers stared at Ash in confusion. Gary shrugged, dismissing it as nothing important.

The Luster Purge collided with the Venusaur. The super-effective attack was strong enough to knock out the Grass-Type with a huge explosion. When the light, receded, everyone was aware of the Grass and Poison-Type's defeat. "Venusaur is unable to continue battling. The victor of this battle and the winner of the Silver Conference is Jon Dickson of Sento Cherry Town!" the Referee bellowed. The crowd burst into wild cheers as Jon stood there, stunned at the realization that he had just won the Silver Conference.

"This is it! Jon Dickson has won the Silver Conference of the Johto League!" the MC announced.

"YEAH!" Jon shouted, finally reacting to the fact that he had won the tournament. Togetic flew over to him as she hugged him, overjoyed that she had made her trainer a League Champion. The crowd cheered.

After a few minutes of preparations, the MC spoke up. "Now, its time for the awards ceremony of this year's Silver Conference!" the MC announced. The field shook as the rock field began to sink back to the earth. It split in two as the normal field took its place, with the surprise that in the center of it was a stage. It had many bright colors and a microphone in the middle. Two pedestals were beside it, and in the middle of the stage were three platforms. The one that was lowest to the ground was bronze-colored and had a "3rd" painted on it, the middle platform in height was silver-colored and had a "2nd" painted on it, and the tallest one was gold-colored and had a "1st" painted on it. Several news crews and photographers were allowed into the field to get the best shots of the stage.

Mr. Goodshow and Lance entered the field, waving at the cheering crowd. Behind them, walking in a straight line, were the other fourteen final rounds participants. Both walked up to the stage and

stood in front of the microphone. Jon Dickson and the other trainer joined the other finalist, forming in a line in front of the stage.

"Greetings to all!" Mr. Goodshow boomed over the speakers. "This year's Silver Conference was certainly one to remember, but sadly, it has finally come to an end, with many outstanding trainers and even greater battles! But first, I would like all of you to give a round of applause to these sixteen trainers who made it to the final rounds and fought fiercely for the title. Though only one won, the rest gave an amazing performance. Let's thank them all for the memorable battles they gave us!" Mr. Goodshow began to clap his hands. Soon the rest of the stadium joined in a collective applause for the sixteen trainers lined up in front of the stage. Ash and Gary admitted that it was an amazing feeling to have an entire stadium cheering for them.

"Well," Mr. Goodshow began as the applauses died down. "Now it's time to begin the individual awards. These are divided into a few categories and are granted to the best trainer in each category! The judges that decided who which award went to are myself, the Johto Champion Lance, the Elite Four, Silver Town's local Nurse Joy and Professor Elm!"

A beautiful woman entered the field, carrying a platter. On it were five gold medals, each with a different inscription on it. She walked to the stage and set the platter on one of the small pedestals besides the microphone.

"The first award is 'Best Performance.' This award is given to the trainer that had the best tournament, the trainer that managed to dominate his battles the best and the one that seemed to be the most solid contender throughout the conference!" Mr. Goodshow announced. "This award goes to... Kyle of Goldenrod City! Through he lost the final battle, his road towards the match was impressive as he steadily dominated all trainers that opposed him, and he fought impressively to the finish." The crowd cheered.

Lance grabbed one of the medals as the aforementioned trainer walked up to the stage. He gave a low bow as Lance placed the

medal around his neck. "Congratulations," Lance said as the trainer walked back to the line.

"Now," Mr. Goodshow started. "The second award is 'Best Youth.' This award is given to the trainer that, despite being rather young, still managed to make it far in the Conference. This award goes to Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town! At the age of eleven years and eleven months, Ash managed to reach the semifinals! A new world record!" Mr. Goodshow announced. The crowd cheered. Delia burst into happy tears as she took an entire album's worth of photos.

Ash smiled happily as he walked up to the stage, receiving the medal from Lance, though Pikachu had to move a little for the medal to be placed properly. At least they were on good terms despite their last meeting. "Congratulations," Lance said.

Ash smiled. "Thanks," he said. He walked back to the line.

Gary gave Ash a playful punch in the shoulder as he returned. "Good one, congratulations." Ash smiled at his former rival.

"The third award is the 'Best Strategist.' This award is given to the trainer that demonstrated the ability to plan ahead of difficult battles and come through with surprising results. This award goes to... Harrison of Little Root Town! He managed to create a strategy that was able to almost beat Ash Ketchum's Legendary Pokémon, and as a result, incapacitated Latios for the semifinals," Mr. Goodshow announced. The crowd cheered again. Harrison smiled and walked to the stage, receiving the commendation and medal from Lance.

"That's why I lost..." Ash muttered unhappily. Latias stifled a giggle.

"The fourth award is the 'Best Pokémon' award," Mr. Goodshow announced. "This award is given to the trainer that showed us the rarest, greatest or strongest Pokémon of all the other finalists!" Mr. Goodshow explained. "This award goes to... Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town! Ash certainly made the most shocking event of the

conference, revealing to the world his ownership of the Legendary Pokémon Latios!"

Ash smiled and walked back to the stage again, happy to receive another award. In the stands, Delia took about two albums' worth of photos while happily crying. Some people stared at her oddly. Professor Oak chuckled nervously.

"Congratulations yet again Ash," Lance said with a proud smile as he hung another medal around Ash's neck. "Between us," he whispered. "I personally congratulate you for having two Legends." Ash chuckled and nodded. He walked back to the line of the finalists.

"Now, it's time to give the fifth and final individual award!" Mr. Goodshow announced. "The 'Most Powerful Team' award. This award is given to the trainer that had the most balanced team within the League. This award goes to... Jon Dickson!" Mr. Goodshow bellowed. Jon smiled and walked to the stage, receiving the medal and congratulation from Lance.

"Now," Mr. Goodshow began. "The time has come to give the trophies to the best three trainers!" Another beautiful woman entered the field, holding a tray with three trophies: a bronze one, a silver one, and a gold one. The golden one was the largest and the bronze one was the smallest. She set the tray on the second pedestal beside the microphone.

"The third place is chosen between the two trainers that lost in the semifinals. Out of those two, it is given to the one that had a better overall performance in the league, voted and chosen by the same judges from earlier, and the official third place of the Silver Conference goes to... Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town!" Mr. Goodshow boomed, his voice amplified by the mike. Ash froze in amazement. He couldn't believe it, he was in third place!

"Now, will the top three trainers please ascend to your corresponding pedestals?" Mr. Goodshow asked.

Jon Dickson and Kyle walked forward towards the stage. Ash was still paralyzed with amazement. Gary chuckled. '*Stunned in place, hehe!*' He gently nudged Ash forward, snapping him out of his trance. "Go and enjoy your glory."

Ash smiled and nodded, walking after the other two trainers. Each trainer took their place on a pedestal. Jon stood on the large golden one, Kyle on the silver one, and Ash on the bronze one. Lance grabbed the third place bronze trophy and handed it to Ash, then repeated the process with the other two trainers.

"Now, these three are the best trainers of the Silver Conference! Special honors go to Jon Dickson, Champion of the Silver Conference!" Mr. Goodshow boomed. Several hidden mechanisms behind the stage opened and fired multi-colored confetti upwards as the three trainers lifted their trophies and held them proudly over their heads while the crowd cheered loudly. Several more mechanisms activated and fireworks were launched skywards, exploding in a colorful display of lights above the stadium.

Mr. Goodshow left the microphone and walked to the trainers. "Now, it's time to take the official photo of the results for the Silver Conference hall of fame. Please, it is tradition that the photo is taken of the top three trainers alongside their "Signature Pokémon," or the Pokémon they feel they are bonded with the most," Mr. Goodshow said. Several photographers lined up besides the short man, getting their cameras ready.

Jon and Kyle nodded and released their selected Pokémon, Jon letting out his Togetic and Kyle his Typhlosion. Mr. Goodshow looked at Ash. "And you?" he asked.

"I choose Pikachu," Ash said, scratching Pikachu's chin tenderly. The Electric-Type gave a 'cha' of contentment.

Mr. Goodshow frowned. "Do you mind if Latios appears too? He was one of the most memorable Pokémon of this year's conference; he *has* to appear in its culmination photo."

Ash shrugged. "Sure. Latios, reveal yourself." Latios materialized beside Ash in a bright display of blue lights, startling everyone on the stage. They had expected Ash to reach for a Pokeball.

Jon stared at Ash. "Has he been here the whole time!" he asked incredulously.

Ash nodded. "Yep." Jon's jaw dropped.

Latios gazed at Togetic, who was perched atop Jon's head. "You used *my* personal move..." he said, slightly annoyed.

Togetic laughed nervously. The last thing she wanted was to be on the bad side of a Legendary. "Err. I'm sorry? I mean, Metronome is random... hehehe... I had no control over it... please don't kill me!" she said, terrified. Latios narrowed his eyes.

"*Latios! You're gonna scare her to death!*" Latias told her brother. He mentally laughed.

The group posed and got ready to have the photo taken, Ash and his two Pokémon plus Kyle and Jon and their Pokémon. As the photographers got ready, Ash stopped them. "Wait!" he said. They looked at him, wondering what he wanted. Ash grabbed the 'Best Pokémon' medal he had been awarded and took it off. "Here Latios, this is yours." Latios smiled, blushing slightly. He bowed his head so Ash could put the medal around his neck. They posed as the photographers took the photo, and what a nice one it was.

Meanwhile, a few miles outside of Silver Town....

"Sign here too," a Team Rocket executive said. Jessie groaned in pain. This was like the thousandth paper she'd signed!

"Please... stop this," she begged.

"You're lucky Agent Jessie, that was the last form. You're ready. Here," the Team Rocket executive gave her the keys for the Ultimate Team Rocket Machine, which was behind him.

"And here." He handed James a book that was at least two thousand pages long. "That's the manual."

With that, the Team Rocket executive departed, walking to his personal helicopter and leaving Jessie, James and Meowth to stare at the machine in front of them. "It's amazing..." Jessie commented, awestruck.

"With this baby, we'll have Latios for da boss in no time!" Meowth gushed. They eagerly climbed aboard, James examining the manual the whole time.

"First, lets' get a feel of how to use it, then we'll ambush the twerps as they leave Silver Town," James suggested. The other two nodded and began to study the manual.

Looks like someone else was getting ready to steal Latios.

And Chapter 22 has finished! (Along with the Silver Conference). I always thought that the ceremony to give the trophy to the champion in the anime was way too simple. So, I decided to add a few things. Hope you all liked it!

And tell me what you think of the Chapter. Don't forget to **Review** !

Ambush! Team Rocket Returns

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: And here's chapter 23! Finally. I'm very sorry for the delay, but, the finals of school semester have been terribly mean to me. *cries*

Ash smiled nostalgically as he and his group of friends looked back at the distant Silver Town. With the Silver Conference over, they were getting ready for the journey back to Kanto and their respective home cities. Their route would be a quick trip to Goldenrod City, where they would take the magnet train to Saffron City and then go to their respective towns. They could easily buy the tickets with the prize money Ash got for winning third place in the League. He had been rather horrified to find that due to his age most of the money was given directly to Delia, his mother. What fun...

Bianca had to return to Altomare to get back to her art business. Latios had offered to fly her to the port after lots of farewells between her and Latias, where she took a ferry back to Altomare. She also made Latios promise that before going to the Hoenn region they would visit.

Charizard still hadn't left. Since the group was going towards Goldenrod City, which was a lot closer to the Charizific valley, he decided he'd depart from there back to the valley.

For now, Oak had to stay in Silver Town for a few days checking over some of the results of the Conference with Professor Elm, and Delia decided to stay. Gary would be staying too for a few days, but he

wanted to accompany Ash to the outskirts of town for a final goodbye.

"So Ash," Gary began. "Where are you going to compete next?"

"I've been talking it over with Brock and I've decided to compete in the Hoenn League," Ash answered. "And you?"

Gary smiled. "I've decided to leave Pokémon battling," he answered. This naturally caused everyone to turn to look at him, clearly surprised.

"What do you mean?" Misty asked.

"I've decided to become a Pokémon researcher like my grandpa," Gary announced proudly, glad to announce his career choice to Ash, his best friend and former rival.

"Wow, that's interesting," Brock commented.

"Aw, but who will be my rival now?" Ash complained.

Gary laughed. "I'm sure you'll find a trainer that will beat you around, forcing you to train harder to outdo him." Ash glared at him while everyone else laughed.

"But what motivated you to become a researcher?" Ash asked.

"Many things," Gary answered. "All the secrets that are still in the Pokémon world, like Pokémon I haven't seen before such as Latias and Latios. They're an awesome pair of Legendary Pokémon, and it was an interesting experience to meet and talk to them, especially since I started to hear their telepathy." After a few days, Gary had begun to hear their telepathy, and now he could talk freely to them.

"*No problem,*" Latias replied.

"I wonder what other kinds of Legendaries or unknown Pokémon are still out there. Besides, I like what my grandpa does," Gary

continued.

"Alright. I wish you the best of luck!" Ash said, encouraging Gary. He smiled and got an idea. He grabbed his backpack and opened it, rummaging through his stuff. He took out a rusty Pokeball and split it in half. He offered Gary the half that he had taken for himself on that long ago day when they'd first divided the Pokeball between themselves. "It's a good luck charm," he explained, smiling.

Gary smiled and took it. "Thanks. Well, I think I should get going, I have to get back to Silver Town and I want to have a look around these woods. Who knows what Pokémon I might find?"

"Alright. Good-bye Gary. Until next time," Ash said as he and Gary shook hands.

Unexpectedly, a small quake interrupted them. "What was that?" Misty asked, hugging Togepi tighter against her chest.

"I don't have a clue," Brock said. Another small quake shook the ground.

"Okay... this is awkward," Ash commented.

"*What are you all talking about?*" Latias asked curiously.

"The ground is shaking. Can't you feel it?" Ash asked.

Latias sweatdropped. "*Ash... I'm floating,*" she deadpanned telepathically. Ash laughed nervously. Everyone facepalmed.

"Latios, can you sense something?" Brock asked.

Latios closed his eyes and spread out his mental senses as far as he could. "*No... just a few wild Pokémon here and there, but nothing else...*"

Suddenly the ground shook violently and the earth in front of them cracked. They quickly ran back as a huge drill appeared followed by

a huge black tank with a red 'R' painted on its side that erupted from the ground. The lower half of the tank had a huge frontal drill and several rocket propellers in the back. The top half had a weird white sphere in place of a cannon. A huge black crystal was embedded in the back part of the tank. For some reason, it sent a chill down Latias and Latios's spines. "Nothing else, huh?" Brock asked sarcastically.

Latios' jaw dropped. *'H-How did I fail to sense that thing! Impossible! Even underground, I should have sensed something that big coming...'*

"The heck is that!" Gary cried.

Latios growled mentally. *'Damn, Latias and I are visible, whoever is driving that thing probably already saw her...'*

Inside the machine Team Rocket smirked as they looked at the viewscreen. "What's that?" Jessie asked, pointing at Latias.

James flipped through his cards for a while. "Here," he said, finding the card that matched the Pokémon they were seeing. "That's a Latias. So, the twerp has two Legendaries? That's double the prize, I guess..."

The top hatch opened as an elevator lifted Jessie, James and Meowth out of the tank, while of the machine's speakers began to play an eerie deathly music. "Prepare for trouble!" Jessie said.

"And make it double..." James continued.

Ash, Pikachu, Misty and Brock felt like they wanted to cry. Not them again! And they'd thought they had lost them for good...

"To protect the world from devastation!" Jessie said loudly, hiding a laugh at the twerp's faces.

"To unite all people within our nation!" James continued, glad that they could finally say their motto again.

"To denounce the evils of truth and love!" Jessie followed.

"To extend our reach to the stars above!" James said.

"Jessie!" Jessie announced, doing a dramatic pose as the music's rhythm picked up.

"James!" James called out, doing another dramatic pose.

"Team Rocket, blasting off at the speed of light!" Jessie shouted.

"Surrender now or prepare to fight!" James declared.

"Meowth! Dat's right!" the feline Pokémon said, ending their motto.

Latos and Latias thought it was the stupidest thing they had ever heard in their lives. They would have laughed, but it was hard to do that considering the huge machine before them. They felt anger boil within them at seeing a member of Team Rocket again. *'Though, from Ash's tales, these three must be the idiots that always fail in capturing Pikachu, so they shouldn't be a threat,'* Latios thought.

"Man, it's been a while since we last did that," James commented. "I missed it."

"Yeah, we needed to say the motto again," Jessie agreed.

"Not you three again!" Ash shouted. "I thought we'd lost you for good!"

"Aw, did you miss us?" Jessie said mockingly.

"I guess getting rid of them is hard," Misty commented. "I wonder if it's even possible..."

"We will never rest until we catch that Pikachu... and those two Pokémon there!" Jessie announced, pointing at Latios and Latias.

"You'll never take them away!" Ash shouted back.

"Like you have a say! With dis new toy, we'll beat anything you throw at us!" Meowth said proudly, motioning to the tank.

"Meet our newest mecha, the Dark Devastator, the strongest machine Team Rocket has ever produced!" the three shouted at the same time.

"We'll smash it up just like we have with every single other stupid machine!" Ash said, grinning .

" I have a faster way. I'll simply knock the three out psychically before they use their machine on us," Latios said. For once, Ash agreed. If Latios knocked them out psychically, they could win without fighting. Latios' eyes glowed as he got ready to attack them mentally... and found that he couldn't even sense their minds in the first place. He instead tried hitting them with a powerful Psychic attack... and again nothing happened. His eyes widened. Jessie, James and Meowth smirked. They hadn't even been alarmed when they saw his eyes glow.

"Latios, what's wrong?" Ash asked.

" I... can't sense them... I tried attacking them mentally and I can't!" Latios said, clearly shocked.

"What do you mean?" Brock asked. "Can't you simply knock them out cold?"

" No," Latios said.

"But why?" Ash wondered.

"Their minds must be so tiny you can't even sense them," Pikachu joked. Ash, Latias and Latios laughed. Latias mentally transmitted the joke to the rest, and they laughed too, much to Meowth's irritation.

"How dare you!" Meowth bellowed.

Jessie and James blinked. "What did they say?"

"He said dat the reason their psychic attack didn't work was because our minds were too tiny!" Meowth translated angrily. Jessie and James fumed.

"Why those little..." Jessie snarled.

"You couldn't be more wrong!" James announced. "This machine has a powerful Dark-attribute crystal that creates a field of Dark energies around the machine, nullifying all Psychic activity!"

Ash grinned. "Thanks for the information, that's very useful."

"So, that's what that thing does..." Latios muttered.

James' jaw dropped. Jessie hit him in the head. "Idiot! Anyway, you have a simple choice twerp, you hand over all your Pokémon, or we'll take them away by force," Jessie threatened.

"Like I'd ever give up!" Ash shouted. "We'll smash that machine the same way we've smashed all your robots in the past!"

The Rocket trio laughed. "Have it yer way then..." Meowth said darkly as the Rocket trio entered their machine once more. Ash and his friends stepped back, each grabbing a Pokeball.

"Blastoise, I choose you!" Gary shouted, releasing the large turtle-like water type.

"Charizard, go!" Ash shouted, releasing the fire-type. He chuckled when he saw his opponent, guessing who was inside the machine.

"Onix, go!" Brock shouted. The huge rock snake appeared, roaring into the air.

"Palitoad, go!" Misty said, releasing the water-type.

Inside the machine, Jessie laughed. "Those twerps really think they can beat us?" she asked rhetorically, looking at the screens. "Activate battle mode!"

James nodded and pressed a switch. "Let's bring the pain!"

The machine buzzed to life as its battle mode activated. Two large hatches opened on either side of the upper part as huge rocket launchers designed to fire plasma nets capable of subduing any Pokémon with powerful energy discharges were deployed. Five hatches opened on the top of the machine as five medium-sized energy cannons appeared, each with different coloration. There was a red one in the center, a soft icy blue one to the left, a green one to the far left, a silver one to the right side of the red one and a yellow one to the far right. The large black crystal in the back of the machine began to shine an eerie purple as its Dark field increased in power, almost to the point where Latias and Latios felt like it was hurting them.

Their jaws dropped. "This is ridiculous!" Brock cried.

"Behold the full power of our ultimate weapon!" Jessie bellowed.

"Damn," Ash muttered. "That thing looks tough."

"Let's do this!" the Rocket trio said eagerly as they took up the controls. The blue cannon turned and aimed at Latios, blue energy forming a ball at its tip as it fired a powerful beam of freezing energy at the Eon Pokémon.

"Charizard, protect Latios with a Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Charizard nodded and spat a stream of flames, vaporizing the ice attack. The yellow energy cannon turned to aim at the Fire type, hummed and began crackling with electricity, and fired a powerful lighting strike. Latias took immediate action, using a DragonBreath to block the thunderbolt, clashing the white flames against the lightning.

"Onix, smash those cannons!" Brock ordered. Onix nodded and swung his tail at the cannons.

"Ha! Don't think so!" James bellowed over the speakers. The white sphere atop the machine began shine as it began to compress a lot of air within it. After a second, it released a tremendous blast of pressurized air, knocking Brock's Onix away with ease.

The net launchers to the side fired a pair of Plasma nets at the snake-like Rock-type. Latios recognized them as the same trap Annie and Oakley had used on him back at Altomare. His eyes glowed as he tried to rip the nets apart with his mind, but found that he couldn't use his psychic attacks. *'Damn that crystal!'* he thought angrily.

The nets wrapped around Onix's neck. The Rock-Type gave a cry of pain as they activated, engulfing him in red energy that drained his strength. "Charizard, burn those things with Flamethrower! Pikachu, use Thunderbolt!" Ash shouted. Charizard nodded and spat a powerful Flamethrower at Onix, completely incinerating the plasma nets. Pikachu turned to the machine and released a tremendous discharge of electricity.

"Blastoise, use Hydro Pump! Aim for those cannons!" Gary ordered. Blastoise aimed his cannons and fired a potent blast of water at the cannons.

"You too, Politoed!" Misty ordered.

The machine's cannons quickly aimed at them. The green cannon shined as a small solar panel attached to the top gathered sunlight, firing a powerful Solar Beam that intercepted the Hydro Pumps. The electric cannon fired a powerful bolt of electricity, countering Pikachu's thunderbolt with ease.

Charizard, Latias and Latios moved a bit higher and fired two Dragonbreaths and a Flamethrower down towards the machine. The remaining three cannons aimed up and charged their attacks. The

red one fired a jet of flames, cancelling Charizard's fire attack, the silver one fired a potent Flash Cannon, and the blue one fired an Ice Beam, countering Latias and Latios' Dragonbreaths.

The net launchers pivoted upwards and fired a series of plasma nets towards the three airborne dragons. Latias and Charizard flew downwards while Latios flew up, evading the nets. Latios noticed something, he no longer felt the machine's dark field. He smirked, realizing he had just found its range. His eyes glowed as he levitated a boulder from the nearby woods sky high. Once it was above the machine he dropped it.

"Pretty clever, but think again!" James said as the silver turret aimed upwards and fired a powerful Flash Cannon that pierced the rock, shattering it to pieces. Latios groaned. The ice cannon fired an Ice Beam at him, forcing him to dodge it quickly lest he be frozen.

"Ash!" Gary called. "We need to destroy those cannons! Have Latias, Latios and Charizard distract them, I'll attack them!"

Ash nodded. "Latias, Latios, use Dragonbreath! Charizard, use Flamethrower!"

Gary grabbed two Pokeballs. "Arcanine, Umbreon, Go!" he shouted, releasing the two Pokémon.

"Onix, attack from bellow!" Brock ordered. The rock-type nodded and quickly 'dove' into the ground, quickly disappearing as he dug underground.

Latias, Latios and Charizard quickly floated in front of the machine and fired their respective attacks, getting Team Rocket's attention. The cannons aimed forward and fired their own barrage of attacks, cancelling their techniques yet again.

Suddenly, Arcanine, with Umbreon on his back, appeared on top of the machine thanks to an Extremspeed-powered leap. "Use Fire Blast and Shadow Ball!" Gary shouted. Umbreon quickly gathered

an orb of shadows in her mouth while Arcanine took a deep breath, both exhaling and firing attacks that collided with one of the cannons. Umbreon's Shadow Ball hit the Green Solar Beam cannon, while Arcanine's Fire Blast hit the blue Ice Beam cannon. Both cannons exploded violently.

An alarm flared inside the cockpit, alerting the Team Rocket trio of the damage they had taken. "Damn!" Jessie cursed. "Get them off us before they do more damage!"

The white sphere took another intake of air, charging and proceeding to fire another blast of wind, flinging both of Gary's Pokémon away. They managed to land on all fours, avoiding a painful landing, though they winced due to the weapon hitting rather hard.

Suddenly, the machine sunk a few feet into the ground with a low tremble. Brock smirked, knowing his Onix was responsible. "Now what!" Jessie asked angrily.

"We're being attacked from below!" James announced, looking at the machine's sensors. "Activating drill, we're going underground!"

The drill began to spin slowly as it activated. However, Misty and Ash had different plans. "Ice Beam!" Both of them shouted. Latias, Latios and Politoed gathered icy-blue spheres of energy in their mouths and fired three beams of freezing energy directly at the drill of the machine.

The Fire cannon quickly aimed to intercept the blows. "Charizard, Flamethrower!" Ash shouted. Charizard took a deep breath and spat a stream of fire, forcing the cannon to protect itself and aim at Charizard's attack instead.

A thick sheet of ice covered the drill, stopping it before it could build up enough speed to destroy it. "Pikachu hit that thing with Thunderbolt!" Ash ordered. Pikachu's cheeks sparkled violently as he fired a powerful bolt of electricity at the machine, hitting it. To their

dismay, all they were doing was recharging its batteries. The Rocket trio laughed moronically.

Onix sprouted from the ground beside the machine and tackled it on the side. To Onix's dismay, the Dark Devastator's armor was way too strong, and it was knocked back, head spinning from the recoil.

"Onix, aim for the guns!" Brock ordered.

Onix nodded and swung his tail at the main guns of the Dark Devastator. "Stop it!" Meowth bellowed.

"Activating crystal weapon!" James said, pressing a few buttons. The machine's crystal rose in power, creating an eerie purple glow as it increased its output. Latias and Latios were forced to back out of the field's range as the Dark energies began to hurt their senses rather badly.

A large blast of Dark energy was fired from the crystal, hitting Onix and knocking him out, forcing Brock to recall him. "Blastoise, use Hydro Pump! Arcanine use Fire Blast!" Gary ordered.

"Oh, no you don't!" Jessie said. The machine's net launchers aimed and fired a pair of plasma nets, capturing both of Gary's Pokémon, draining them of their energy completely and knocking them out cold. Gary growled and returned both Blastoise and Arcanine back to their Pokéballs.

The energy cannons fired a barrage of attacks, hitting Pikachu and Charizard with a fire and electrical attack, respectively. Thankfully, it took a lot more than that to knock them out. Another pair of nets were fired yet again, this time with different targets. Umbreon gracefully jumped, evading the net with surprising ease. Politoed, however, was not as fast and got captured, draining his energies and forcing Misty to return him.

However, the Dark Devastator was having some problems. The ice sheet was starting to freeze the power wires and systems of the front of the machine, and the tank was sinking into the weakened ground

due to its weight. The flame cannon aimed and fired a Flamethrower at the drill, melting the ice there.

Suddenly, the machine trembled violently as a huge boulder fell from the sky, courtesy of Latios, who had lifted the rock away from the machine's radius. It collided with the Dark Crystal, cracking it slightly, but it didn't look too affected. However, Latias and Latios were undaunted because they were combining their powers to lift another boulder that was even bigger. Team Rocket paled. "That thing will cause severe damage!" James cried.

"Then fire a Flash Cannon!" Jessie shouted.

"It's too big, that won't work!" James yelled.

"Didn't dis thing have a huge Hyper Beam cannon inside the drill?" Meowth asked.

James' face lit up. "Right! We can use it to shatter that rock!" James said, as he activated the main weapon. The cannon inside the drill began gathering a massive amount of power. They smirked and took aim. They eagerly waited for the cannon to blast the huge rock Latios and Latias were lifting... and... why did an alarm start sounding in the cabin?

"What's that?" Jessie asked.

"I don't know," James answered. He took out the manual and checked it against the error message flashing on the control panel to find out what was wrong. "Uh oh..."

"What?" Meowth asked.

"The machine has a huge cannon inside the drill, and the drill needs to split in half to reveal the cannon... and we forgot to open the drill before initiating the firing sequence..." James said, scratching the back of his head Mareepishly.

"What! Do something!" Jessie cried.

"Too late!" Meowth shouted as the cannon fired. The lower part of the machine was blown apart in a terrible explosion. Latias and Latios reacted quickly, dropping the rock they had been lifting into the forest and generating a psychic shield around Ash and his friends, protecting them from the explosion. Thankfully, the blast dissipated the dark field briefly enough for them to do that.

"Damage report!" Jessie shouted.

James looked at the screens. "The lower front part is completely torn apart! The top part of the tank is still operational through... We're sitting Psyducks here! Oh... and the fire is reaching the fuel for the rocket propellers in the back, the whole thing's going to blow up!"

"Activate aerial mode!" Meowth ordered. James nodded and pressed an emergency switch. The entire top part of the machine separated from the lower half. Four hatches opened as four medium-sized helicopter rotors emerged and spun into action, two on each side. The Dark Devastator's top part rose away from the lower part as it exploded violently. Thankfully by that point Ash and his friends were a safe distance away.

"Okay... what was that about?" Ash asked, wondering why the machine had exploded. Now the Dark Devastator was a mid-sized aerial battleship, keeping most of the weapon systems and gaining more maneuverability. The ship aimed downwards and began to power up the wind-sphere to fire another attack at the group.

"I have an idea!" Ash said. "Latios, get their attention and make them focus their attacks on you. Latias, fly Gary's Umbreon to the top of the machine, she can get closest to that crystal since she's a dark type! Once she destroys it, hit it with your Mist Ball, and then destroy it with a combo attack from all of you, got it?" They nodded.

"Hey, I'm the only one who can tell Umbreon what to do!" Gary said. "Ahem. Umbreon, rise on Latias to the top of that machine and

destroy that crystal! Since you're a Dark type, you can get the closest to it without getting hurt!" The others sweatdropped.

Latios quickly flew towards the machine and fired a Dragonbreath attack. The flame turret aimed downwards and fired a stream of fire, cancelling both attacks. "Want a Legendary? Come and get one!" Latios called as he began to fly in the direction of the forest.

"With pleasure!" Meowth said as the machine followed him. The net launchers began to fire a barrage of Plasma nets, the energy turrets launched multiple blasts and the sphere threw several sonic wind blasts. Latios began to frantically dodge the attacks, doing loops and twirls in the air as he desperately flew around the blasts, the sheer number of missiles beginning to overwhelm him. And the damn machine getting closer! Thankfully he didn't have to resist much longer as Latias hovered above the machine, Umbreon on her back.

"You sure about this?" Umbreon asked, not really looking forward to jumping onto a moving air machine.

"Yep," Latias said as she hovered over the machine, wincing at the dark waves the crystal was emitting. Umbreon sighed and dove towards the machine, powering up her Last Resort attack. Since the Machine was overwhelming them and this was their last plan, the attack worked nicely. She collided with the already cracked crystal, causing it to completely shatter, shaking the air machine and giving Latios time to move to a safe distance.

"I think we lost something," James commented.

An alarm began to beep inside the cabin as it signaled that the Dark Field was dissipating. The Rocket trio paled. Umbreon jumped off the machine as Latias quickly flew by, the Dark-Type landing safely in the dragon's back. Latias already had a fully charged Mist Ball in her claws. She flung it at the machine, covering its entire air space with a thick reddish mist.

Another alarm began to flare in the cabin. "We're losing power!" Meowth cried. "How is dat possible!"

"The rotors are weakening, the cannon's lost all energy and the sensors are shutting down. We're gonna crash!" James cried as the machine began to lose altitude, spinning out of control as the rotors lost power.

"Now!" Ash shouted. Latias took a deep breath and fired a Dragonbreath attack, Latios glowed brightly and fired a Luster Purge, Charizard took a deep breath and exhaled a potent Overheat attack, Pikachu's fired a powerful lightning bolt from the ground and Umbreon spat a Shadow Ball from Latias' back.

The attacks collided against the weakened airborne machine. It exploded violently from the sheer power behind all the attacks, flinging Team Rocket into the air. "Why did this happen!" Jessie cried as they hurtled into the distance. "I thought this was Team Rocket's ultimate war machine!"

"Well, you know what they say about false advertising..." James said wearily.

"We ought to sue dose guys for selling us such a crummy superweapon! That went just as badly as all our usual endeavors do! We coulda dug a hole and gotten da same results... AND saved more moolah!" Meowth said angrily.

"But we didn't," James said sadly. "And now..."

"Team Rocket's blasting off again!" they cried in unison as they disappeared over the horizon.

Everyone sighed in relief. Finally, they'd beat that thing. Once the Pokémon flew down, Umbreon jumped off of Latias' back. "As usual, their machine was thrashed yet again," Ash chuckled.

"I wonder when they'll learn," Misty said with a sigh, shaking her head. "At least we got a break from them for the entirety of the tournament."

"Yeah, I guess," Brock agreed. "Too bad it's over..."

"Well, I guess we should continue our ways, despite this minor setback," Ash said.

While the humans were talking, Umbreon glared at Pikachu. He chuckled nervously. "What?"

"You cheater," she snarled.

Pikachu's jaw dropped. "Me? What are you talking about?"

"Back at the battle we had, your trainer somehow saw through my Double Teams and told you where I was. That's cheating!" she said.

Pikachu chuckled. "That's... just an advantage we have."

"Don't give me that trash, it's called cheating," she said firmly. She grinned at him. "If it hadn't been for that, you would have never gotten past my Double Team."

"Yes I would have!" Pikachu argued back.

"We're tied one-to-one in victories. The next time we fight, it'll be the tiebreaker," Umbreon said confidently.

Pikachu nodded. "Very well."

"And we'll fight without trainer commands, just you and me, so your trainer can't use that ability of his," she continued. "I look forward to our next battle," she added, still grinning. Pikachu sighed, getting the feeling this wasn't going to end well. Latias and Latios couldn't help but chuckle at his predicament.

And with that, after some talking and farewell, the friends parted, Gary going back to Silver Town and Ash and his party continuing down the long road back to Pallet Town.

And finally, the chapter's done! Again I'm sorry for the delay, but school is very important (to my dismay).

And well, Team Rocket lost... OMG what a surprise...

Also, I hate to tell you all that "A New Chance At Life" will be ending soon, just a few more chapters to go... but, hold the tears of pain, because there will be a sequel! Yep, I will write Ash's journey in Hoenn in a sequel called: "A New Chance For Adventure"... On the final chapter of A New Chance At Life, I will tell you a little more about what to expect from the new adventure.

Anyway, Hope you all liked the Chapter. Goodbye an until next time! And please **REVIEW** ! =D

A Rainbow In The Sky

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech."

'Thoughts.'

"Telepathy."

Author Notes: Chapter Rewritten. And here's chapter 24! Enjoy it!

Last Revision: April 16th, 2016.

Chapter 24 - A Rainbow In The Sky

"Viridian City..." Brock mused nostalgically as the group entered the city. They had decided to make a quick stop in the very nature-friendly city before going on to the routes that would take them to their respective hometowns. Those being Cerulean City for Misty, Pewter City for Brock and Pallet Town for Ash.

"Man, this place sure brings back memories," Ash commented in an equally nostalgic fashion, sighing as he recalled the two previous times they had been in Viridian City, both of which presented numerous adventures, both good and bad.

"Memories of how Pikachu destroyed an entire Pokémon Center on the first time you were here?" Misty teased gently, giving Ash a sly sidelong glance, an eyebrow quirked up playfully. Ash chuckled nervously while Pikachu pretended nothing had been spoken.

"Or, memories of how Ash caused the former Viridian City Gym to crumble down," Brock added, laughing at Ash's horrified face. "I hope you don't destroy a building on this visit. I am not sure if you can get away unscathed for a third time."

"Wait, *Pikachu pulverized an entire Pokémon Center?*" Latios asked, rather curious about the event that was mentioned. He was as usual floating above the group, hidden by his invisibility. Latias was in her illusionary human disguise, 'walking' alongside the group.

"It was an accident..." Pikachu said unhappily, sulking on Ash's shoulder at the embarrassing mention of the incident that happened nearly two years ago. "I can argue it was *mostly* Team Rocket's fault."

"*How did it happen?*" Latias asked telepathically, looking at Ash and Pikachu curiously. Like Latios, she too was interested in learning.

"Ugh, I don't feel like telling that story... it's a bit embarrassing. Just look at my memories if you want, it's faster that way," Ash answered, permitting the dragons a quick intrusion into his mind.

Latias and Latios took a quick peek at Ash's memories, their eyes glowing softly as they did so. "*Hmm, I sort of agree with Pikachu. I do think the blame can be pinned mostly on Team Rocket,*" Latias said in amusement, giggling softly.

"*But it was still Pikachu who blew it up. You call that an accident, Pikachu? Really?*" Latios questioned, his telepathic voice extremely teasing. "*That's no accident to me.*"

Pikachu sulked even more. "Don't mention it, it's that event that made Team Rocket follow us endlessly without rest until they could steal me. They were *that* impressed with me," he said sadly. If only he hadn't done that, they wouldn't have to deal with Team Rocket all the time. He wondered how things would have changed if those crucial first days had played differently. The idea of Team Rocket never chasing them was appealing.

"So, why are we stopping at the Pokémon Center?" Ash asked, turning to look at his two traveling friends. They were the ones that did all the planning, with him regularly just following their lead.

"I want to make a call to the Cerulean Gym to see what's up. I wonder how my sisters have taken care of the Gym in my absence," Misty replied with a hopeful voice. "If they have done well, I might not even need to go there. I could just follow you to Pallet Town and stay with you, and depart to the next region with you."

"Misty, they are your sisters. Knowing them, they mi-" Brock started saying.

"Stop. Don't finish that sentence and get me all worried," Misty interrupted sharply. Brock chuckled nervously and sidestepped a couple skips to get a little farther away from the temperamental redhead.

"It can't be that bad, can it?" Latias questioned confusedly, blinking slightly as she wondered why Misty was so worried about her sisters and the Cerulean Gym. *"I've seen their shows a couple times on television, they're pretty and really talented."*

"That's my sister's public show face, Latias," Misty responded. "You don't know them once the cameras are off," she said flatly, face wrinkling in annoyance. "We run an Official Pokémon League Gym. That is our most important duty. The problem is, they never care about the gym. All they care about is their shows and their presentations."

Brock nodded grimly. "And their free-time is never spent on the Gym. They just travel around. They are pretty weak trainers." Then, abruptly, a dreamy look replaced his previously critical expression as he exuberantly gushed, "But still, they are some of the most breathtakingly beautiful women I have ever seen!" Ash, Pikachu, and Latios collectively sweatdropped, while Latias rolled her eyes and Misty silently gritted her teeth as she resisted the urge to punch Brock in the back of the head.

"I can give him a small headache if you want," Latias telepathically whispered exclusively to Misty, picking up on the girl's feelings

through her empath-sense, which consisted strongly of frustration, resentment, and to Latias' surprise, jealousy.

Reigning in her emotions, Misty gave a small sigh and thought back, *'Nah. It's not worth it. My sisters have always been the pretty ones, the ones who always get the fame and recognition, while I have always been the odd girl out in the family. I wasn't interested in the whole sexualized swimming shtick my sisters were doing, I took more to training Pokémon and battling when I was growing up.'*

"Wow, you really are so different from them in such a good way," Latias said slowly, smiling.

'My sisters loved to make fun of me, called me tomboy, runt, ugly, and while it did make me angry at them and resent them, it also made me that much more focused in my training. I was more determined than ever to become a powerful trainer, to be better at something than my sisters could possibly be. And it paid off. When my mom made the decision to retire as Gym Leader, she named me as her successor over my sisters. They would act as my backups in case I was not around to meet challenges. It was one of the happiest days of my life,' Misty thought with a small smile.

"That sounds fantastic, Misty. I can't imagine how exciting that must've been for you!" Latias enthused.

'Yeah. You should've seen my sisters whine. They actually thought that one of them would be named Gym Leader. They wouldn't shut up about it. So, with mother's approval, I decided to issue them a challenge. I would face each of them separately in a Pokémon battle, and if one of them managed to defeat me, they would win the title of Gym Leader from me. But, if they all lost, then they would all accept me as Gym Leader and never again question my merits to be one.' Misty struggled to suppress a chuckle. *'They accepted the challenge.'*

Latias smirked slightly. "And let me guess. Each of them lost?"

' That's putting it lightly. I destroyed them,' Misty thought with a savage grin.

" Ha!" Latias exclaimed.

' Yeah. Mom was so proud of me for proving myself to my sisters. It was great. As for my sisters, I thought that my defeating them would be the end of it from them... but...' Misty trailed off, frowning.

" But...?" Latias prompted, worried.

' Well... let's just say that my sisters did not take my humiliating them kindly. While they never openly questioned my position as Gym Leader again, they collectively took it upon themselves to make my time as Gym Leader hell. The way they treated me before that point was nothing compared to how they treated me after defeating them,' Misty thought.

" Oh my, that's so terrible. Your sisters sound like horrible people." Latias paused, scowling. *"Was it because of them that you decided to leave Cerulean City? I remember Ash telling us about your visit there, and your run-in with your sisters."*

Misty's face grew dark. *'Yeah. Something they did. Something I will never forgive them for. And sorry, Latias, but this is something I'd much rather keep to myself, if it's all the same.'*

" That's okay. I understand, Misty. Some memories are just not worth dredging up," Latias conceded sympathetically. *"Still, I'm sorry that you had to deal with such horrible siblings growing up."*

"Hey, Misty, you alright?" asked Ash, who had been amiably chatting with Brock over their past visits to Viridian, until he noticed Misty's troubled expression. "You're being awfully quiet. Something wrong?"

"Oh, no, nothing wrong, Ash," Misty assured him. "Just thinking about something." Just then, her eye caught sight of the building the group was looking for. "Hey look, there's the Pokémon Center."

Reaching the large red dome-shaped building, the group headed through the sliding double doors, entering the Center's sizable main lobby. Spotting the phones over in the lobby's far right corner, Misty walked for them, the rest of the group following her... except for one of them.

"Heeeeeello, Nurse Joy!" Brock said giddily as he leaned over the counter, grabbing the hands of the rather freaked out Nurse Joy there. "Remember me?" he asked hopefully, leaning closer to Joy while smiling at her. "I'm here to consummate that marriage agreement we had the last time we met."

"Latias, why aren't you stopping him?" Pikachu asked curiously, glancing between the lovesick former gym leader and the disguised red Eon dragoness.

Latias blinked and looked at the counter where Brock was, and then looked towards Misty. *"I thought it was Misty's turn to stop him,"* she answered telepathically.

Misty frowned at the dragoness' answer and then she shook her head as she looked at the counter in exasperation. "It was your turn, Latias."

Latias shook her head. *"No, I'm pretty sure it was your turn."*

Misty frowned after an instant of quick thinking. "Yeah, it was mine. I'm just spacing out because I'm worried about my sisters."

"Sorry... but, who are you?" Nurse Joy asked nervously, pushing the squinty-eyed man back while heavily contemplating if she should call security over, or even Police.

Brock turned chalk-white in horror. "What!? You don't remember me!?" he cried out, sinking to the ground with an audible sob. "Why!?" he screamed, as if awaiting an answer from the heavens.

Nurse Joy looked down, wondering what the hell was going on with the odd man. Before she could react, Brock was already standing and leaning over the counter again. "How!? How could you forget me!? I was here the last time we visited this city!?" he asked demanding, remembering the time when they had come here so Ash could earn his eighth Kanto Gym Badge.

"Ah, that's maybe because I am a new Nurse Joy? The previous one got a promotion and left to work at another Pokémon Center," the current Nurse Joy explained. "So, I was assigned to be the replacement."

Brock frowned, but then snapped his fingers as if realization had hit him. "Ah, so that explains why I couldn't remember Viridian City's Nurse Joy using a shampoo with the scent you're using." He perked up, squinty eyes lighting up in hope. "That means I can get a fresh start with you!" he gushed.

Nurse Joy started at him with a blank expression. "What?" she asked flatly.

Suddenly, Brock felt a searing pain from his ear as Misty yanked it and stomped off, dragging him away. "I better end this before it gets too awkward," she muttered to herself. "Or before we get banned from Pokémon Centers forever."

"Ouch! Ouch! Hey, stop it!" Brock protested as he was forcefully pulled away. "It was just getting good!"

"Hence why I am ending it," Misty shot back, shaking her head angrily.

Nurse Joy sweatdropped at the very weird scene, but was glad the dark-skinned guy was finally away from her. Ash walked up to the Pokémon Nurse. "Sorry about that," he apologized, bowing slightly. "Our friend's... weird, around pretty girls."

"That's okay, I guess. I've seen weirder guys," Nurse Joy said offhandedly, waving a hand. "And, I've only been here a few months. Oh, you have no idea how weird some Pokémon trainers are."

"You'd be surprised," Ash said, nodding. "I've met some pretty weird guys too."

Pikachu smirked. "Look who's talking," he teased. Ash ignored him and kept up with his talk with the Pokémon Nurse. Latias giggled, amused.

Nurse Joy looked him over, humming as she took in the details while closely examining him. "A boy with a Pikachu dressed in predominantly blue clothes and a Pokémon League hat... you're Ash Ketchum, right?" she asked, just to be sure.

"Yeah, that's me," Ash answered with a nod, idly wondering how the Nurse knew about him if she claimed to be a recently-assigned one.

"Wait here, please. The previous Nurse Joy left something for you and Misty. I'll go and get it," Nurse Joy said, walking to the back rooms behind the counter to go and get the aforementioned object.

"I wonder what it is," Ash said in speculation, leaning slightly to the side to see if he could get a peek of what Nurse Joy had gone to search for.

Pikachu shook his head. "Beats me, I've got no idea," the electric-type said.

Ash heard the phones beep and turned to look at them. He noticed that Misty was beginning her call, so he walked over to them to see how it went. The screen turned on, and a few seconds later Misty's older sister Daisy answered the phone. "Ah, hello there, Misty! Just who I needed to talk to," Daisy said, her tone relieved as she began to smirk. Misty got a very bad feeling from that, as did all of her traveling companions.

Misty blinked, analyzing the image on the screen closely. Why was Daisy wearing a straw hat, a Hawaiian-style shirt, and sunglasses? And, why were Violet and Lily very busy packing stuff in the background? The redhead growled in annoyance. "Okay, what's this about?" she asked, clearly irritated. She was already dreading badly what was about to happen. She had a very good idea of it.

"Guess what!? We won a trip around the world as prize for one of our latest performances!" Daisy exclaimed happily, raising her arms in joy.

"Yay!" Both Violet and Lily screamed in the background, high-fiving and hugging each other. "We're going on vacation! We're going on vacation! We're going on vacation!" they chanted happily.

"So, could you come and take care of the Cerulean Gym while we're gone?" Daisy asked, her tone of voice more like informing her she was going to do it rather than asking her if she could. "I think we're only going to be gone... maybe half a year. It's a big trip."

"What? No!" Misty said angrily, her eye twitching. "I'm busy with my friends!"

"Yes, you're busy *traveling*," Daisy retorted. "I think it's time we were the ones that did the traveling, don't you think?" Misty growled at her, clearly annoyed. "Sorry, Misty," Daisy apologized, though her voice sounded very uncaring. "You're the best when it comes to Gym battles and the Cerulean Gym. When you're around, the Cerulean City Gym is a very tough challenge for trainers. Us? Not much."

"But, I'm traveling with my friends!" Misty protested again, glaring at the screen. "That's not fair."

"Yeah, it's not fair," Daisy agreed. "You've gotten to travel two years while we haven't traveled at all. Really unfair."

Misty glared at her. "I hate you."

"I love you too," Daisy replied, waving her hand while brushing Misty's angry protests off. "Someone has to take care of the Gym while we are gone, honey. Besides, *you* are Cerulean City's official Gym leader, not us," Daisy countered, which to Misty's dismay, was completely true. "We're leaving in two days! See you here by then. If not, the gym closes. Well, I gotta go, too much left to pack and so little time." With that, the call ended, leaving a disheartened Misty staring at the blank screen.

"Great..." Misty muttered softly, her tone clearly indicating she was on the verge of tears. "I knew they were going to do something stupid. Now I have to go and take care of the gym for who knows how long..."

"You... have to go?" Ash asked disbelievingly, looking shocked and dismayed. "But... you can't leave, Misty! You've been with me since day one! I... I can't imagine what it would be like without you..."

"Neither can I imagine not traveling with you anymore," Misty said miserably. "But, I don't really have a choice in the matter. It's the duties of a Gym Leader. If my sisters leave and the Gym closes, getting our registration as a Pokémon Gym again can be really hard."

"No, you don't," Brock said reasonably, putting a hand on her shoulder to try and cheer her up. "You know Gym Leader duties come first. We'll all miss you."

"Yeah. I think I'll even miss you yelling at me and telling me to pay you back for your bike..." Ash joked... until he suddenly realized he meant it. His heart sank.

Meanwhile, Ash's lighthearted attempt at humor instead caused Misty's already fragile emotional state to completely shatter. Feeling tears welling up in her eyes, she quickly turned away so Ash wouldn't see, crossing her arms in front of her chest, as the first of the tears started running down her cheeks.

Latias reeled back in shock at the sudden outpouring of raw emotion coming from Misty. The feelings of all-encompassing sorrow and heartbreak she felt emanating from the young girl were so powerful that Latias unconsciously began to feel tears falling down her own face. She realized then that she wasn't the only one who secretly harbored feelings for Ash. And Misty had known Ash for a lot longer than she herself, noticing and feeling his sister's distress through their mental bond, immediately floated over and attempted to comfort her, gently nuzzling his cheek against hers, which Latias gratefully accepted.

While this occurred behind him, Ash took a concerned step towards Misty, a look of confusion on his face. "Misty? Is something wrong?"

"Oh, Ash," Misty said quietly, as she desperately strained to keep her voice level, "haven't you realized by now that it wasn't the bike that made me want to keep traveling with you all these years? It was *never* about the bike."

"What do you mean, Misty?" Ash asked, perplexed.

"I..." Misty began.

However, before Misty could say any more, the voice of Nurse Joy interrupted her. "Here we go!" she called out brightly as she came out of the back room, dragging a very neat and really cool-looking bicycle. "Sorry for the wait, I... oh my, is something wrong?" she asked, her face and voice shifting to ones of concern as she beheld the varying emotional states of the group of friends, Misty with her back turned, her arms wrapped around herself, Ash with a look of utter confusion and concern, the brown-haired girl behind him openly crying. The weird squinty-eyed man didn't seem to notice her this time, watching Misty and Ash with a sad, knowing gaze. Even the boy's Pikachu showed obvious signs of distress, his ears and tail noticeably drooping. "Am I... interrupting something? I can wait if you..."

Nurse Joy's arrival seemed to snap Misty's senses and awareness of her surroundings back to herself, as well as the sheer embarrassment of what she had been about to say. *'What are you doing, you idiot! You were about to bare your feelings for him out in front of everybody! Get ahold of yourself!'* With a supreme force of will, Misty quickly ran a hand across her face to remove any trace of the tears she had shed while also gathering up the scattered pieces of her emotions and holding them together as best she could. That accomplished, she turned around to face Nurse Joy, saying, "No. No, Nurse Joy, nothing's wrong. Everything's fine," she lied, putting on a false, but convincing, smile.

"Oh. Well, alright then," Nurse Joy said, frowning, but deciding to let the matter slip. Pushing forward the bike, she then said, "So, I was told by my predecessor to hold onto this bike on the off chance either of you happened to re-visit this Pokémon Center in future. She apparently used her free time to have it repaired. I believe it belongs to you, Misty?"

"So, that's the bike, huh?" remarked Latios quietly, staring at the thing that was apparently the root of the previous few minutes' sorrows, as he continued to lay a comforting claw on Latias' shoulder, who was in the process of drying her own tears.

"Yeah. It's strange. That thing used to be a source of constant embarrassment for me. Now, though... now I don't know what to think of it," Pikachu answered in a dour voice, as Misty walked forward to inspect the bike herself.

"What do you mean, Pikachu? What's going on?" asked a still utterly clueless Ash.

Knowing that it would be nigh-impossible to explain to his eternally-dense trainer, Pikachu merely heaved a sigh and answered, "Never you mind, Ash. Never you mind."

"Never mind about what? Jeez, why is everyone being so cryptic all of a sudden? Why won't anyone tell me what's going on?" Ash

indignantly huffed, throwing his hands up in consternation.

' *Heh, same old Ash...* ' Misty thought, amused, yet sorrowful. She was going to miss him so damn much. His endearing klutziness, his undying optimism, his love for his Pokémon, his passion for battling, that warm, caring smile that she loved so much... She wished she could tell him that, to tell him how much she truly cared for him... *'No. He doesn't need something like that weighing down on him when we're about to say goodbye. I don't want to make this goodbye any more painful for him. As a friend, I owe that to him. No matter how much it may hurt...' she thought, her heart wrenching painfully.* But she would not cry, despite how much she wanted to. For now, she would put on a brave, smiling face, for Ash's sake. She would enjoy these last few precious moments in his company. And after they had said their goodbyes, and she had gone her own way... then, and only then, would she cry.

Contemplating her refurbished bike, she took it by its handles. The previous Nurse Joy had done a fantastic job restoring it. It looked almost exactly how it had appeared before it had been destroyed. It was quite frankly hard to imagine that this was her original bike, but here it was in front of her. She smiled softly; she and this old thing had been through quite a lot together in the days before traveling with Ash. "It looks fantastic. Thank you, Nurse Joy," she said appreciatively.

"It's no problem. It's really my predecessor who should be receiving your thanks. But I'll be sure to pass your gratitude along to her. Now, I must be getting back to my duties. You all take care, now," Nurse Joy said with a kind smile, before walking away.

"You know... It's kinda hard to believe that our journey's over," Ash commented, sighing and feeling very disheartened. "We've been through so much since we started out."

"Yeah. It seemed like it was just yesterday that we entered Johto to start your journey to the Silver Conference," Brock agreed, smiling wistfully at the memories. After a moment, he said, "Well, we better

get going, our hometowns await us." The group nodded in agreement.

They left the Pokémon Center, heading out of Viridian City and towards the route across the forest. "So, what will you be doing, Brock?" Ash asked curiously as they hit the road once again.

"Well, I have to go and check on my siblings and see if the Gym has been under proper care," Brock answered him. "Don't worry, Ash, if everything is in order I'll join you in Hoenn as soon as I can." He frowned. "I might not if there's problems, though," he warned.

Ash smiled happily, deciding to ignore the last part to cheer his mood up. "Thanks Brock! That's great! That means we'll be able to travel together through Hoenn!"

' Yeah, but I won't...' Misty thought quietly, her eyes traveling to forlornly regard the dirt trail they were traveling along. 'No crying until the end, Misty,' she reminded herself. 'Now come on, be brave, and be happy for him.' Smiling jovially, she then said, "So, Ash, don't forget your morning rituals. Take a bath and brush your teeth!"

"I'll remember," Ash said, giving her a smile in return.

"And make sure that Pikachu doesn't eat too much," Misty continued. "It took a long time for him to lose weight. He was so chubby when you two met."

"Hey!" Pikachu shouted indignantly as Latios gave a loud bark of laughter.

"Yeah, don't want you getting chubby on us!" Latios guffawed heartily.

"Shut up, Latios," Pikachu growled, the electric sacs on his cheeks sparking dangerously.

"The same goes for you too, Latios," Misty called, hearing the coos of laughter from behind her.

Latios' laughter died, only to be immediately replaced by that of Pikachu's, who then stuck his tongue out at the spot where he figured Latios was floating, eliciting a wordless growl from the invisible Eon dragon.

"And now, Brock," Misty resumed, "try not to get too distracted by all the girls."

Brock laughed nervously, rubbing the back of his head. "No promises."

Closing her eyes, Misty began, "Oh, and one more thing-"

"That's enough!" Ash chuckled in good-natured exasperation.

Opening her eyes again, Misty gazed up into the sky and continued, "It's just something that I feel I need to tell you..."

"All right," Ash conceded, smiling.

Dropping her gaze to the road again, Misty paused for a moment. All too aware of the sound of her heart hammering away in her chest, threatening to betray her façade of happiness at any given moment, she said quietly, "Just keep on... doing your best..."

"Er, what do you mean?" Ash asked in confusion, turning his head to look at her.

"Well, you know..." Misty continued slowly. '*Do not cry...*' she reminded herself. "... without me there."

Almost unbidden, all the memories of the time she'd spent traveling with him, knowing him, loving him, passed through her mind. All the adventures they'd shared, all the sights they had seen, all the laughs they had had, all the friends they had met, all the trials they had surmounted, all the tears they had shed. For two years she had been

there for him, and him for her, whenever they needed each other most. He was the best friend she could ever ask for, the first real friend she had ever made. And while their friendship had gone through some rough patches on occasions, and while many of their adventures had landed them into insanely dangerous, life-threatening situations, she wouldn't trade the last two years of her life for anything in the world.

Smiling warmly, she once again regarded the bike she was pushing along. "It was because of this bike that I met Ash," she nostalgically mused. She then drew her eye to Togepi, who was sitting in the bike's basket, looking out across the dirt path they were walking along with the innocently cheerful wonderment of the very young. "Togepi, it was a coincidence that you and I met, too!" she said brightly. Turning at his name, Togepi returned his mother's cheerful smile, chirping happily.

"... Ours wasn't coincidence," Ash piped up suddenly. Misty turned her head towards Ash, giving him a curious, questioning look.

Keeping his eyes forward, Ash continued, "I don't believe it could be just a coincidence that I met you, out of all people."

"What do you mean, Ash?" Misty asked.

"I guess what I mean is, even though that happened," Ash began, turning to look her in the eyes while giving a wide smile, "I think that we were meant to meet and become friends!"

"Me too," Brock chimed in. "We've been through so much together on our travels, I'd say that we're best friends now!"

"*Fate works in mysterious ways sometimes,*" Latios commented, smiling. "*It can bring people and Pokémon alike together under the most extraordinary of circumstances and forge bonds between them that can last a lifetime. If it weren't for the events that occurred in Alto Mare, my sister and I would not be traveling with you now. So, it very well may have been fated for me and my sister to meet you all*"

and become friends and travel with you, just as it may have been fated for you three to meet, become friends, and travel together."

Brock chuckled. "Well, if that is the case, then fate certainly has been kind to us, indeed."

The rest of the group nodded at his words, smiling in agreement as they continued down the road, the three longtime human companions cherishing each other's company as they all shared one final journey together.

The sun was setting on the horizon when the group finally reached the moment they had been dreading, as they came to the crossroads that lead to their home cities.

It was time to say goodbye.

"Well, I guess this is it..." Misty said in a sad, quiet voice, as each of them stood facing each other from the respective roads they would take.

"Yeah," Ash agreed hoarsely, looking down in dismay, his eyes shadowed by the brim of his cap in the early twilight. He didn't want this to happen. He didn't want his friends to leave him. He didn't want to start a whole new adventure on his own... why did they have to go?

"Well, Ash, I hope I can join you on your Hoenn journey," Brock told him, putting a hand on his shoulder reassuringly. He turned to look towards the eon siblings. "Latias, Latios... make sure he doesn't do something stupid and get himself killed," he reminded them. "Take good care of him. He *really* need someone to take care of him at all times."

Ash fumed angrily at the comments. The eon dragons laughed loudly at it. "*Don't worry Brock, we'll take care of him,*" Latios promised.

"*Yeah,*" Latias agreed. "*He's in good claws with us.*"

"You two better, Ash needs all the help he can get while traveling," Misty commented dryly. The twins nodded in agreement. Misty sighed as she looked at her bike. "Well, goodbye and take care, Ash. Good luck with the Hoenn League." She frowned. ' *And please... be safe...* ' she thought.

"Thanks, Misty," Ash said, smiling softly. "And, good luck with the Gym to you. Make it a really tough challenge for all trainers," he said brightly, trying to cheer the depressed girl up. "Just like it was for me."

Misty nodded slightly. "I will, and you, win the Hoenn League. You have two Legendaries with you right now. You just *have* to win it!" she said, her voice slightly more cheerful as she thought of Ash's reaction if he did win a league. ' *I don't know if I could bear seeing your dreams shattered again.* '

"I will Misty, I will," Ash said, nodding proudly. "I promise it," he said determinately. "The Hoenn League *will* be mine."

Misty turned around and got on her newly repaired bike. "Good-bye, Ash, Brock, Pikachu, Latias, Latios." Much to her surprise, Latias hugged her softly. Misty blinked in surprise, and then blanched when she suddenly realized the eon dragoness must have heard everything she was thinking of and felt all she had been feeling. But, her horror faded when Latias pulled back and met her gaze with a sad look of understanding... and Misty reluctantly admitted that Ash would be in good hands. She smiled, trying her hardest not to cry. She had succeeded in making it this far, so, surely she could hold the tears back for just a few more minutes.

"Farewell, Misty," Brock said as he turned to walk down the road that led to Pewter City. "Good-bye, Ash. Take care. I'll meet you in Hoenn, hopefully. Good-bye, Latios, Latias, and you too Pikachu," Brock called, waving at them.

" *Good-bye, take care!* " Latios replied, nodding at them.

" Bye!" Latias shouted telepathically as well.

"Bye! Try not to get into women-related problems Brock!" Pikachu advised. "You won't have Misty or Latias to stop you!"

"He can't understand you," Latios reminded him. "Besides, Misty already made a point of telling him that earlier, remember?" he pointed out.

"So? Even if he couldn't understand me, I felt it was a point that merited repeating," the electric-type countered. Latios sweatdropped at his response, though he admitted it was valid. With that, both Brock and Misty headed for their respective cities... and away from Ash.

"Bye!" Ash called one last time to his retreating friends, waving his arms at them. He stared after them until they faded from view in the distance and then reluctantly turned and began to walk in the direction of Pallet Town in a slow and depressed manner. "I'm... I'm gonna miss them..." he mumbled sadly, lowering his gaze with a sigh while trying to hide the tears building up in his eyes from his Pokémon.

"It's okay, Ash," Latios said, hovering behind Ash and putting a claw on his shoulder to show his support. "I'm sure that you'll see them again."

Latias smiled and nodded. In a bright shower of blue sparkling lights, she abandoned her illusion and let her true dragon form be visible for a split second before it turned invisible, as both dragons tended to do when traveling with their trainer. Latias flew towards Ash and pressed her body to his, nuzzling her head against his cheek. "Yeah. I'm sure that you'll see Misty again someday, and there's the chance that Brock could be joining us in Hoenn. But even if he doesn't, don't forget that you still have us to keep you company," Latias reminded him. "You're not alone, and you never will be," she added softly.

Ash reflexively pressed back to her touch, enjoying the comforting dragoness' presence. "Thanks, Latias. That means a lot to me. Still, I've been traveling with Brock and Misty since the very beginning. We've been together all the time..."

"Brock took a brief break from traveling during the Orange Islands," Pikachu reminded him. "Though, admittedly, Misty stayed with us."

Ash frowned. "Well, without *both* of them."

"Cheer up, Ash," Pikachu said, trying to be enthusiastic. "We'll all be fine, you'll see."

Ash nodded slowly, glad that all his Pokémon were being so supportive of him. After walking a few minutes in awkward silence, he looked at the long road ahead, stretching up to the horizon and beyond. In his current depressed mood, it seemed like the walk would take forever. "This is going to take a while."

"Well, I could take you there if you want to," Latios offered his trainer. "We'd be there in a couple minutes."

"It's *very* tempting..." Ash admitted slowly. He paused and frowned after several moments of silent thought. "But... no. I... need to walk this off," he responded sadly, hoping that the long walk ahead would soothe his aching emotions.

Latios winced, seeing how depressed this turn of events was making Ash. "Alright, Ash. I understand," he conceded. Latias looked at Ash unhappily, not enjoying the feelings her empathy was picking up. She glanced at Latios expectantly, pressing at the mental bond they shared. He caught on his breath, his mind racing. "So, uh..." he paused, an idea forming up in his head. "What's your hometown like?" the blue dragon asked, trying to strike up a talk with a subject that would cheer Ash up.

"It's a very nice and friendly town, Latios. It's one of those small places where everyone knows everyone. It's really peaceful and

quiet. Fresh and beautiful. You two will surely like it," Ash replied, some of the life flowing back into him at the thought of his beloved hometown.

Pikachu nodded in agreement, glad that Ash seemed better. "It's quite lovely, yeah. It's one of those peaceful places that feels like nothing could ever go wrong."

"I'm sure we will," Latias agreed, nodding softly. "So, at your pace, how long until we reach it?" she questioned curiously.

Ash hummed in thought, glancing around to identify where exactly he was located. This was one of the few general areas that he knew like the back of his hand, and thus could easily picture distances and times. "It shouldn't be too long, about two hours of walking," Ash answered her, still walking at a very sedate and calm pace. That was something that seemed extremely uncharacteristic of him, though, all three of his Pokémon could understand why.

"I can't wait to get there if it's as peaceful and nice as you say it is," Latias commented brightly. "Latios and I like peaceful places like that."

Latios grinned and nodded in agreement. "It'll be nice to spend time there, then. Until we are ready to go to Hoenn."

"Peace... kinda like Alto Mare?" Ash asked, thinking back to the island city in which he had met the two dragons at.

"Yeah," Latias replied. "Alto Mare is a very peaceful place. Always so calm and settled. Latios and I could carelessly play around for hours upon hours, wander around without worrying about anything... Good times." She sighed nostalgically.

Pikachu tilted his head. "If it's so peaceful and nice, why does Alto Mare need two Legendary Pokémon guardians and a huge, creepy machine to protect it?" the electric-type wondered idly.

There was a rather long and awkward pause. Latios and Latias glanced at each other for an answer that neither of them had. "Well, I..." Latios paused, trying to form up any sort of coherent reply. He began chuckling nervously. "I honestly have no idea, really. But, for some reason, the few Legendary Pokémon that we've met always stressed upon us the extreme importance that we stayed there and never left. Being young, Latias and I obeyed. Maybe Alto Mare holds some kind of important, symbolic value to them? I don't know."

"Ah," both Pikachu and Ash chorused, accepting the vague answer for the time being. They doubted they'd get anything else if they pressed forward on the topic.

"So, when are the registrations for the Hoenn League opening?" Pikachu asked curiously, changing topics to keep a conversation up to get both his and Ash's minds off of more depressing matters.

Ash hummed in thought, thinking back to the explanations Brock had told to him about the Hoenn League. "I think in about two weeks or so... We'll stay some time in Pallet Town before going to Hoenn. By the time we arrive, we should be able to register," Ash answered. "I told my mom to buy us the tickets in advance to get over there."

"You took into account that me and Latias want to go to Alto Mare first, right?" Latios asked, turning to look at his trainer.

Ash smiled. "Of course I did! I told it all to my mom. We'll take a ferry to Alto Mare, and from there we'll go to Hoenn," he informed the two dragons.

"Thanks a lot, Ash," Latios said gratefully.

"You're welcome, Latios," Ash replied. He too wondered how the island city had been these last few months. He knew that it was a very important place to the Eon twins, and was more than happy to visit it for their sakes. Ash sighed, wondering how the travels would go without his friends.

Latias turned to look a bit to the side and raised her head, scenting the general area. "Oh!" she exclaimed in delight. Latias hovered off the main road, heading into the woods.

"Latias? Where are you going?" Ash asked, stopping. He waited for a few seconds to see if she came back. Seeing that she only kept going forward, he began walking after the red Eon dragoness.

"I smell some berries nearby," Latias answered, not even turning to look back at him. "Pecha berries, to be precise. I love those. And it's been a while since breakfast."

Latios laughed softly. "I remember when we were younger she'd try to steal a few from Alto Mare's marketplace whenever they were in season."

Ash and Pikachu chuckled in amusement. "She did?" Ash asked, amused by the revelation. "Wow."

"It must be really easy for you two to steal stuff, being psychic, flight-capable and invisible," Pikachu commented. "It's almost like cheating."

"Yeah, she did. I scolded her for stealing, and Lorenzo made sure from that day forward to buy extra Pecha berries whenever he got groceries," Latios replied, still laughing as he thought back to the days they were back at Alto Mare. "She'd eat through them as soon as she saw them."

"You remember the way back to the road, right, Latios?" Ash asked nervously, glancing backwards and seeing nothing but trees and bushes, and he knew that now he had no idea where the road was.

"Yes, I do," Latios answered. Ash sighed in relief, as that meant that they weren't lost.

They followed Latias to a small clearing with a few trees, many of which had plenty of juicy berries growing on them. Latias grinned.

'It's been a while since I last ate some...' she mused and began flying up to the top of the trees. She began searching for the ripe and ready-to-eat Pecha Berries.

"You know, I think I'm going to have some, too," said Latios, having started to feel slightly hungry himself.

"Hey!" Ash called out to Latios as he flew over to join his sister. "Get some for me as well!" he shouted.

"Me too!" Pikachu yelled.

Latios chuckled and nodded at them. "Will do."

Ash ran up to the base of the tree as Latias and Latios used their Psychic powers to collect a good handful of berries. Once they had a sizeable amount of them, they floated back to the base of the tree and levitated a few of the berries down to Ash and Pikachu.

"Careful," Latias advised. "They are rather soft and tender. Don't squeeze them too hard."

"Okay," Ash said as he carefully grabbed the levitating berries, taking them from Latias' psychic hold.

Latias eagerly began to eat them. "Mmm..." she moaned softly.

"They're so sweet! And delicious... it's certainly been a while since I had some, and they taste the best when fresh from the tree," she said telepathically, as her mouth was busy chewing.

"Yeah, they aren't half bad," Latios agreed with a nod, also speaking with his mind for the same reason as the Eon dragoness.

Ash took a bite out of his berry, tasting the first bite eagerly. He swallowed and grinned. "Really great!" he agreed happily, quickly going for another bite.

"Yeah," Pikachu added, thoroughly enjoying them.

After the group finished eating their berries, they stayed there for a while under the shade of the tree. Ash smiled as he leaned back against the tree, thinking of the journeys that he'd had and were still to come. He had to admit that he was a little nervous, going to a new region without his regular traveling companions. He sighed, wondering how he was going to take on this new challenge without Brock and Misty. "Hey! Don't look so down!" Latias chided, startling Ash out of his melancholy. "You'll do fine, don't worry!" she said cheerfully.

"Thanks, Latias," Ash said gratefully. He was happy that the eon twins as well as all his Pokémon would guide him all the way across this new journey, plus there was the hope that Brock would rejoin him once he finished checking up on his gym.

The group stayed there, enjoying the time they were sharing with each other in blissful silence. Without realizing, the four of them began to doze off under the shade of the tree and the cool, windy breezes. Before long, all of them fell into a quick nap.

Sometime afterwards, a half-asleep Pikachu suddenly raised his head, his sensitive ears twitching ever so slightly as a barely audible sound began to resonate on them. He began to slowly look around to examine the immediate surroundings. Something felt... off. Pikachu frowned in worry, moving up to a sitting position.

He rubbed his eyes, trying to get rid of the grogginess. He had no idea how long they had all been asleep. He noted that Ash, Latias and Latios seemed to have dozed off as well. His ears twitched again as the sound began picking up in intensity, which he quickly identified as the distinct noise of large displacements of air.

'Flapping... and very big flapping at that,' he thought to himself, worryingly noting that the temperature of the area was suddenly feeling slightly hotter. "Guys? I think something's coming," he said in a rather loud voice, turning to Latios, Latias and Ash. "Something *big*."

Groggily, the three of them began to shake off the doze and raise their heads when suddenly a massive figure flew past the clearing, easily less than a dozen feet above the top of the tree line. The Pokémon's overhead pass cast a gigantic shadow over the clearing, making Ash, Latios, Latias and Pikachu all leap in fright at the abrupt arrival of the large Pokémon.

The flying Pokémon flew in a wide circle in front of them to turn around, displaying a most amazingly vibrant coloration of feathers that made all four of them instantly recognize the Pokémon. "Ho-Oh!?" Ash cried out, deeply shocked at the sudden onset of the Legendary, as she finished turning and began to descend upon the clearing. It had been over two years since either Ash or Pikachu had laid their eyes upon the magnificence of the fire-type Legendary Pokémon.

Ho-Oh was a truly gigantic Phoenix-like Pokémon. Her lively feathers were a combination of red, white, green and golden spread out across her body. Ho-Oh's back, neck and head were all of a vivid red color, with a single green stripe circling the middle of her neck. A bright golden crest decorated the top of her head, with her beak being yellow. She had bright red eyes, framed by a circle of black feathers. Her underside was pure white in color while her wings were mainly red, with white in the middle and green at the edges. Her large, fanned tail feathers were completely golden with lighter yellow tips. Ho-Oh's legs and feet were dark blue, with four large and very sharp-looking talons adorning each foot. All in all, Ho-Oh's prismatic plumage was amazing and vivacious, gently glistening under the sun's rays.

As Ho-Oh descended before them, each mighty flap of her great wings brought a powerful gust of wind in her descent. She landed with a soft thump of her talons on the grass. Ho-Oh spread out her wings, stretching them to their full wingspan briefly, unintentionally giving the group before her a grand display of her elegance before gently pressing them to her sides. She gazed at them, her intense gaze looking over at each of them intently.

Instantly, her eyes drew utmost attention out of Ash and Pikachu, who were involuntarily compelled to lock eyes with her. Ho-Oh's gaze was powerful. Her gaze was mighty, holding within it what were clearly countless millennia of life, experience, knowledge and wisdom. Ho-Oh's red eyes shone with the pure, unmatched power of a Goddess. While Latias and Latios seemed perfectly normal and comfortable to be in the grand Legendary's presence, Ash and Pikachu couldn't help but immediately feel vastly smaller before Ho-Oh. Not only in physical size, but in a feeling that seemed to go deep and spiritual. Both of them instantly agreed no doubt that Ho-Oh was a truly imposing being, as if the sheer might of her presence made everything around her seem insignificant.

It was then that Ash and Pikachu noted two odd changes all around them. First, the simple presence of the Legendary Pokémon seemed to have made the entire area around them a lot warmer. However, to the two's surprise, it wasn't a suffocating heat that made them sweat or uncomfortable. It was more like a gentle, caring and motherly warmth. The second was that Ho-Oh's presence seemed to make them unexplainably happy, it was a sensation that hit them out of nowhere. It was as if the power they felt emanating from Ho-Oh encouraged the happiest memories they had to come flowing forward and envelop them completely, like every dream and hope they had was realizing itself all around them. That began to make them feel at ease in spite of how massive and imposing she was when standing right in front of them. Rapidly, the two were pulled into a sense of security and confidence around her.

"... Wow..." Ash breathed out in a shocked whisper. Pikachu nodded dumbly. "H-hello," Ash greeted, stuttering as he tried to think of ways to address the Legendary Pokémon. Idly, he recalled when he had seen her on the very first day of his journey, shrouded in a golden glow and flying off into a rainbow in the far reaches of the sky. Ho-Oh was many times more imposing up close than in the far distance.

Ho-Oh let out a short, amused laugh. It was clear she was not surprised by his reaction, making the two wonder how many times

she had experienced this. Ho-Oh gave them an acknowledging, polite nod before turning her focus to Latias and Latios. "Greetings Latios, Latias. It is good to see you two are doing well," she said gently. Ho-Oh's voice was beautiful, sounding warm and loving, yet at the same time it carried an undertone of strength, wisdom and confidence.

"Hi, Ho-Oh!" Latias called out excitedly, suddenly racing towards the older legendary. She collided against Ho-Oh's white chest with a hug, nuzzling herself against the warm feathers happily. "It's been a while! I missed you!" she added, completely turned into a bundle of cheerfulness.

Ho-Oh let out a pleased rumble before unfolding her wings from her sides to hug the dragoness back. "I'm very happy to see you as well," she said warmly. Her large wings blocked the excited, purring Latias from everyone's view. She cuddled against Ho-Oh's breast, enjoying her warmth and presence. After a few seconds, the fire-type Legendary glanced up at Latios expectantly. "No hug from you?" she asked, her voice taking a surprisingly teasing tone.

Latios blushed in embarrassment. "Oh... sorry," he said, flying towards Ho-Oh slowly.

Ho-Oh let out an amused chuckle and opened her wings. When Latios was close enough, she suddenly closed them around him, making him squeak in surprise as he too was pulled in for a hug. "You don't need to be so serious, Latios. Let your emotions flow," Ho-Oh said chidingly to the dragon. She let out a content sigh. "I am very happy to see you both again."

Latios smiled up at her, doing his best to get a look at her face from inside the feathery hug he was currently enveloped in. "Likewise," he replied, to which Latias nodded in agreement. She kept the two tightly hugged against her chest for a few instants before spreading her wings to allow them to fly back to Ash's side. Again, she folded her wings at her sides and settled down comfortably in the grass.

"See you both... again?" Ash repeated what Ho-Oh had said, confused. "You guys... have all met each other before?"

Ho-Oh hummed, gazing at Ash. Her intense red eyes met his own reddish eyes, making him suddenly feel tiny and nervous at having such a powerful gaze solely focused on him. It felt like she was looking deeply into him in an extremely analytic and prying fashion. He let out the breath he didn't know he was holding when her gaze shifted to Latios. "Interesting."

"It's... not that bad..." Latios said slowly, already having a good idea as to what she was seeing. Ho-Oh had always been one to see everything, and Latios knew from experience it was impossible to hide anything from her. "Uh... I can explain..."

"That will be appreciated," Ho-Oh responded with a calm voice, much to Latios' relief. She did not sound disapproving. "I want that explanation. Also, Ash, I will let Latias and Latios respond to your question soon. However, I have a more important question to ask before any of that." Latios and Latias listened intently to Ho-Oh, wondering what she wanted. "What are you both doing away from Alto Mare?" she questioned, her voice turning very serious.

Latios was glad her voice had no anger in it. Ever since he left Alto Mare, he had been concerned about what other Legendaries that tasked them with Alto Mare's protection would think when they learned the two had left without telling anyone. "Well... how do I put it?" His mind raced, thinking of the best way to piece together the explanation for the expectant Ho-Oh.

"Our dad let us leave," Latias suddenly spoke up, making Ash and Pikachu turn to look at her in pure confusion. "He told us to go."

Ho-Oh, however, seemed deeply intrigued by what Latias had said. Her face turned into one of deep thought. For several moments, it seemed like the phoenix-like Legendary had spaced out. Latias tilted her head, confused. Ho-Oh had always been a very controlled Legendary, yet, her empathy was picking up some really conflicted

and strong emotions from Ho-Oh. However, Latias was unable to tell what they meant exactly. "He did?" she asked slowly, not doing anything to hide the surprise in her tone. "That's unexpected."

Latios nodded slowly. "Yes. We had a... really problematic situation in Alto Mare a couple months ago. Which resulted in... well..." He pointed to himself and Ash. "This. After everything was solved, Latias wanted to come with Ash on his journey. However, I wasn't sure about that. Then... our father spoke to us. He possessed an Oddish, and told us to leave with Ash. He said he could take care of Alto Mare's safety on his own."

"Very well..." Ho-Oh said, still looking to be deep in thought. "If he allowed you two to leave, then it's okay. You two made the right decision by following your father's word and deciding to leave Alto Mare with a trainer."

Latias grinned, pulling Ash close with one of her claws. "And with such an awesome one, too!" she said happily, making Ash blush at the praise.

"He is a good trainer, indeed," Ho-oh agreed. "I've heard much about him from other Legendary Pokémon myself. There are very few trainers out there that would have made me as comfortable as I am right now knowing you are with him."

"Thanks, I guess..." Ash said, flushed red in embarrassment. Latias giggled in amusement and nuzzled her trainer happily.

"Anyway, Latios. You could have told a Legendary you were leaving Alto Mare," Ho-Oh said, her voice slightly scolding. "If you are unsure on how to find me or any of the Legendary beasts, you know where Lugia and his family's home is. You will always find a way to get in touch with them there."

"Shamouti Island?" Pikachu asked curiously, idly recalling that day's grand adventure with Lugia and the legendary birds.

"No," Ho-Oh responded bluntly, making Pikachu tilt his head in considerable surprise and curiosity. However, despite his wordless entreaty for Ho-Oh to elaborate, it became apparent from the Legendary's stone-faced expression that she wasn't willing to indulge him, so Pikachu merely sighed in disappointment.

Latios frowned, admitting she was making a very good point. He mentally smacked himself, wondering why the thought of warning someone never occurred to him. "Yeah, I don't know why it didn't cross my mind. We could have told someone..."

"We were really excited to travel around," Latias said defensively, interjected in her brother's defense. "Informing others didn't occur to either of us," she said in support, sharing some of the blame alongside her brother.

"I guess it's fine," Ho-Oh said dismissively, shaking her head slightly. "I'm merely pointing out what you two could have done better."

"So, uh," Ash interrupted. "How is it that you all know each other? I'm confused."

"Yeah, me too," Pikachu said. "Normally, it's stuff that is blatantly obvious and Ash is the one being confused and we get to poke fun at him. But this time, I am too." Ash glared at him, while Pikachu looked back at him innocently.

"May I tell them?" Latios asked, looking at the Rainbow Pokémon.

"Yes, you may," Ho-Oh answered with a small nod. "There is no harm in doing so."

"Well, Ash, Pikachu," Latios began, making the two turn to look at him. "Latias and I, as you know, are orphans. I once told you that there were many Legendaries that took the task of checking up on us constantly to help us survive our early days and raise us. Many Legendaries who were our friends during our times of need. Ho-Oh is one of those Legendaries, and she is among the most important."

Latias nodded in agreement, glancing at Ho-Oh appreciatively. "Ho-Oh took care of us. When we were babies, she'd be with us every day. She'd make sure we were fed, that we had stuff to keep us entertained. That all our fears were quelled and our needs sated. Everything."

"Well, it wasn't a task I did all on my own," Ho-Oh spoke up, drawing everyone's attention. "It was a shared task several other Legendaries also took. When they were babies and young children, my visits were daily. When Latios began to grow and mature, I was able to space out my visits more, often visiting once a week or once a month. Same for the other Legendaries."

"Everything I know of other Pokémon, of other Legendaries, or of life and trivialities in general, all of that comes from Ho-Oh. She's taught me so much..." Latios said, smiling at the Rainbow Pokémon. He then glanced at Latias playfully. "And then I tried to teach it to her as best as I could. But, she always preferred games instead of learning."

Latias stuck her tongue out at him. "I'm not boring. Unlike you."

"Learning is important," Latios shot back.

"Having fun is important," Latias retorted firmly.

Ho-Oh let out a soft laugh, making both twins focus on her. "Both are important. Just like how you enjoyed me teaching you all kinds of things, it's fine that Latias preferred the fun and games. She acts more her age than you do, Latios. Really, it's you who should be acting like her. Remember, you are still a child."

"See?" Latias said teasingly at the flushing Latios, who had no words to respond to Ho-Oh. "Ho-Oh gives me the reason, what are you going to do about it?" Latios winced, having no idea how to respond to that.

"Anyway, now that Ash's question has been answered. I believe you owe me an explanation, Latios," Ho-Oh spoke up, looking between Latios and Ash curiously. All of the changes Ash had undergone had not gone unnoticed by her. "What is that 'problematic situation' you spoke of earlier?" she asked.

Latios let out a sigh, not particularly enjoying the flow of memories that the dark night brought. "Just a quick recap. A couple months ago, during the annual Alto Mare chariot race, we met Ash. It had been a good day, until nightfall. Two criminals entered the Secret Garden and kidnapped me and the Soul Dew. They used it to start the DMA and take over the city with it." Latios looked at Ash, Pikachu and Latias admiringly. "They came back and fought the criminals, and stopped the DMA. However... the Soul Dew shattered and I died in the aftermath of stopping the wave that was about to destroy the city."

"That thing was scary," Ash mumbled, recalling the events of the night as well. Latias nodded in agreement.

"Go on," Ho-Oh pressed on, paying very close attention to Latios' explanation. Latias frowned, worried about what her empathy was telling her about Ho-Oh. It was rare to feel her like that.

"From what our father told us, he put in Latias' mind an idea of how to use Ash to save me, and she carried on with it. We used Ash to save me. After that, the Soul Dew rebuilt itself and everything went back to normal," Latios explained. "After we had regained our senses and Ash had to leave, Latias wanted to leave with him. I didn't. But, father told us to leave. And, here we are now."

Ho-Oh nodded slowly, contemplating everything that was said by the dragon. "Very well. I'm sorry no Legendary was there to assist you that day." She let out a soft exhale. "Ultimately, I am grateful that you two are fine."

"Me too," Latios said. "I could be... dead."

"Don't say that," Latias said, looking at him worriedly. "I could never go on without you."

"I'd never let you stay dead," Ho-Oh said in a determined manner. Before any of them could question her what she meant by that, Ho-Oh abruptly changed the topic to a much happier one than the thought of Latios perishing. She let out a low chuckle and turned to look at Ash. "You almost died because of a Legendary yet again. You tend to do that a lot," she said, slightly bemused.

Ash chuckled nervously. "Yeah, pretty much." He paused. "Wait, you know about the other times?"

"Yes, I've been told," Ho-Oh responded. "Anyway. Ash, Pikachu. I want to sincerely thank you for helping Latias and Latios in their time of need, and saving them. I cherish them both dearly."

Ash grinned. "Hey, no problem, Ho-Oh. I'd do anything to help a Legendary Pokémon in need any day."

"That is noble of you," Ho-Oh said approvingly. "I know you do."

"Yeah," Latios agreed. "They gave me a new chance at life. And Latias, too."

Ho-Oh turned to look at Latias. "And, from what I hear, you found courage to confront your fears and save your brother. I am very proud of you. You did amazing, it is good to hear you finally had a chance to be the one saving your brother." Latias blushed, but grinned at the praise. "And, in what a spectacular way too."

Ho-Oh stood up straight, extending her wings outwards while rising to full height. Ash and Pikachu gazed at her as she rose, noting with admiration that she was clearly taller than the tree they were resting on when standing to full height. She truly was an imposing goddess. "Well, it was lovely seeing you all, but, I'm afraid I must be off now. I would love to spend more time talking with you all, but, I have some

important matters to attend to in the Johto Region, and then the Hoenn Region. Several busy days await me."

"Alright," Latios said. "It was nice to see you again, Ho-Oh. Your visit was much appreciated."

"Hey, Ho-Oh..." Latias began, floating up to her face. "When we talked with father, we asked him... all our questions about our past. He said it was not the time. I'm wondering... when is it finally going to be time?"

Ho-Oh looked at Latias with a crestfallen expression. She extended a wing and placed the tip on the dragoness' back. "I know you two are desperate for answers, and fully deserving. The time nears, that I promise. Trust your father's words. When the time for answers come, it will be fully worthwhile. For now, I ask that you enjoy life. Do not let your past haunt you, and look to the future positively."

Latias nodded slowly. Latios flew forward and wrapped her in a hug. "Hey, we're fine right now."

"Yeah," Latias agreed, floating back to the trainer's side alongside her brother.

"Farewell," Ho-Oh spoke up. The Rainbow Pokémon spread her wings, her feathers shining with the colors of the rainbow under the sun. "It was a pleasure to talk to you all. I offer you my blessings for the times to come. Good luck on the journeys you all have ahead of you." With that said, Ho-Oh flapped her massive wings and rose to the air, sending a strong breeze billowing in every direction while kicking up a cloud of dust. With a final nod, she turned around and began to fly away, rapidly raising into the sky.

"It was amazing meeting her..." Ash mumbled as he watched the fire-type Legendary Pokémon fly away, becoming gradually smaller in the distance until she had disappeared completely.

"Yeah," Pikachu agreed. "Definitely much better than just seeing her passing by."

"Think we'll see her again, Latios?" Ash asked curiously, looking at his draconic friend.

"Yeah," Latios responded. "I'm fairly certain."

"That's awesome," Ash said, grinning. "I wouldn't mind seeing her again."

"Hey, you two spoke to your father at Alto Mare?" Pikachu asked curiously, tilting his head. "I don't you think you ever told us about that."

"No, we decided to keep it between us," Latias said. "It's something very personal, and we wish for it to remain that way." Her voice was dead serious, clearly indicating Pikachu it was a bad idea to argue with that statement.

Pikachu frowned. He was very curious about the matter, but if the dragons decided to keep it secret, he figured there was no way he could get more information on the matter. So, the Mouse Pokémon decided to drop the subject. "Okay."

"She is going to the Hoenn Region... same as I am," Ash said, suddenly feeling much more determined. Brock and Misty leaving him hurt a lot, but meeting Ho-Oh had certainly done wonders to his spirits. The prospect of traveling alone no longer seemed as crushing as it did before. Ash stood up, a faint smile on his lips. "Come on, guys. It's time to continue on to Pallet Town."

Latias grinned, glad Ash's depression seemed to have mostly disappeared. *'Ho-Oh has that unique trait to her. She's amazing at cheering others up,'* Latias thought to herself. *'Still, I wonder what was wrong with her...'* she wondered, thinking back to what her empathy had picked up. Sometimes, Ho-Oh was so confusing to her.

Giovanni sat at his rather expensive desk, looking at various reports and files, occasionally typing something into his computer. His Persian was curled up beside his chair, snoring softly. A small beep was heard from a voicebox as his secretary spoke up. "Master Giovanni, Professor Sebastian wishes to speak to you. He says it's a matter of great importance."

Giovanni pushed a button. "Let him in," he said, wondering what the professor wanted.

A few seconds later, the scientist entered the office. "Greetings, Master Giovanni," Professor Sebastian said respectfully.

Giovanni nodded. "What is it you wish to report? My secretary implied it was important."

"Sir, I am proud to inform you that we have finished fabricating the other four as you had requested. The project is complete!" Professor Sebastian announced.

Giovanni smirked, clearly pleased. "Very well. Have they been tested?"

"Yes, all field tests were a complete and absolute success. So far, they have proved perfect in most respects," the professor informed. "Recordings of the field tests and its results should be in your personal database by now."

Giovanni nodded and pressed the button on his voicebox. "Excellent, Professor. Have field agents Iron-Masked Marauder and Tyson escaped prison yet?"

"Yes sir, The Iron-Masked Marauder escaped a few weeks ago and is back to active service after failing his mission to capture the Legendary Pokémon Celebi. Tyson escaped recently as well after his failed assignment in the Lake of Rage," the secretary responded.

"Very well," Giovanni said. *'Failures, failures, failures... well, with this new Project... nothing will stop Team Rocket again!'* he thought in a determined way. "Professor, arrange a meeting for tomorrow at eleven. Prepare your five creations for active use. Tomorrow I will assign what to do with them," Giovanni said. He took a list from his desk and handed it to the Professor. "I want all those agents at the meeting."

Professor Sebastian nodded and took the list. "Interesting... these are all elite members..." he murmured as he examined the paper. "As you wish, Boss. I'll see that all the preparations are made." He turned and left the office.

Giovanni nodded. *'At last... Soon, I will have the power to make the world mine, and no one who stands in my way will survive!'*

Author Notes: Chapter 24 is finished! =D I hope you all liked Ho-Oh showing up!

Prelude Of The Dark

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: Here's chapter 25! Enjoy it! =D

Sorry for the rather long delay... I've been very busy, but despite those setbacks, this chapter is finally here! Enjoy!

Also, I'd like to thank my Beta Reader **Ri2** for all his help editing and checking up on all my chapters. He really does a wonderful job and he's helped me a lot in making this Fanfic so good. Many thanks, my dear friend! You're awesome!

Now for the chapter!

Latias couldn't help but smile at Ash as he walked towards Pallet Town. Meeting Ho-Oh had certainly lifted the boy's spirits, and he was now in a more peaceful and happy mood. Yes, he was still sad about the departure of his friends, but at least he wasn't as depressed as he had been before talking to the Rainbow Pokémon. Also, the prospect that they were getting near his hometown was helping a lot, too. "I see meeting Ho-Oh put you in a good mood," Latias commented, tugging Ash's sleeve while smiling gently at him.

"I guess. Meeting her was simply... amazing," Ash replied.

Latias giggled. "That's all you can say?"

"Well, no... it's just that... meeting her was so incredible that I can't really describe how it made me feel. It was just so awesome..." Ash said, pausing to think out his reply. "And it was also cool to know she's so close to you two," he added, smiling back at her.

"I wonder... you said she went to the secret garden to check up on you and to teach you stuff, right?" Pikachu asked.

"Yep," Latios confirmed. "Why?"

"Well, she's a rather large Pokémon... how did she enter the garden?" Pikachu asked, clearly confused. Ash nodded in agreement, puzzled over the matter as well.

"She just flew in, how else?" Latios answered. Both Ash and Pikachu stared at him in disbelief. Latios tried to elaborate. "She entered the garden around two or three in the morning so no one saw her. During our youth, she'd stay the entire day and not leave until early in the morning the next day. When we grew up, she'd come by for an hour or so to check on us and then leave."

"Didn't the garden have a roof?" Pikachu asked. "Or did it? I never really thought to look..."

"Neither did I," Ash said, scratching his head in confusion.

"Well, it has the *illusion* of a roof so the garden can't be seen from above. It's kinda like the illusion of the entrances, but bigger. Sunlight can enter and help the extensive plant life of the garden to grow while shielding the garden from foreign eyes. Lady Ho-Oh just flew through the illusion," Latios explained.

"Ah," Ash said. "I can't understand how we missed that."

"Me neither," Pikachu agreed. Latias and Latios laughed, happy that their home had so many surprises, and even more happy at the thought that they were going to go there soon.

"Anyway, it's *my* turn to impress you two with my hometown," Ash said.

"Your home doesn't have cool waterways, a huge secret garden, lots of illusions or two Guardian Legendaries," Pikachu commented. A vein of irritation appeared on Ash's forehead.

Latias giggled. "I'm sure you'll manage to impress us anyway, Ash."

"Yeah, Pallet Town is a very beautiful town," Pikachu admitted. "You two will love it."

"Yeah," Ash agreed.

Pikachu noticed something and hopped off Ash's shoulder and walked back a bit. Ash noticed and turned around. "What's up, Pikachu?" he asked. The eon dragons turned to look at the Electric-Type.

"Yep, it was around here," Pikachu commented, looking around the area.

"What was around here?" Latias asked, looking confused.

"Ash, don't you have a promise to fulfill?" Pikachu asked, tilting his head and smiling.

Ash stared at Pikachu blankly. "What do you mean?" he asked, confused.

Pikachu's jaw dropped. "You forgot!" He exclaimed. "Well... that doesn't really surprise me."

"What!" Ash demanded.

"What are you two talking about?" Latios wondered. Latias looked between Ash and Pikachu, blinking in confusion.

"Don't you two dare read our minds now, keep out!" Pikachu told them. Latias and Latios looked at each other, more confused than ever. They decided to respect the Electric-type's wish and restrained themselves from reading either Ash or Pikachu's minds to know what was going on.

"Err... I made a promise?" Ash asked.

"Yes," Pikachu deadpanned. He sighed and gave a small chuckle. "Seeing as you've forgotten, let me refresh your memory. In the forest between Viridian City and Pallet Town, you released a certain Pokémon before departing for the Orange islands. You promised that certain Pokémon you'd return... Remember now?"

Ash paused, thinking back to his adventures over a year and a half ago, a far off look in his reddish eyes. A few seconds later he remembered. "Pidgeot..." he muttered softly, a fond smile tugging at his lips. "It's been a while since I saw him..."

"Her," Pikachu corrected, chuckling slightly.

Ash paused, a look of confusion on his features. "What?"

Pikachu laughed. "Why I am not surprised you're oblivious to this? Your Pidgeot is a *she* ."

"Ah..." Ash muttered in surprise.

"It was around here where she fought off that Fearow to protect the flock of Pidgey and Pidgeotto. You left her to take care of that flock. Once the flock became strong enough to fend for themselves, she'd wait here for your return... You promised Pidgeot you'd come back for her," Pikachu said.

"Right... I feel horrible for forgetting her..." Ash muttered.

"It's not too late to search her. You're only a year or so late," Pikachu commented. Ash sulked. "You promised you'd come back after the

trips to the Orange Islands."

Ash sighed. "Why didn't you remind me!"

"Mainly because you couldn't understand me," Pikachu replied flatly.

"Oh, right... understanding Pokémon is certainly amazing! I love it," Ash commented. He frowned. "Think she'll be mad at me for forgetting her?"

"Yes, but I'm sure she'll appreciate seeing you again," Pikachu replied. Ash smiled in relief, trusting the Electric-Type's words.

"That's certainly interesting," Latios commented, looking at the exchange with bemusement.

"Yeah, guess that means we'll take a detour to find this Pokémon of yours, Ash," Latias added.

"Yeah," Ash replied, smiling softly. "I wonder how she's been after all this time."

"After she beat the Fearow, she became leader of the flock," Pikachu informed them. "You would have known, but, you couldn't understand her, so..."

"Yeah..." Ash mumbled. "I wonder how she'll take my ability to talk to Pokémon?"

"She'll probably be thrilled, like almost all of us, your Pokémon, were," Pikachu replied.

"Well let's hurry! You said she should be around these parts, so let's go!" Ash said, walking off the road and into the woods. His Pokémon followed him.

Pikachu smiled. "This forest brings so many memories... like Ash throwing a rock to try and catch a Spearow," he commented. An irritated vein appeared on Ash's forehead. Latios and Latias stifled a

laugh. "Or... Misty fishing Ash from a river..." Again, an even more annoyed look crossed Ash's face. The Eon dragons barely contained their laughter. "And you... using some rubber gloves to drag me around."

"You wouldn't listen to me!" Ash countered. The eon dragons couldn't hold it in any longer and started laughing hysterically.

"Well..." Pikachu began. He couldn't take it and started laughing along with the eon dragons.

Ash sighed in frustration. "You three are impossible."

"We know it," all three Pokémon said at the same time. Ash groaned in despair.

"Well," Latias began. "Ash didn't make a mistake with the Spearow thing..."

"I didn't?" Ash questioned in confusion.

"Well, you threw a rock at it, and Rock is super-effective against Flying-Types," Latias joked.

"Ash used Rock Throw!" Pikachu cried. The three Pokémon laughed. Ash muttered about annoying and disrespectful Pokémon under his breath, increasing the laughter from his friends.

"Well that was certainly fun," Pikachu commented once the laughter died down.

"Yeah," Latias agreed.

"Yeah," Ash agreed sarcastically. Latias giggled. "It was my first day as a trainer so... It's forgivable," he countered.

"I doubt other trainers did things as stupid as that," Pikachu commented dryly.

Ash paused. "Er... who knows?"

Pikachu rolled his eyes. "Anyway... Latias, Latios, can you sense any Pidgeot nearby?"

Both dragons did a quick mental scan of the area... only to get dizzy and a nice headache. "Owww..." Latios moaned, clutching his head. Latias wasn't doing any better.

"What's wrong now?" Pikachu asked with a frown.

"There are too many Pokémon nearby. Finding a single mind out of all them is too difficult," Latios answered. "They kinda overloaded our mental senses. If we had tried to search for a few more seconds, it could have knocked us out."

"Yeah," Latias lamented.

"Finding her will be a lot harder than I thought, then," Ash commented, looking around in the unsuccessful hope of finding Pidgeot.

"Want us to search from the air?" Latias offered. "We might be unable to search mentally, but we can at least try the old-fashioned way."

"Sure," Ash agreed. "Be careful."

"Alright," the eon dragons chorused. They turned invisible for safety and took off for the sky.

"Think they'll find her?" Ash wondered.

"I hope so. Let's keep looking too," Pikachu suggested.

"Yeah," Ash agreed. The bushes beside them twitched. They turned. "What's that, Pikachu?"

"Probably a few Beedrill," he answered. The Electric-Type paused. "Run." They ran frantically as a bunch of Beedrill emerged from the woods and angrily buzzed after them.

"We're lucky today, aren't we?" Ash commented sarcastically as they ran away.

"You think?" Pikachu retorted in annoyance.

"Pikachu, use Thunderbolt!" Ash ordered. The Electric-Type nodded as his cheeks sparked. He released a potent blast of electricity, shocking a few of the Beedrill and dropping them to the ground. Seeing that they had already chased the human out of their territory and that the Pikachu was rather strong, the rest deemed that it was unnecessary to chase them and decided to withdraw.

"That did the trick," Pikachu commented as the swarm of Beedrill flew away.

Little did they know that they had attracted some very unwanted attention. A Fearow soaring at the canopy level of the trees saw an electrical blast in the distance. He frowned and went to inspect it. His mind was immediately clouded in rage and bloodlust when he saw the very human he despised the most standing below him, the same human that had hit him with a rock, defeated him, causing the flock he was leader of to deem him too weak and expel him. That human was going pay dearly for all that. "I'll rip you apart!" He screamed, completely enraged as he dove at Ash with an Aerial Ace.

Ash turned as he heard a very angry shriek, and was terrified to see a Fearow flying at colossal speeds toward him. He knew instinctually that the hit from that long spear-like beak at those speeds would severely injure him... maybe even worse. He closed his eyes, awaiting the dreaded impact and the pain that would follow... and instead heard the Fearow screech in pain. He opened his eyes and was deeply relieved to see the Fearow recoiling after a rather hard crash against Pikachu's Iron Tail. He had been so focused in hitting

Ash that he had forgotten completely about the Electric-Type.
"Thanks, buddy," Ash said gratefully. "I owe you one!"

"You're welcome," Pikachu said as he landed in front of him, smiling at his friend. He turned to the Fearow. "What's your problem!" He demanded, glaring at him.

"That's none of your business!" The Fearow spat angrily, now sporting a nice cut on his chest.

"Ash is my best friend and trainer, you attacking him makes it *my* business," Pikachu countered, his cheeks sparking dangerously.

"Ah, right, you're the human's Pikachu..." the Fearow mumbled, remembering the Electric-Type.

"Are you crazy? You could have hurt my friend badly with that attack!" Pikachu yelled angrily.

The Fearow chuckled darkly. "Who said I wanted to hurt him? I wanted to *kill* him." Ash shivered in terror. Pikachu glared at the Fearow dangerously.

"I'd like to see you try again..." Pikachu said, crouching low to the ground as his cheeks sparked more violently than ever, ready to attack the Fearow at any given second.

"Why!" Ash demanded, terrified at the death threat.

"You ruined my life," the Fearow answered. "You attacked me when I was a Spearow, and then you made my flock exile me!"

"While I admit that Ash's attack with a rock when you were a Spearow was uncalled for, sheez, it was just a rock, get over it you crybaby," Pikachu said. "And you losing your position as leader wasn't anyone's fault but your own."

"What? How dare you!" the Fearow cried, clearly angered.

"If you hadn't been fed up over that rock thing, you wouldn't have attacked that Pidgey and Pidgeotto flock, and if you hadn't attacked them, Pidgeot would never have beat the crap out of you, and thus you might still be the their leader. Don't blame Ash for *your* stupid mistakes," Pikachu continued.

"I don't care, it's his entire fault no matter what you say you pesky Rattata... and I'll make him pay for it!" the Fearow bellowed as he dove at Ash and Pikachu. *'Fighting an Electric-Type isn't a good idea... I'd better kill the human first and take advantage of the Pikachu's grief to kill him afterwards,'* the Fearow thought as he flew towards them.

"Pikachu, stop him with Thunderbolt!" Ash ordered, glad that he had Pikachu's protection. *'I sure picked a good moment to agree to send Latias and Latios away... but at least Pikachu should be strong enough to beat Fearow. Due to my soul-connection thing with Latios, he should have sensed my earlier fear by now, so he's probably on his way here... but Pikachu should be done by the time he gets here,'* Ash thought.

Fearow smirked as he got an idea to bypass Pikachu to get to Ash. *'Human... you're dead.'*

Pikachu fired an electric strike at the incoming flying type. The Fearow used double team, creating several dozen copies of him. The Electric attack vaporized a few of the copies, but the remaining birds made no move to attack Pikachu, much to the Electric-Type's confusion. When he saw the Fearows getting ready to fly towards Ash, he realized Fearow's plan. He made a quick decision, releasing a colossal electrical blast skywards, causing all the Fearow to disappear as the attack dispelled them. However, before the attack hit, Pikachu didn't notice one of them disappearing with Aerial Ace. Pikachu gasped as he saw that the last one was heading towards Ash. *'Damn! He passed me!'* he thought, utterly baffled.

Ash gasped as he saw the Fearow charging at him, his beak beginning to spin like a drill as he used Drill Peck. *'I'm gonna rip you*

apart!" the Fearow thought excitedly. Ash quickly began to reach for Cyndaquil's Pokeball, but Fearow was coming too fast, he would never be able to reach it in time. Fearow would have smirked if his beak wasn't spinning. *'Too slow!'*

"LEAVE HIM ALONE!" A female voice shrieked in pure rage. For the second time that day, Ash's life was saved as the Fearow was hit with colossal force in the side, sending him spiraling away and ripping the tree he collided against apart. Pikachu grimaced, sure that had hurt... and he was certain the Fearow must have broken a bone or two.

Pidgeot landed gracefully as her Steel Wing/Aerial Ace combo ended, setting herself in front of the stunned Ash. She grinned, though it wasn't very noticeable through her beak. "Ash! You're back! I knew you'd come back some day! I'm so happy to see you!" she cooed sweetly as she tackled Ash playfully. Due to the fact that she was much bigger than him, Ash fell backwards with the Flying type on top of him. Pidgeot nuzzled him lovingly and gave him happy pecks on his cheek now and then, wrapping her large wings around him in a hug.

Ash gave a small cry as Pidgeot's pecks drew a bit of blood, looks like she forgot the beak... "Ack, Pidgeot, stop, you're hurting me!"

Ignoring his pleas, Pidgeot pulled him into a close hug, resting her head on his neck and closing her eyes. "I'm so happy you came back, I missed you!"

"I missed you too, and I'm very glad you stopped pecking me. Sorry it took so long, but, yeah, I'm back," Ash responded with a wince of pain, wrapping his arms around her neck.

Pikachu smiled at the sweet reunion. He heard a rustle and turned to see the bruised and beaten Fearow trying to stand up. "Oww... that... h-hurt..." he groaned. "Ugh... not that bitch again..."

Pikachu shook his head in annoyance and walked up to him. *'Sorry, you're not interrupting this moment,'* he thought as he used a Thunderbolt to knock out the Fearow. "That will teach you not to mess with us." Pidgeot and Ash didn't notice.

"Thanks for saving me," Ash said gratefully as he parted the hug.

"No problem," Pidgeot replied as she got off Ash, hopping backwards to allow him to stand up. Ash smiled and dusted himself off as he stood up.

"So, how is your flock doing?" Ash asked.

Pidgeot smiled. "They aren't my flock anymore," she answered.

"You're no longer the leader? How come?" Ash asked.

"I was only the leader while the flock needed my protection from the Fearows and Spearows. When more Pidgeottos evolved into Pidgeots, I was no longer needed, so I passed my leadership on. Also, I knew you'd come back, so I decided to not let the flock become too dependant on me, though I still lived with them, and am the strongest member of the flock," she explained. "Right now, they're strong on their own, and no longer need me."

"Ahh, interesting..." Ash commented. "Its nice to hear that your flock is okay after all this time."

Pidgeot frowned when she realized something. "Err... you're understanding me... perfectly? How are you doing that!"

Ash grinned. "After a recent adventure I had with two Legendary Pokémon, I gained the ability to talk to Pokémon. And speaking of which..."

"We're back! Sorry it took so long!" Latios cried as he appeared, leaves and branches draped over his body from ignoring bushes in his rush to get back to Ash as fast as possible.

"Yeah sorry!" Latias said frantically as she too emerged from the woods, looking perfectly fine, her smaller body allowing her to maneuver through the trees much easier than Latios' larger form. "Are you okay Ash! Latios told me he sensed a massive amount of fear from you." They looked around, wondering where the possible threat was.

Everyone sweatdropped. "You two are, like, one hour late," Pikachu joked, rolling his eyes. "And why are you so messed up Latios? Why didn't you two fly over the forest?"

The eon twins laughed nervously. "We took so long because on our way back, some damn Beedrill swarm got in our way, and we had to escape by flying under the tree's cover... but it didn't go so good on my end..." Latios explained.

"Ash was almost killed two times while two were away," Pikachu scolded them. The eon twins fidgeted guiltily.

"Latias, Latios, meet Pidgeot, my third Pokémon. She's been with me since my first days as a trainer," Ash said, motioning to Pidgeot. "Pidgeot, meet Latias and Latios, two of my new Pokemon. They're both Legendaries. There are some others you'd probably like to meet, but you'll get to know them once we get back to Pallet."

Pidgeot bowed respectfully. "Legendary Pokémon? I am pleased to meet you."

"Likewise," Latios said.

"Nice to meet you too!" Latias said cheerily, enjoying the prospect of a new friend.

"Where were you two?" Pidgeot asked, finding it odd that they had been away from Ash.

"Looking for you, but we failed miserably," Latios answered.

"You got that right," Pikachu mumbled. Latios glared at him.

"What was trying to kill Ash?" Latias asked, a hint of anger in her voice.

"The Fearow that Ash threw the rock at," Pikachu answered. The twins got annoyed looks. "But before you two think of punishing him or something like that for attacking Ash, remember you arrived late to the party; Pidgeot already beat the crap out of him... in one blow."

"Again," Pidgeot said offhandedly. "Even after he was exiled, he has been trying to get his revenge on me, but he's been failing miserably. That's why I was around these parts actually, it's been a while since he tried something, I came to see what was he up to, and when I saw him attacking Ash... well, you know the rest."

"I hope he's learned his lesson," Ash commented.

"I doubt he will," Pidgeot muttered, shaking her head sadly.

"They never do," Pikachu agreed.

"So, how have your adventures been going, Ash?" Pidgeot asked curiously.

"Fairly good," Ash answered.

"Yeah, he's stopped being as clumsy as he was when he started. He's gotten much better," Pikachu said.

"Yeah," Ash agreed... "Wait... clumsy! What's that supposed to mean!" he questioned angrily. All his Pokémon laughed.

"Exactly what it sounded like," Pikachu answered.

"Is he still as reckless as he was when he started out? He really worried me with some of his antics..." Pidgeot asked.

"Yes, he is," Pikachu answered with a chuckle.

"Hey!" Ash yelled. All his Pokémon laughed yet again. Teasing Ash was so fun!

Pidgeot giggled, she was as happy as ever that she could talk to Ash now. "Ohh, I can't wait to hear about all your adventures. We have lots of catching up to do."

"Yeah, let's go to Pallet, we'll tell you on the way," Ash suggested. "Uh, you know the way back to the road right?"

"Don't worry, I memorized it," Latios answered.

"And I know these woods by heart, so we aren't getting lost!" Pidgeot chimed, clearly eager to hear about Ash's travels.

With that, they headed out of the woods and back to the main road so they could travel to Pallet Town, all the while telling Pidgeot about all of the adventures that she'd missed. Pidgeot couldn't believe some of Ash's most recent antics, but where Ash was involved, anything was possible.

After a long walk (or flight in Pidgeot, Latias and Latios' case), the group finally reached Pallet Town. Ash grinned, recognizing a small hill in their path. "Pallet Town's just over that hill."

"Finally!" Latias said. "I'm eager to see your hometown."

"Almost there," Ash commented as he walked over the hill. "Pallet Town is right here!" Once he reached the top of the hill, he marveled at the sight of his cherished hometown again. Latias and Latios were mesmerized by the town's beauty.

Pallet Town was a really nature-friendly town. It had no paved roads, rather there were very neatly kept dirt roads. Picture-perfect wooden houses with pretty gardens and big grass fiends were dotted all over the place. On the farthest hill, overlooking the town was a large pinkish two-story building with a wind turbine on top, Professor Oak's Laboratory. "So, what do you think?" Ash asked to the eon dragons.

"It's really beautiful," Latias commented, marveling at the small hamlet.

"Yeah, I like it," Latios agreed, gazing at the town with a smile. Pallet Town seemed to have a peaceful air to it, just like Altomare.

"Pallet Town's always been an incredibly pretty town," Pidgeot commented.

"Com'on, let's head for my house," Ash called, beginning to walk into town. The eon dragons turned invisible and followed him. They still preferred to remain invisible in public places. "Think my mom and professor Oak are here yet?" Ash wondered.

"Probably," Latios answered. "We took nearly a week of walking from Silver Town to Goldenrod and from Saffron to Viridian. On the other hand, they most likely took an airplane or car."

"Yeah, good point," Pikachu agreed.

They walked into town. "Hello! Welcome back Ash!" A lady tending to her garden in one of the houses beside the road called out.

"Congratulations!"

"Thanks," Ash said.

"Yeah!" a guy from another house across the road shouted.

"Congrats on the Silver Conference!"

Pikachu chuckled. "Well, seems like you've become quite popular in your absence." Ash laughed and nodded in agreement.

After a few minutes of constantly receiving warm words of welcome and congratulating from the people of Pallet Town, as well as politely declining a few 'Can I see Latios?' requests, saying he'd show him off later, Ash reached his house. "This is my home," Ash said. Ash's house was a small white two-story structure with a red roof and a

white picket fence surrounding the property, which had trees, bushes, and a large backyard with a garden in it.

"It looks really nice," Latias commented.

Ash walked forward and knocked on the door. "Mom! I'm home!"

A few seconds later Delia opened the door. She smiled when she saw her son was on her doorstep. "Welcome home, Ash," she said, hugging her son. She pulled back. "Hello to you too Pikachu," she said, rubbing Pikachu's chin gently.

"*Hi!*" Latias greeted, entering the household. Latios and Pidgeot looked at the door, which seemed too small for them to fit. Well, Pidgeot maybe, but it'd be a tight fit, Latios was sure that he wouldn't be going through it anytime soon. Latias looked back and giggled. "*It's moments like this that I enjoy being smaller, brother,*" she commented. All she had to do to enter was adjust her levitation slightly sideways and move her wings a little.

"You two can enter through the back door, it's bigger," Ash said.

"Nah, I'll stay out here, I don't like small confined places... houses included," Pidgeot said. "I've gotten used to living in the open."

"That's okay, go to Oak's lab for now, I'll meet you there later! Say hi to all my Pokémon for me," Ash told her. She nodded and took off. Latios flew to the backyard.

"So, when did you get back, Mom?" Ash asked, looking at Delia.

"About three days ago," she answered. "What took you so long?"

"It's a long way home from Johto," he replied.

"In other words, you got lost again?" Delia asked. As he turned red, she said, "Well, I'm almost done with supper, so you might as well come have some." Ash grinned happily. "Oh, and, tomorrow we'll have a small party to celebrate your reaching third place in the

league. I would have made it a surprise one, but, we didn't know when you'd get here, so, I had to wait for your arrival first."

Ash smiled. "That's awesome! Parties mean lots of food!"

"Everyone in town is invited," Delia continued. "So do you think Latios would be okay with revealing himself? I'm sure people would be happy to meet him."

"*Er, I don't know,*" Latios said as he entered the living room from the backyard. Both he and Latias dropped their invisibility.

"Oh, don't be so shy! Everyone in Pallet Town is nice and trustworthy, I can assure you," Delia said. "Maybe Latias too."

"I don't mind. It'd be nice to be part of the party instead of watching it unnoticed," Latias answered. "Common, bro! It'll be fun!"

Latios sighed and gave in, as usual. "*Alright...*"

"Good! I'm glad you can make it," Delia said.

"And I'm glad you'll be making some food, because I'm hungry!" Ash said.

Delia laughed. "Oh Ash, you haven't changed a bit!"

Pikachu rolled his eyes as they headed into the dining room. "Tell me about it..."

The next day...

"Be careful, you idiots!" Professor Sebastian bellowed to two Team Rocket grunts as they carried a silver tray to the meeting room where Giovanni was meeting him. "Those are worth more than you can ever hope to earn in your life!"

"Yes sir," one of the grunts replied. Professor Sebastian nodded. After talking to Giovanni the day before, Sebastian had informed everyone of the meeting and its urgency, so everything had to go perfectly. Among other things, he had to ready a hologram projector and several programs to properly carry out the instructions.

"Wait here," he instructed as he walked into the meeting room through one of the side doors. At the moment, only Giovanni was present, along with one of Team Rocket's most elite members, Agent 009: Domino. The room was an expensively decorated chamber with a huge rectangular table at the center equipped with a holographic projector for various purposes. Giovanni was sitting on one end of the table with Domino a few seats to the left.

"Greetings," Professor Sebastian said as he entered. "Everything is accounted for."

"Very well," Giovanni replied, nodding to the scientist.

"So," Domino began. "What's all the buzz about?"

"You'll see," Sebastian answered.

"Is it really worth cancelling all Team Rocket ongoing assignments?" she wondered. It was true, the day before; Giovanni had issued the order that all current missions were to be immediately aborted and all grunts and field agents were to report back to headquarters.

"Its far more than worth it," Giovanni answered. "I cancelled them because this new project is to receive *all* of Team Rocket's weapons, resources and manpower."

"Wow," Domino murmured. ' *For the boss to say that, this must be something big* . '

"Professor Sebastian, bring the agents in," Giovanni ordered. The scientist nodded and walked out. A minute later, he returned with several of Team Rocket's field agents behind him.

"Take a seat," Giovanni ordered. They all sat down around the table, wondering what was to be expected of them. Some of them had a vague idea as they had assisted Professors Namba and Sebastian in developing the devices, but they mostly did field tests and gathered necessary components. They hadn't involved themselves much in the lab.

Giovanni took a quick look around the room, mentally taking attendance of everyone around the table. *'Looks like they are all here,'* he thought. The agents in the room included Attila, Hun, Annie, Oakley, Butch, Cassidy, Tyson, and the Iron Mask Marauder, along with Professors Sebastian and Namba, Domino, and Giovanni himself.

"As you all know," Giovanni began, drawing everyone's attention. "Professors Mamba and Sebastian-"

"It's Namba!" the professor corrected, clearly irritated.

"Whatever," Giovanni muttered. "Anyway, they have finished developing a powerful new device which shall be implemented in our latest plan."

"And what's this 'device'?" the Marauder asked, looking fairly interested.

Professor Sebastian stood up. "It's a new Pokeball designed by Prof. Namca and myself."

"It's-" the irritated Professor began.

"I don't care," Professor Sebastian interrupted, leaving the other scientist to fume. Butch looked at him in sympathy; he too had problems with people getting his name wrong. "Bring them in," Sebastian shouted. The two Rocket Grunts entered, holding a tray with the Pokeballs and setting them on the table beside the Holographic projector. "Allow me to introduce to you our newest weapon, the Prison Ball," he announced, motioning to the five

Pokeballs. The Prison Balls were a solid black on top and a dark steel gray on the bottom. Two gray chains ran across its surface, making an X-shaped design with the intersection being the button of the Pokeball, which resembled a heavy lock. The line that separated the sections was also depicted as a smaller dark gray chain, and in the back, thick rivets was in the back of the sphere. It seemed to radiate a powerful eerie feeling as the agents stared at them.

"Wow," Oakley commented.

"Interesting," Tyson admitted. The other agents nodded in agreement.

"So, what do these 'Prison Balls' do that makes them so special?" Domino asked.

"Many things," Professor Namba answered enigmatically.

"I shall explain," Professor Sebastian announced. "First, they never fail to catch a Pokémon, and once a Pokémon is captured by one, it can't escape. It has a one hundred percent catch rate."

"So, basically, a Master Ball," Attila commented. "But I guess there's more to it than that?"

"Of course," Sebastian replied. "Their most devastating effect is what they do to the Pokémon once it's captured."

"This is getting good," the Iron Mask Marauder commented.

"It's called a Prison Ball because once a Pokémon enters, it can never break free. It is incarcerated within the ball forever. The most devastating effect is that any Pokémon captured will have their willpower, free will, and emotions completely destroyed," Professor Sebastian informed them. "The Pokémon will be linked to the Prison Ball, meaning it will only follow the orders of the one who wields it. Since the Pokémon would have no free will, the Pokémon will comply, no matter what the command."

"Nice," Tyson commented.

"Cool," Butch commented. Cassidy nodded.

"Yeah," Oakley followed, nodding in agreement. "But, aren't free will and willpower the same thing?" she asked.

"No," Prof. Namba answered. "Willpower is the resolve to do something. Free will is the freedom to do anything you wish."

"Indeed, without them both, the captured Pokémon would be unable to do anything on its own accord, and due to the link with the Prison ball, they will be forced to follow the commands of those that captured them," Sebastian explained. "The Pokémon will follow every order given by their captors, making no mistakes and complying without caring about the consequences."

"And there's more," Namba continued. "During early tests, we discovered that these Pokémon had a small flaw. As you know, Psychic Pokémon can sometimes take control of people and Pokémon by invading their minds. Since these Pokémon have no willpower to defend themselves, they were overtaken rapidly."

"That was the hardest part, finding a way to avoid that," Professor Sebastian continued. "So, after several days of research, we developed something interesting to amend that drawback. Through the infusion of highly concentrated darkness energy, unless the Pokémon is already a Dark-type, any Pokémon captured with a Prison Ball will gain a Dark sub-type," he declared. "Also, the infusion of that energy will raise the Pokémon's sheer power to colossal levels, far above that of any living Pokémon."

"Mm, that sounds interesting," Hun commented. "But, you say a Pokémon gains a Dark-Type upon capture, right?"

"That is correct," Professor Sebastian answered.

"Then what happens if a Pokémon that already has two types is captured?" Hun asked.

"We already checked that out. Basically, the Pokémon gains a third Type. With the Prison Balls, we were able to create the first Pokémon ever with three elemental types," Professor Sebastian answered. "One of them always being the Dark-Type."

"Amazing," Domino muttered. Everyone nodded in agreement, clearly impressed. "What happened to the Pokémon that you used for the field tests?"

"Even after we reset the Prison Balls, breaking the link with the Pokémon, the effects didn't disappear. The Pokémon retained the Dark-Typing and lack of will and emotions, but without the Prison Ball to command it... there was no way to get them to do anything or even move, so we had to kill them since they were of no use to us," Professor Sebastian answered. "The effects are completely irreversible."

"Wait," Iron Mask said. "Those sound a lot like my Dark Balls, though... mine don't add Dark-Types... but the effects are pretty similar."

Professor Sebastian chuckled. "I hate to tell you, but your Dark Balls are no match for my Prison Balls. Your Dark Balls increase a Pokémon's power, however, that increase is small compared to that of the Prison Ball. And, if my data is correct, you captured a Celebi with a Dark Ball, correct? What happened to it?"

The Iron Mask Marauder growled in anger. "I managed to get a Celebi in my control, but two stupid kids sweet-talked it into breaking free... how cliché."

"Let me enlighten you as to why that happened," Professor Namba said. "You see, emotions... willpower... they are impressive forces that drive living beings. They are the most powerful force a living being has, either human or Pokémon. They can compel them to do

incredible feats. According to our spies, in the region of Orre an organization named Cipher created something they called "Shadow Pokémon" by 'locking the door to their hearts.' Basically, the restrained their emotions completely. Your Dark Ball does something similar, which is what happened to that Celebi."

"That's a huge mistake," Professor Sebastian commented.

"Indeed," Professor Namba agreed. "Both restrained the Pokémon's emotions. However, there is a point where emotions become so powerful that they can't be restrained. That's why 'Shadow Pokémon' could be 'purified' and why your captured Celebi broke free, probably because its feelings for the children became so powerful that by sheer willpower, Celebi shattered the Dark Ball's control over it."

"That's why Prison Balls are impossible to break free from," Professor Sebastian continued. "They don't simply restrain emotions and will, they *destroy them completely*, making them completely nonexistent. Without them, they have nothing to fight off the Prison Ball's control, so they will follow your every order, and they can't break free."

"Ah," the Marauder said, slightly offended that his Dark Balls had been completely outclassed.

"We have decided to name Pokémon that are captured within a Prison Ball: Incarcerated Pokémon," Professor Namba announced.

"Anyway," Professor Sebastian continued. "In a normal Pokémon... the effects were impressive. A single Incarcerated Pokémon completely annihilated a dozen of Team Rocket's most elite Pokémon in a direct battle, even if they had been under intense training regimens for years. Side effects of the power increase were also increased physical capabilities, speed, and reflexes. All of that was under our absolute control, because Incarcerated Pokémon make no movement unless ordered to. They are the perfect servants... now, imagine what a *Legendary Pokémon* captured with the Prison Ball could do..."

Everyone's eyes widened as they grinned, getting the idea. Giovanni chuckled wickedly. *'My plans are falling into place.'*

"I have prepared a simulation to give you all an idea of what to expect from the power boost applied on a Legendary Pokémon based from field tests on regular Pokémon," Prof. Sebastian announced, grabbing a remote control from one of the pockets of his lab coat. "For this example we decided to use a Legendary Pokémon we have a good deal of data on: Lugia."

"We have received data on him on two occasions, one sighting in the Orange Islands by three low ranked Rocket Members, and a lot from a Lugia pair I captured in the Whirl islands, though sadly, they escaped," Professor Namba explained. "Please, look at the hologram." All the Team Rocket Members looked at the hologram projector, even Giovanni himself. This was new. He wondered what the two scientists had prepared for him.

Professor Sebastian pressed a button as a hologram of a Lugia appeared. "Lugia's signature move is a destructive attack known as Aeroblast," Professor Sebastian informed them. The hologram of a large city with dozens of skyscrapers appeared before the Lugia. "If a regular Lugia were to use an Aeroblast on Saffron City, the biggest city in Kanto, this would happen," he said. In the hologram, the Lugia fired a large orange beam from its mouth with a huge cyclone surrounding it. The attack collided with the center of Saffron City, creating a huge explosion that destroying a skyscraper and left gaping holes in a few others, severely damaging the nearby buildings. They collapsed soon after, the gusts of wind from the blow shattering almost all the windows of the city. Despite the devastation, much of the city was still standing.

"That did some damage, but... now look," Professor Namba said.

Sebastian chuckled. "Now, let's see what an Incarcerated Lugia would do." He pressed another button, resetting the city. The Lugia fired the same attack, hitting the center of the city. The result was catastrophic, a colossal explosion that devastated the entire city,

vaporizing dozens of skyscrapers and hundreds of buildings in a second. The huge gusts of wind that erupted from the attack decimated the outskirts of the city completely, even going as far as to annihilate the surrounding forest, ripping thousands of trees apart. A huge crater was left to replace the city, a massive chunk torn out of the landscape. "Saffron City, Kanto's biggest City, would be obliterated in a single blow," Professor Sebastian announced proudly. Everyone's eyes widened. "And Lugia *isn't* the strongest Legendary Pokémon, stronger Legendaries could make a lot more devastation."

"Amazing," Giovanni muttered. *'This is the kind of power Team Rocket needs...'*

"Nice," the Iron Masked Marauder commented.

"Yeah," Oakley agreed, both her and the Marauder staring at the Prison Balls with greed in their eyes. "And with all the other things the Prison Balls do... we'll get the ultimate weapons."

"Now that you are all aware of the capabilities of the Prison Ball... Master Giovanni, it's time," Professor Sebastian said, motioning to the Rocket boss.

Giovanni stood up. "With the help of our lead scientists, we have developed a list of targets that are to be captured with a Prison Ball. Thankfully, over the years we've developed an extensive database on most Pokémon that inhabit the regions of Kanto and Johto, and some of Hoenn thanks to information stolen from various Pokémon professors. Due to lacking partners, Tyson and Iron Mask Marauder, you will work as a duo for this mission and will be given one Prison Ball. Butch and Cassidy will receive another Prison Ball. Both of these teams will be supervised by Professor Nampa. Attila and Hun and Annie and Oakley will also receive one Ball each and those two teams will be supervised by Professor Sebastian. The last Prison Ball will be managed by Agent Domino and myself," Giovanni informed them. "Professor Sebastian and Nampa will assist me whenever I require their advice."

"It's Namba!" The scientist blared. Everyone ignored him.

"First," Professor Sebastian continued. "Agents Marauder and Tyson, your targets will be in the distant Hoenn Region. I have received information that two other criminal organizations have been formed in the Hoenn Region and might become a threat to us. Eliminate them once you make your capture. You shall target the Pokémon that are rumored to have created the continents, sea and sky. Capture one of the following Legendary Pokémon with your Prison Ball: Groudon, Kyogre or Rayquaza. The two organizations I mentioned seem to be after Groudon and Kyogre, so you might have to infiltrate them to accomplish your assignments. Also, see if you can find a Latios and Latias, another pair of strong and rare Legendaries native to Hoenn." He pressed a button and a holographic image of the five aforementioned Pokémon appeared.

Both of the burly men grinned and reached for a Prison Ball. The Marauder glared and slapped Tyson's hand away. "Hey!" Tyson shouted, rubbing his hand.

The Marauder grabbed the Prison Ball, grinning. "Epic," he commented. "I could get used to having one of these!"

"Also," Professor Sebastian began. "We don't know if we have complete info on Legendaries from Hoenn, so if you come across anything interesting, do tell."

"Alright," Tyson replied, still sore that the Marauder had gotten a Prison Ball instead of him.

Professor Sebastian grabbed a small control panel. It beeped and said, "Registration completed. Prison Ball 1: Vicious 'Iron Mask Marauder' and Tyson. Supervisor: Professor Namba," in a mechanical voice.

"At least the machine gets my name right," Professor Namba muttered. Nobody paid attention.

Both men looked at the panel. "What's that for?" Tyson asked.

"Oh, it's just to keep track of the Prison Balls," Sebastian answered. "This is also so the Pokémon you capture will only obey you two, since you two are the ones that are registered to the Prison Ball, and no one else." The nodded, grinning.

Giovanni nodded. "Next."

"Biff and Cassidy, you are next. You shall seek Pokémon that are found in water, your targets are: Kyogre, Lugia, or Suicune," Professor Sebastian announced. The holograms of the three Pokemon appeared over the projector.

"So... after Lugia once more..." Cassidy muttered.

A vein appeared on Butch's forehead. "It's Butch!"

"Hey, we already got Kyogre!" Tyson protested.

"But you have four other targets as well. In case you don't capture Kyogre, this gives us another chance at it," Professor Namba answered.

"Ah," Tyson said.

Cassidy grabbed the Prison Ball. Sebastian pressed a button. "Registration completed. Prison Ball 2: Butch and Cassidy. Supervisor: Professor Namba," the control panel said.

"Neat," Butch commented. "The thing got my name right too!"

"Next, Attila and Hun, your assignment is the Mysterious Pokémon of alien origin Deoxys. It could be anywhere on the world, so search carefully. Also, look for Pokémon native to Johto, such as Entei, Raikou, Suicune and Celebi," Sebastian announced. A hologram of the five Pokémon appeared.

"Very well," Hun replied, nodding. She took a Prison Ball. "So, a Raikou again... Ugh, I don't feel like seeing another one ever again."

Attila laughed. "We still have other four choices."

"That's good..." Hun muttered.

Professor Sebastian's control panel beeped. "Registration completed. Prison Ball 3: Attila and Hun. Supervisor: Professor Sebastian."

"Now, Annie and Oakley," Professor Sebastian continued. "You shall search the skies, Your targets are the Legendary Bird Pokémon, Articuno, Zapdos and Moltres, as well as Ho-Oh and Rayquaza, two Legendaries that are said to live sky high," he informed them, their holograms appearing over the projector.

"Alright," Oakley acknowledged, grabbing a Prison Ball. *'This is better than a second attempt to get the Soul Dew... good thing it got cancelled. Even so, I'll get my revenge on the kid and his Latios someday. First, I'll capture one of those Pokémon, and once I have an Incarcerated Legendary under my power, I will seek Ash and Latios out... and I'll kill them,'* she thought eagerly, awaiting the day she would have her long awaited revenge.

Professor Sebastian's panel beeped. "Registration completed. Prison Ball 4: Annie and Oakley. Supervisor: Professor Sebastian."

Everyone turned and looked at the final Prison Ball. Giovanni walked forward and pocketed it. Professor Sebastian's panel beeped again. "Registration completed. Prison Ball 5: Master Giovanni and Agent 009 'Domino'. Supervisor: None."

"Master Giovanni, what are your targets?" Prof. Sebastian asked since the Team Rocket boss hadn't yet said a thing about who he was shooting for.

"I will only target two specific Pokémon: Mew... and a Pokémon named Mewtwo. Either of them will suffice," he answered.

"Ah," Sebastian muttered. He took out his control and input a few commands. The database began to search for the two Pokémon. After a second, two holograms appeared. "Wow, Mew is an extreme rare Pokémon, said to be unique, but Mewtwo... I haven't heard of that one..."

"Mewtwo is one of Team Rocket's experiments. It's a clone of Mew," Giovanni explained. "Somehow... I can't remember anything about it, and neither can any Grunt or agent in the organization. Mewtwo is a powerful Psychic, so I presume it erased our minds of its existence..."

"If it erased your mind, then how do you know about it?" Professor Namba asked skeptically.

"Backup data," was Giovanni's answer. "All of Team Rocket's affairs are sent to my personal computer, so I eventually stumbled upon Mewtwo's files and numerous records and activities on various dates. Mewtwo may have erased my mind, but it forgot about my technology."

"Interesting," Professor Sebastian noted.

"Mew and Mewtwo are two very powerful Pokémon. If any of them are captured with a Prison Ball, we'll be unstoppable. I shall see to their capture... *myself*," Giovanni said darkly. "Agent Domino shall assist me."

"Alright," the professors said at the same time.

"All of you listen well," Giovanni began, getting everyone's attention. "You have full access to all of Team Rocket's manpower, funds and weapons. I don't care what it takes, I don't care if you have to sacrifice dozens of expensive weapons and machines or hundreds of Rocket grunts, I want one Legendary Pokémon incarcerated for

each team no matter what the cost. Also, since this task will require you to take on Legendary Pokémon in battle and most of you only possess one or two Pokémon, all of you have my full authorization to take a full six Pokémon team from our storehouses. All the Pokémon there have been training for years under our best specialists, so they will serve you well." Everyone nodded, glad that they were getting so many privileges and new Pokémon.

"May I point out... if we go all out like this, that might put our finances into severe danger, more than the already expensive creation of the Prison Balls did," Professor Sebastian warned. "That's why we couldn't make more... we'd endanger our budget."

Giovanni laughed darkly. "When we have five incarcerated legends under our control we shall be invincible... money won't matter anymore, the world will tremble in fear before us. Besides, we already have a large number of battle machines, we have hundreds ready, so losing a few dozen doesn't mean anything as long as the Pokémon are captured." Everyone nodded, eager to begin their newest assignment. " *Project Incarceration*... has begun. Dismissed," he finished.

Everyone stood up and left the room, walking out and talking with their partners about how they were going to capture a Legendary Pokémon and get new Pokémon for their teams. Giovanni smiled, pleased. He turned to Professor Sebastian, who hadn't left yet. "Here," the scientist said, handing the Team Rocket Boss the control panel he used to register the Prison Balls. It was basically a small tablet with a touch screen and a few buttons.

"Good," Giovanni said. "Did you make the modifications to it that I requested?"

The scientist nodded. "Yes. This is the main control panel. It tells you the status of each Prison Ball as well as their contents. It's also a master control. This tablet is already registered to you and has the highest priority. That means that all five incarcerated Pokémon will

take your orders as top priority, even over those of the agents that captured them," Sebastian explained.

"Alright," Giovanni said, examining the control panel.

"I will take my leave now. I have to plan with Attila, Hun, Annie and Oakley how we are going to make our captures," the scientist said, turning and walking out of the room.

Giovanni smirked, looking over the main control panel. *'In case some agent decides to betray me... I can easily recover their Pokémon with this, so they can't use the Incarcerated Pokémon against me. Finally... my greatest plan to make the world mine has begun. No more failures, no more setbacks, nothing shall stop me! Project Incarceration shall rise, and with it the world will bow to me!'*

Well, chapter 25 finished! =D

I guess you all know by now who's gonna be the main antagonist of this fic's sequel: "A New Chance For Adventure." Wish Team Rocket good luck!

The name "Prison Ball" was originally created by my Beta Reader, **Ri2**, though its effects and look in this fic are very different. Also Ri2 helped me plan all that out, so many thanks go to him for helping me develop this whole idea! Thanks!

Anyway, don't forget to leave a **REVIEW** ! =D

Peaceful Moments, Dark Tides

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: Here's chapter 26! Another chapter for the delight of all of you my dear readers. =D

Oh, and a friend of mine, another author named Fergus Flamacron made a poster for A New Chance At Life, using just copy and paste. It's amazing =D. If you want to check it out, the link to it is on my profile. I also wrote some stuff for my profile too, more will come as I get ideas of what to add to it.

And I made a new Poll! Question: Which are your favorite Legendary Pokémon? (Like last time, you all get 5 choices).

Now, on to the chapter! Enjoy!

In the bedroom of a certain Pokémon trainer from Pallet Town...

"Who gets to wake Ash up today?" Pikachu asked, looking bewildered at the sleeping form of Ash. It was already around midday and the boy was still asleep, which didn't surprise any of the three Pokémon looking at him.

"Your turn," Latios conceded, a small smirk tugging his lips. Waking Ash was a very fun pastime. The boy sure was a very heavy sleeper.

Pikachu got ready to wake Ash up, his cheeks sparkling, but Ash stirred as he opened his eyes groggily, rubbing them a little to adjust

to the light. "Hey!" Pikachu said in annoyance, glaring at Latias as her eyes stopped glowing, having used her psychic powers to interrupt Ash's sleep.

"Five more minutes mom..." Ash muttered while he put a pillow over his face and turned away from the three, tucking himself inside the sheets. They sweatdropped collectively.

"You really should wake up," Latias suggested, seeing Pikachu's cheeks had begun to sparkle again.

Ash got up rather quickly. "I'm awake! I'm awake!" he cried frantically, remembering that his Pokémon had the habit of giving the term 'rude awakening' a whole new meaning, and not a nice one either, well, for Ash it wasn't. The three Pokémon laughed in amusement, leaving Ash to glare at them. "What time is it?" he asked.

"Twelve forty," Latios answered, glancing at the small clock that was hanging from the wall.

"What! It's so late already!" A stunned Ash asked. He usually didn't sleep *that* much. Well, his Pokémon didn't let him, anyway.

"Don't worry, your little party is later this afternoon. Your mom should be at Oak's, getting everything ready. Let's head there now," Latias suggested.

Ash sighed in relief. "So I haven't missed anything... I need to stop sleeping in like this..."

Pikachu grinned. "We could start waking you *very* early, not caring it's an important day or not..."

"Yeah, Latias and I have the habit of waking very early, usually around five in the morning or so," Latios added, grinning as well.

Ash gave the three a completely terrified look. "No! Please don't!"

They laughed. "Joking, joking," Latios said, suppressing another fit of laughter. Ash glared at them.

"You three are *still* impossible... many people I know get jealous of me because I can understand Pokémon... if they just knew what I went through with you three, they'd change their minds..." Ash said, still glaring at them.

The Pokémon trio laughed yet again. "Oh it's nice to know you love us too," Pikachu commented. Ash rolled his eyes.

"Well," Latias began. "Get dressed, we need to meet your mom at Oak's," she said. "We'll wait in the living room." With that the three Pokémon left Ash by himself. He sighed and lay back on his bed to think about what the day had in store for him. He smiled and closed his eyes, eager for the party and what would follow.

" *And you'd better not fall asleep again...* " Ash jumped frantically out of the bed as he heard Latios' telepathic voice chuckling darkly, causing Ash to pick up the pace.

After a quick shower and putting on a fresh set of his usual clothes, Ash headed downstairs to the living room. "Hello," he greeted.

"Good morning sleepy head," Latias said.

"Hi Ash! Good morning!" Mimey called as he cleaned some portraits.

"Oh, hi. I'm going to Oak's, you coming?" Ash asked.

"I'll head over there after I finish some cleaning. Meet you there!" Mimey informed them before continuing to clean.

After meeting up with his Pokémon, Ash headed out of the house. The Eon twins as usual followed him invisibly, though they would reveal themselves to the town soon enough. He wondered how his Pokémon were, since he had sent all of them to Oak's after supper

yesterday so they could catch up with each other. The only ones that had stayed with him were Latios, Latias and Pikachu, as usual.

"I'm eager to go to Hoenn," Ash began, trying to strike up a conversation on the way to the Professor's place. It wasn't that long a walk but it was still better to go talking along the way.

"I know," Latias said, smiling at him.

"I wonder what kinds of Pokémon I'll befriend and capture there, how the Gyms will be, how strong the trainers there are, and how I'll do in the league..." Ash said, a thoughtful look on his face.

"Well, remember Harrison? He was a tough opponent, and if I recall what I heard on TV correctly, Hoenn Gyms are way tougher than Johto or Kanto Gyms," Latias commented.

"We'll do fine," Pikachu said, grinning. "We'll plow through them so fast they won't know what hit 'em!"

"Yeah!" Ash agreed. "When did my mom say we leave for Alto Mare?"

"In two days," Latios answered. "We go from Alto Mare to Littleroot Town in Hoenn in seven days, since the trip to Alto Mare will take around three days. That means we would have two days to spend in Alto Mare."

"Alright," Ash acknowledged. He looked up and noticed they were almost at the Professor's lab.

"The professor better not try any experiment on me just because we're in his lab," Latios deadpanned.

"Wasn't he interested in your feathers?" Ash questioned.

"Ah, right, he wanted a feather from us because he was interested in how we use them to turn invisible," Latios recalled.

"Hmm, now that I recall, when I look at you two, I don't see any feathers..." Ash commented. "Why is that?"

"Oh, that's because they're very small," Latias answered. "I remember that at first it was mostly thought by the people of Alto Mare that it was fur instead."

"Ah," Ash mumbled. Out of curiosity, he touched Latias on her neck, petting her gently and feeling the texture of her feathers. She gave a small squeal of pleasure. "Now that I take notice of it, it does feel like fur... I think I thought it was fur until you two told me they were feathers." Ash stopped petting the dragoness as he noticed they had arrived at the lab.

"I wonder why he is so eager to get a sample of it?" Pikachu wondered.

"They are feathers that can turn invisible, and he is a Pokémon professor. Of course he wants a sample," Latios stated, chuckling slightly.

Ash knocked on the door a few times. "Hello!" he called.

Tracey opened the door after a few seconds, noticing the cap-wearing trainer. "Oh, hi Ash," he said.

"Hello Tracey," Ash replied, smiling at his old friend.

"Come in," Tracey said, motioning inside.

Ash walked into the lab. Latias turned upright and flew through the door. Though it was a rather tight fit, she managed to get through. Latios stared at the doorframe, noting its small size, and decided to enter through a different route.

"So, where's my mom?" Ash asked, looking around and seeing the rather empty living room.

"She's in the back. Come on," Tracey said, leading the way. Ash followed him silently.

They walked to the backdoor. Tracey smiled as he opened the door...

"Surprise!" the Pallet Town citizens shouted as Ash walked through the door. The cap-wearing trainer gave a startled leap; he had expected the party to be later. The small plain directly outside Professor Oak's lab had been adorned with lots of banners that said congratulating words to Ash. There were several tables with diverse foods and drinks lined up all over the place.

"Hello, dear," Delia greeted, walking forward and hugged her son. "Got you off-guard, right?"

"Yeah," Ash answered, returning the hug. "Wow, everyone in town's here..."

"Well of course, Ash!" Professor Oak said, walking up to the boy. "You returned Pallet Town's name to stardom by placing so well in the Silver Conference despite your age. It's been a long since we had such a good trainer!"

"Hey!" Gary said, frowning. "I'm good too!"

Ash blushed at the praise. "Thanks!" he said brightly.

"And," Delia began. "You can also take it as an early birthday party, since your birthday isn't for another two weeks, but by then you'll already be heading for Hoenn... So happy early birthday!"

"Ah, nice!" Ash commented, smiling at the neat surprise. "But I thought this was going to be later."

"Oh, despite the fact that you knew there was gonna be a party, I still tried to make it surprising for you," Delia answered. "I came here

early to get everything done. I told Latios to wake you up around midday, when I knew everything would be ready."

"Ah, so there was a reason you let me sleep in so much..." Ash grumbled. It was rare that his Pokémon let him sleep past nine in the morning or so.

" *Hehe, yep, there was a reason.*" Latios confirmed, suppressing an amused chuckle.

Ash smiled. "And I like it a lot!"

A few of the people got close to Ash, asking several questions, though it wasn't long before the one that was echoing in almost everyone's minds was asked. "Can we see Latios up close?" a lady asked. Several of the townspeople nodded in agreement, silently voicing the same question.

Ash nodded. "Sure. Latios, reveal yourself!"

Latios took a deep breath. If he had revealed himself to countless thousands of people in the Silver Conference, surely he could reveal himself here, even if in Silver Town there was a tall wall separating the field and the stands, and no one was stupid enough to enter it in the middle of an intense Pokémon battle. *'Delia said the people of this town are very nice, so... let's give it a shot,'* the eon Dragon thought. He dropped his invisibility, appearing in a shower of blue sparkling lights. Many people looked on in wonder, most of them seeing a Legendary Pokémon for the first time of their lives.

" *My turn!*" Latias announced, causing Latios to bristle slightly, still reluctant of the idea of Latias revealing herself as well. But, being the more social one, it was obvious she'd want to be at the party. He took a small breath to calm down, reminding himself for the thousandth time that they were all good people. Besides, almost none of them were trainers, what could they do to him, a Legendary Pokémon?

' *I haven't forgotten,*' Ash thought, knowing Latias would read his mind and hear it. Latias portrayed a smile in his mind. "Oh, I have an announcement to make!" Ash called, getting the attention of the townspeople as they stopped looking at Latios. "I have a second Legendary Pokémon!" Everyone looked at him with widened eyes, wondering if his earlier statement was true. "Meet Latios' sister, Latias!"

The red eon dragoness grinned happily and dropped her invisibility, causing shock and amazement to run through the attendants, their jaws dropping at the sudden appearance of the red eon Dragon. Latias giggled at most of their stunned and surprised faces. Pikachu laughed. "You two certainly attract plenty of attention," he commented as several of the townspeople began to gather near the eon dragons.

" *Relax brother,*" Latias chided in Latios's mind, sensing his unease and anxiety. "*I sense good emotions from the people here, there's no need to be so alarmed. Calm down.*"

" *Sorry, you know I'm not one for things like this , sis,*" Latios said rather nervously, which sounded odd from his normally confident and secure nature.

" *Just relax, interact with them, e njoy yourself, have a good time. You'll grow into enjoying the moment. Oh, and don't go overprotective on me now, if you do, I'll get pissed at you!*" Latias said mentally, projecting a glare in his mind at the last part. Latios laughed nervously. He'd never do anything that would upset Latias.

"Seems they're taking it well," Professor Oak observed as he saw the two eon dragons started to interact with the townspeople. "Though Latios seems... odd."

"He's probably nervous," Ash said.

"Yeah, yesterday he was a bit reluctant to reveal himself at the party. Latias said yes in a heartbeat," Delia added.

Ash's stomach roared, literally. Everyone sweatdropped. "Well," Ash began. "I'm getting something to eat."

"You're leaving them alone?" Pikachu asked, motioning to the eon dragons.

"Eh, they'll be fine," Ash said. "So long as Latios doesn't become too much of a nervous wreck."

"I think he already is," Gary commented.

"I'll go with him to make sure he doesn't get too crowded," Pikachu said as he jumped off Ash's shoulder and headed to the eon twins.

"Hehe, they're having a good time aren't they?" Delia asked, smiling.

"They sure are," Gary agreed. They laughed when they saw some young children reaching up trying to get on Latios' back for a ride. The Eon Pokémon flew up a few inches, getting out of reach of the kids. They pouted at him as he smiled nervously.

" *This is fun,*" Latias commented. *"Though I wish we could talk to them openly..."*

" *Yeah,*" Latios agreed. He made a small dodge as another kid tried to get to him. *"I guess it's another incentive to train harder to make our psychic powers stronger."*

" *I'd really love to talk freely to these people, they seem really nice!"* Latias said. *"When we get some more free time bro, let's speed up our training!"*

Latios smiled at her and nodded. *"Alright,"* he replied, glad that Latias was taking something seriously for once. He flew back a little, getting out of reach of the kids again.

" *Well , looks like children have a thing for you, brother,*" Latias commented playfully, suppressing a fit of giggles at his predicament.

Meanwhile, at the nearby tables, the food was under heavy attack. "This food is awesome!" Ash commented as he ate vigorously from about ten different plates.

"Haha, leave some for the rest of the guests, Ashy-boy," Gary commented as he walked up beside him. Ash was currently seated at one of the tables, enjoying a good meal. It was like buffet, there was no set time to eat, you just had to get up and grab a bite when you were hungry, much to Ash's delight.

"But the food's awesome!" Ash argued before resuming his meal. Gary shook his head in amusement. Same old Ash.

Nearby, Mimey was cleaning the plates and tables that the guests were leaving, or any trash that was dropped on the floor. Anyone who saw the Psychic-Type probably wondered if cleaning was a hobby for him.

Meanwhile, Pikachu was looking with amusement at Latios' little kid predicament. "Hello uncle Pikachu!" a voice shouted behind him, causing the electric-type to yelp and release a small Thundershock.

"Sorry for that!" Pikachu apologized as he turned around, and facefaulted when he saw Phanpy. "Ugh, you're a Ground-Type. Why do I even bother to apologize?"

Phanpy laughed. "No problem Uncle Pikachu!"

"Where are the others?" Pikachu asked.

"We're all here, but we'll wait until the crowds dissipate a little before coming to greet Daddy. I didn't want to wait, so came anyways," the Ground-Type answered.

"Alright," Pikachu said.

"Hello uncle Latios!" Phanpy greeted cheerily as Latios flew over to them.

Latios smiled. "Hey there, kid."

Pikachu laughed. "Couldn't take the crowds anymore?"

Latios grimaced. "Those kids are a terror! They wouldn't leave me alone!"

Phanpy pouted. "You don't think I'm a terror do you?"

"When I said 'kids' I wasn't referring to you," Latios told him.

"Ah," Phanpy conceded. Pikachu laughed again.

"How did you get them to leave you alone?" the Electric-Type asked.

"Thankfully, Latias took mercy on me and decided to play with them instead. They easily fell for her more playful demeanor," Latios explained. "And since the shock and interest in meeting me and Latias has faded, the party has returned to normal."

"A good thing, too, they could have driven you mad," Pikachu commented, chuckling.

"They townspeople are more interested in Latias since she's more eager to be around them and she's new to them. They already knew about me from the TV battles," Latios continued. He looked to where his sister was, playing what seemed to be a combination of hide-and-seek and tag with the kids while their parents watched, laughing in amusement with surprised looks that a Legendary Pokémon could be so playful.

Pikachu chuckled, looking at the scene too. A small figure caught his attention and he froze in terror. "Gotta go, talk to you later!" he said as he ran away very fast and hid behind some tables. Latios and Phanpy stared at him oddly. They shrugged in puzzlement.

A few seconds later they noticed Gary's Umbreon walking around, almost like she was looking for something, or someone. Latios

laughed, knowing why Pikachu had run away. "How brave..." he muttered.

Umbreon's ears twitched as she heard Latios' laughter. She smiled devilishly and walked up to him, knowing that the Eon dragon was good friends with Pikachu, so she was pretty sure he knew where he was. "Hello," she said.

"Hi," Latios replied.

"Where's Ash's Pikachu? I *know* he has to be here," Umbreon asked, looking up at the dragon. "And I *know* you know where he is."

Latios shrugged. "He's hiding from you behind the tables over there," he answered, pointing to Pikachu's hiding spot.

Pikachu's ears twitched when he heard this. '*Latios, you damn traitor!*' he thought furiously, knowing that Latios would hear his thoughts.

"*Who said I had a side in the first place? I was just telling the truth,*" Latios thought back in a clearly fake innocent tone.

"Thanks!" Umbreon said in gratitude as she ran to where Latios had pointed. "You owe me a battle!" She yelled at Pikachu.

"Not now!" Pikachu replied as he ran away.

"Get back here and fight me!" Umbreon protested, chasing after him.

"I'm not in the mood for a battle! Besides, we can't fight during the party!" Pikachu shouted back as he ran.

"We can always move to a different part of the field. They're very big and we can find a nice arena somewhere. Now get back here!" Umbreon shouted, picking up the pace.

"That was funny," Phanpy commented after the two Pokémon had disappeared.. "Poor uncle Pikachu. Did you really have to do that?"

Latios laughed uproariously. "Yes. Yes I did." He paused, sensing something interesting. "Wait here kid, I'll be back in a second," he said to the small Ground-Type as he silently entered a small patch of bushes and trees without drawing any attention to himself. Once he was in, he turned invisible and flew away, grinning the whole time.

Meanwhile...

"Look at that little Latias..." Jessie muttered, gripping her binoculars tighter. "Just waiting to be claimed by Team Rocket... we have to move swiftly while Latios and Pikachu are out of sight and the twerp is distracted... Right?" A few seconds passed. "Right!"

She got no response as Meowth and James were more interested in the food. "Look at all that food..." James mumbled, his mouth watering.

"Yeah, if we could only get a huge loada that!" Meowth gushed. A vein appeared on Jessie's forehead. She hit them both on the head, *hard*.

"Ow..." James moaned, clutching his aching head.

"What was dat for!" Meowth screamed.

"We are supposed to be capturing Pokémon for the boss, not thinking about a meal!" she shouted, clearly angry.

"But after the Dark Devastator was destroyed, we tried to capture them a few times on their way back to Kanto, but we couldn't even get near them!" James protested. "How are we going to capture Pikachu or Latias and Latios if we can't even hope to beat them!"

"I don't know! We'll think of something! It's just a damn Pikachu and two lousy Dragons!" Jessie said angrily. "I'm sure we can capture them!"

"Ahem, what did you just call me?" Latios asked from behind them, his invisibility dropping. They froze in terror. "I dare you to say it again."

They turned slowly, coming to face the Eon dragon. They gulped. "M-Meowth... what did he say?" Jessie asked, trembling in fear.

"He dared you to call him what you just called them again," Meowth translated. Jessie bit her lip but remained quiet. Latios glared at them, causing them to shiver harder.

"Oops!" Jessie said, looking at her naked wrist. "Oh look at the time, its getting late, gotta go!" She took off running. James and Meowth followed, not wanting to stay near the Eon dragon a second more. Latios burst into laughter.

"Tell the main twerp I say hi!" James shouted back, running faster.

"I said hi too!" Meowth added.

"Team Rocket's running away again!" They chorused. Latios shook his head in amusement as his body began to glow. He fired a powerful sphere of bright light in their direction. The Luster Purge collided with them and exploded in a bright flash of light. "And now we're blasting off again!" They cried as they flew off into the distance.

"Done," Latios said as he turned and headed back to the party. Everything was still going the same. Latias was still playing around, Ash was *still* eating, and he was also chatting with the professor, his mom, and Gary. He could sense Pikachu hiding in some nearby bushes, probably hiding from Umbreon. Well, for now he'd just enjoy the party and keep an eye on Latias...

"*On no you don't!*" Latias said in his mind. He cringed slightly. "*I'm perfectly fine by myself for now, thank you very much!*"

"*Sorry sis, force of habit...*" Latios thought back, sending a mental apology.

She projected a sweet smile in his mind. *"Its okay, I think the one that needs the protection now is Pikachu. Did you really have to tell Umbreon where he was?"*

Latios chuckled and shrugged in faux innocence. *"I had nothing better to do."*

" Oh, brother..." Latias said in amusement. She shrugged and continued what she was doing, her mental talk with her brother not interrupted in the slightest. *"Though I think I heard a thought coming from Pikachu's mind, something along the lines of 'I'm gonna shock the living daylights out of Latios for this', so be careful,"* she said. Latios laughed, not really caring. He was resistant to electricity, though... he had to admit the Pikachu zapped hard, so he'd have to be careful.

Latios noticed that a few people were crowding around Ash. No doubt the boy was telling them tales of his travels, and probably about him and Latias. He smiled and decided to go and hang out with them for a while, maybe even help Ash with the storytelling.

With that everyone continued enjoying themselves and spending time with each other and having fun, which was what parties were for.

A few hours later, after the party had ended and most of the guests returned home...

"Ah, that was awesome!" Ash said as he rubbed his belly. He was sitting on one of the sofas in the lobby of Professor Oak's lab.

"Ash, are you sure that in a past life you weren't a Snorlax?" Professor Oak asked, shaking his head in amusement.

"Snorlaxes eat a lot less than Ash," Gary noted, causing the aforementioned trainer to glare at him. Gary laughed.

"Well, today was certainly a good day!" Ash said happily, sinking back into the couch and closing his eyes.

"And I hope that next year, the party will be to celebrate your victory in the Hoenn League," Delia commented.

"I *will* win!" Ash announced . "By then Latios will be a lot stronger, and the rest of my team too."

"So Ash, speaking of which, have you decided which team you're taking to Hoenn?" Professor Oak asked.

"Well, I was planning on having a fresh start, just with Pikachu, and Latias and Latios," Ash answered. "As much as starting with two Legendary Pokémon can be considered 'Fresh,' anyway."

"Ash, are you crazy?" Professor Oak said. "That's a terrible idea!"

"It is?" Ash questioned.

"First, you have to take Larvitar with you since, as I recall, you wanted to return him to his mother," Gary said. "That means he *has* to go with you, no matter what."

Ash looked around guiltily, not believing he had forgotten about that. "*You forget a lot of stuff,*" Latios said flatly.

"And," Professor Oak followed. "Remember that from what you said and the info we have, his mother is with a poacher. That means you are going to go looking for a criminal, so you'll need a strong team to take him on. I know Latias and Latios are strong, but it doesn't hurt anyone to be well prepared."

"I guess that makes sense..." Ash muttered.

"Also Ash, this may not have happened to you yet, mostly because you've spent most of your time in Silver Town, where security was tight, but everyone knows now that you have a Legendary Pokémon with you, and there will be some trainers that will try to steal Latios

from you to have him as their own Pokémon," Professor Oak warned him.

Ash sighed, recalling that what the Professor said had already happened to him once with Lance, though he was glad the champion had seen the error of his ways. Team Rocket bugged him too, but they had been bothering him since way before he got Latios so they didn't count. "True..."

"Many will seek to attack you to get Latios, so you need a strong team to help protect yourselves," The Professor continued.

"Ash, please be careful..." Delia said, clearly worried.

"It's okay Delia, I'm sure Ash can take care of himself. Besides, he has his Pokémon. You know how attached his Pokémon are to him, they'll protect him," Professor Oak assured her. "Also, just because some guy tries to take Latios doesn't mean he is strong enough to do so, and Ash has Latias as an element of surprise. Most will be ready to take on Latios, but not Latias."

"Yeah, Gramps. So Ash, you better think of a nice team to take with you. Oh, and I would also suggest that you... capture Latias in a pokeball. If you're going poacher hunting, it'd be safer if she was captured, even if she stays out all the time," Gary suggested.

"I don't know... What do you think Latias?" Ash asked, turning to look at the red and white dragon hovering a few feet beside him.

She smiled. *"I'll allow myself to be captured,"* she said. She glared in Latios' mind. *"And you better not say a thing, it's my choice!"*

"I wasn't gonna say a nything!" Latios protested. *"I don't mind, I trust Ash completely!"* Latias mentally giggled. Latios stared at her oddly.

"Are you sure?" Ash asked.

"Yep!" She said, nodding vigorously.

Ash smiled at her. "Thanks."

*" And you can also take Pidgeot with us , Ash," Latias suggested.
"You didn't go back for her just to leave her here in the lab. She'll be devastated if you leave her behind again, but she'll love coming with us to Hoenn."*

"Yeah," Ash agreed, his face lighting up in a smile. "Latias, Latios, Pikachu, Pidgeot and Larvitar... that makes five. Who else?"

" I s ay Phanpy, Larvitar will enjoy his company, the two are like brothers," Latios suggested.

"So that's it, the team I'm taking to Hoenn with me is Pikachu, Latios, Latias, Phanpy, Larvitar and Pidgeot," Ash announced. "I'll probably swap some once I get Hoenn Pokémon on my team."

Gary sweatdropped. "That's what you call a powerful team? I was expecting some others, but I guess that will do."

Ash laughed. "Latias, Latios and Pikachu will be very hard to defeat. Pidgeot is, after all her time training and being a flock leader in the Viridian Forest, a surprisingly strong Pokémon. The other two can be tough when they want to be."

"Alright," Gary conceded. "Good luck."

"Thanks," Ash said. He turned to Latias and smiled. "Ready?"

"Yes," she said.

Ash grabbed a Pokéball from his belt and gently tapped it on Latias' neck, causing it to suck her in. The Pokéball shook a little, but it beeped when Latias didn't fight back and allowed herself to be captured. Ash smiled and looked at the Pokéball in his hands. "Ash, you are forgetting something," Latios and Pikachu said to him at the same time.

He paused. "Oh right!" he said. He stood up and posed dramatically. "Yes! I got... a Latias!" he shouted triumphantly, holding the Pokeball in an outstretched arm, a colorful and dynamic background appearing behind him.

Everyone facefaulted. "Ash... you've had that Latias for *months* !" Gary pointed out.

"Yes, but not *officially*," Ash said as he released Latias from her pokeball.

She looked a bit dizzy. "You're right brother, first time in there is always the weirdest... Does this continue the next time?"

"No, just the first few times while you get used to it," Latios answered her.

"It's been a while since I got inside a pokeball," Pikachu commented. "And I am so never going into one again."

"Oh, now I recall, Latios, think I can have a fea-" Professor Oak started.

" No," Latios said flatly.

"Well, was worth a shot..." the Pokémon professor muttered disappointedly.

"Well, I better go to the backyard and gather up the Pokémon I chose," Ash said as he stood up and walked out of the lab. Pikachu and the eon twins followed. "I'll be back soon for dinner!"

"Ash! You just ate at least an entire table's worth of food!" Gary cried.

"But its dinner!" Ash whined. Everyone shook their heads in amusement. With that Ash left to enjoy the rest of the day with his Pokémon.

Meanwhile, in the top secret Team Rocket Base...

Annie and Oakley grinned as they headed out of the storage room. Each had picked five Pokémon from Team Rocket's elite stash. They had decided to keep Espeon and Ariados, since the two Pokémon had been through a lot with them. "So, where to now?" Annie asked.

"We're going to meet up with Professor Sebastian," Oakley answered. "I want to see something."

"Alright," Annie said, pocketing the five new additions to her team.

"Hun! Attila! You coming?" Oakley called to the other team under Professor Sebastian's supervision.

"Yeah, yeah, we're coming," Attila grumbled. Hun followed him.

"Good luck!" Tyson laughed as he, the Iron-Masked Marauder, Butch, and Cassidy headed to a different door. They had to reunite with their own lead scientist, after all. "Bet you four won't catch a thing, losers!"

"Yeah right," Hun said. "We'll see about that. Try not to get killed."

"Shut up Tyson. Let's go," the Iron-Masked Marauder grumbled, walking past the door. "Cassidy and Bitch! You come too, we better have some words with Professor Nanza before setting out, we have lots of planning to do."

Butch gave him a horrified look as everyone else paused. They laughed after they realized what Butch's name had been mistaken for. "IT'S BIFF!" he bellowed angrily, causing them to laugh even harder. He paused. "Wait! Scratch that, its Butch!"

"Bitch, that's a name I'm sure none of us will forget anytime soon," Attila commented, laughing.

"Let's go already," Oakley said in annoyance, walking to the door. The other three agents followed her, still suppressing some laughs.

"So, what did you want us for?" Attila asked, looking at Oakley.

"I wanted to see one of the field test recordings for the Prison Ball with Professor Sebastian, so we can get an idea of how they work," she explained, a smirk tugging her lips.

"Didn't we already see that with the Lugia hologram?" Hun questioned.

"No, remember Sebastian's words. That hologram was just to give us an idea of the power increase," Oakley answered. "Besides, if we do capture the Legendary Pokémon... we must be ready and know how they fight. We got an idea of the power increase but not on how it can be used in the battlefield..."

"Why are you so concerned Oakley?" Attila asked. "With such power, I doubt we can be stopped."

"No, I'm taking something else into account," Oakley replied.

Attila looked at her, clearly confused. "What's that?"

"I'm more concerned about what the other Legendary Pokémon we *don't* capture will try to do when we enslave their brethren..." Oakley answered. "Many of you may not know it, but I've seen firsthand to what extent Legendary Pokémon can go to save and protect each other." She paused slightly as she remembered how Latios had taken two plasma nets as well as several direct attacks to protect Latias, using himself as a living shield. She growled lowly. "Aside from the two I saw do that, many others might be the same. We have to know how Incarcerated Pokémon manage themselves in battle in case the other Legendary Pokémon attack us to free their captured friends. Legendary Pokémon are no ordinary living beings, if we are unprepared, despite the power of Incarcerated Pokémon, we can still lose to them."

"Hmm, that could be true... I never thought of that. The only assignment I've ever had involving a Legendary was with a Raikou,"

Hun muttered. "Good thinking..."

"We have to be well prepared. Before we can comfortably start our plans, we first must deal with the remaining Legendary Pokémon," Oakley said as they neared the lab.

"But," Attila started. "In the end we'll still win. Even if we lose and the Pokémon we capture are freed, the effects of the Prison Balls are irreversible!" The others nodded in agreement.

"Let's see what Professor Pointy has in store for us," Annie commented.

They arrived and stood in front of the door to the lab. They entered a code, and after gaining clearance to proceed, they entered. Professor Sebastian turned to the door, seeing his two teams come in. "Greeting. Already got enough Pokémon to fill out full six teams?"

"Yeah," Annie answered. "We are ready to start searching for Legendaries."

"Actually," Professor Sebastian began. "The real Legendary Pokémon hunting doesn't begin for a few months."

"What?" Attila questioned. "Why so long?"

"First, we have to gather sufficient data to know where they are, where they might be, how to find them, and how to beat them and capture them. Take Legendary Pokémon like Deoxys, Rayquaza and Ho-Oh for example, they are Pokémon that are within your assignments and they could be *anywhere* on the entire planet. We have to learn how to look for them and beat them before we move to capturing them."

"Oh," Attila muttered.

"We can't just appear out of nowhere and throw a Prison Ball at anything that moves," Professor Sebastian said. The agents laughed

Mareepishly at this, realizing he was right.

"Though, I kinda agree," Oakley commented. "If we don't capture them on the first try, they'll know what to expect, and they might spread the word of our plans among other Legendary Pokémon, making it all the harder for us to catch them."

"Precisely," Professor Sebastian said, nodding. "The other two teams are probably receiving the same talk from Professor Nanla."

"Well, thanks for telling us that, but there's something else we wanted to ask you. At the meeting you mentioned that you'd pitted an Incarcerated Pokémon against a dozen of Team Rocket's elite trained Pokémon in a battle. Do you have that recording?" Oakley asked, getting straight to the point.

"Yes," the scientist answered. He shivered slightly. "It was terrifying. A few of my scientists fainted from fear."

"May we see it? We want to see how Incarcerated Pokémon manage themselves in battle," Oakley stated.

"Very well, but I warn you... it's rather disturbing. When I said 'annihilated' at the meeting, I *really* meant it," Professor Sebastian said. "Apparently the infusion of concentrated Darkness energy into the Pokémon causes some... side effects," the scientist explained.

"Why is it so concentrated?" Attila asked.

"Because the Dark energy serves several purposes. It grants immunity to troublesome Psychics, and it's what increases the Pokémon's power to sky-high levels in the first place. We didn't anticipate the... changes, however." He walked over to one of the lab computers and typed several commands. He motioned to one of the large screens on the wall. "Behold."

The screen flashed as the recording was played. It depicted Professors Sebastian and Namba as well as several members from

their research team inside a circular arena. They were on a platform on top, suspended around thirty meters off the floor. Below them were twelve Pokémon, all looking fierce and well trained. "This is field test number one, the first battle sequence for an Incarcerated Pokémon. The test subject is a Sneasel that was subjected to capture by a Prison Ball... or rather, it was a Sneasel, after the capture, the powerful darkness energies forced it to evolve, so the subject is now a Weavile," the Professor Sebastian in the recording said.

"Once captured, we released it as soon as possible to see our creation, but we noted the assimilation process between the Prison Ball and its capture takes time, around five minutes to be precise. It can happen either inside or outside of the Prison Ball, the result is the same," Professor Namba said.

Professor Sebastian nodded. "The process was apparently extremely painful to the victim... and before our eyes, something astounding occurred. The subject experienced physical changes from the energy it was infused with, more than simply evolving. Observe," he said as he held out a single Prison Ball. He turned to the field and threw it. "Weavile, go!"

The Incarcerated Pokémon appeared. The opposing dozen Pokémon tensed visibly, clearly startled by the monstrosity before them. The real Professor Sebastian paused the tape.

Attila, Hun, Annie and Oakley gasped. "What... the... hell!" Oakley said slowly, her mouth dropping in awe.

"That's no Weavile..." Attila muttered. "What happened to it?"

"I don't remember the Lugia you used in the hologram looking like that," Hun commented.

"That's because we didn't know what would happen to it physically as a result of Incarceration. We only used it to compare power levels," Professor Sebastian answered.

"Ah, so that's why," Attila muttered. Professor Sebastian magnified the image of the Weavile so it filled the whole screen.

The Weavile was a lot different than a regular one. The claws that made up each hand had tripled in length, each having streaks of black and dark purple energy coating them. The skin color had changed to a jet black and the feathers on the crown, tail and ears had turned a dark purple, with extremely sharp darkness-coated edges. The claws on the feet had become sharper and deadlier as well. On its wrists and ankles, the Sharp Claw Pokémon had large black shackles, with chains that coiled up the arms and legs to join at the neck in a thick collar. A black mask covered the Weavile's face with a grille over the mouth, barely hiding vicious fangs from view. Two holes in the mask revealed the Weavile's bright red, almost evil glowing eyes. Despite the demonic glow coming from them, they reflected no will, no emotions, nothing, just a void of death. All of the bonds seemed to be metal, but upon closer look they were actually made of solid darkness, light as a feather but hard as steel.

"What is all that stuff?" a stunned Oakley asked.

"You mean the shackles, chains and the like?" Professor Sebastian replied.

Oakley nodded. "Yeah, that looks creepy."

"And badass," Attila added.

"It's the physical manifestation of the Prison Ball's control over the captured Pokémon, made from solid darkness," the scientist said proudly. "The very power of the Prison Ball."

"Wow, nice," Attila commented.

"We are not certain yet what effects the darkness will have to the willpower-less Pokémon, though," Professor Sebastian admitted. "While you all gather data, Professor Nanro and I will continue to investigate and learn from it. The Pokémon may experience mental

breakdowns or something. After all, it has no willpower to resist the dark power."

"So, let's see that thing in combat," Oakley said eagerly.

"Alright," Professor Sebastian said. "Just try not to puke." He pressed the forward bottom on the remote control, continuing the footage.

"Now," Professor Namba said. "Let's see the battle!"

The recorded Professor Sebastian turned to the battle field. "Attention all of you!" he called. The dozen Pokémon looked up at him. "Your orders are to defeat and kill this lone Pokémon. Use any attacks, abilities and force necessary!" he shouted. He looked at the Weavile. "Incarcerated Weavile, we have plenty of elite Pokémon in our possession... so kill them."

The agents stared intently at the screen, eager to see what was coming next. The Incarcerated Pokémon took immediate actions the second the orders were given. The apparent leader of the dozen Pokémon, a bulky and strong-looking Charizard, stepped up, ready to take on the Darkness Pokémon. The other eleven backed up a bit, letting it make the first move. The Fire-Type took a deep breath and exhaled a plume of fire, directing it at the Weavile. The Incarcerated Pokémon moved to the side with a massive burst of speed, almost disappearing from sight. The Fire-Type barely reacted as he used an Aerial Ace to move out of the way of the claw strike that was almost an inch too close to its face. He reappeared a few feet off the ground and fired a potent Fire-Blast. The Incarcerated Weavile leaped in the air as its claws shone an eerie black and grew in thickness and length. With a swing the Sharp Claw Pokémon sliced the Fire-Blast in two with Night Slash, extinguishing it with ease, and continuing quickly towards the airborne Charizard.

The Charizard let out an alarmed shriek and opened its jaws, a miniature sun beginning to form in it as it charged the ultimate fire move, Blast Burn. The Weavile reached the Charizard too fast and

made a claw strike. The Charizard quickly thrust its arms forward, catching both of the long claws, and winced as they dug deep into his flesh. But this battle was life and death, so injuries didn't matter as long as you came out alive.

The Weavile's body began to emit morbid pulses of dark energy as an orb of shadows gathered in its claws in a twisted version of Shadow Ball. The Weavile pushed the orb forward, ripping the Charizard's arms apart and slamming it in its chest, *punching through it* and bursting out of its back. The Charizard let out a deafening scream of pain as its incomplete Blast Burn dissipated. The Weavile's claws lengthened as they gathered a large amount of darkness energy in the form of another Night Slash. With a quick slash, the Charizard was silenced as its wings were cut off and it was decapitated. The Weavile landed on the floor as the Charizard fell from the air, body parts landing in different spots accompanied by a rain of blood. The other Pokémon looked at the scene absolutely terrified.

Attila, Hun, Annie and Oakley were absolutely speechless as they looked at the recording. "Any questions?" Professor Sebastian asked. They shook their heads dumbly.

Oakley grinned maliciously. *'That's just amazing! I wonder how the Legendary Pokémon will react to that! Still, Legendary Pokémon are incredibly resourceful, we have to be careful... And Ash and Latios... Latias you too! Even if it takes me months to make my capture... I will find you, and you three will pay!'*

In the footage, another elite Pokémon yelled several things. The other ten Pokémon quickly got into what seemed to be a defensive formation. With a demonic roar, the Weavile lunged, obeying its command of killing the Pokémon, and so the carnage continued...

Annie, Oakley, Attila and Hun stared at the recording in awe and terror. The Weavile showed no mercy as they watched it systematically murder all the other Pokémon with relatively little

effort, showing no compassion, no remorse... nothing, just blind obedience.

"This is amazing..." Oakley commented. "I so want my own incarcerated Pokémon..."

"That's really creepy..." Annie said with a shiver. She had never been one for things like that, so after the first two or three kills, she turned around, unable to watch anymore.

"Mm, a Legendary would make an awesome servant to have as an Incarcerated Pokémon..." Hun muttered.

"The world can rest for a few months while we gather the necessary data and start to search for our targets..." Professor Sebastian said darkly. "When we start making our captures... the world shall shiver in fear."

"Too bad we'll take months making our captures..." Oakley lamented. "I want to have an Incarcerated Legendary now!"

"Remember Agent Oakley... Patience is the key," Professor Sebastian said.

"I have a question," Hun said, looking at the scientist. He nodded, acknowledging her question. "You said the effects were irreversible. What did you mean by that?"

Professor Sebastian took a breath before starting his explanation. "Well, when the Prison Ball was reset, the extensive amounts of Darkness energy plaguing the Pokémon receded back into the Ball, so all the chains, shackles, and everything else disappeared from the Weavile. For further analysis, we tried it on a non-dark Type Pokémon, a Fearow to be exact. When the Prison Ball was reset, the Pokémon retained all three types: Dark, Normal and Flying. Again, all the chains and bondage seemed to disappear. The physical changes, however, remained, though they were less notable than before. As time passed, the changes began to slowly recede as the

Darkness energy disappeared from the Pokémon, but the Pokémon retained the Dark typing, as well as the lack of will and emotions. There were no sighs of recovering from that."

Hun nodded. "And..."

We tried using several healing moves and different treatments, but... nothing worked. We were unable to restore the Pokémon, but we noticed that the Dark-Typing was slowly fading away. That meant that maybe the Pokémon would eventually lose the dark-Typing. However, without the Prison Ball to command it, we had no way to make it move or do anything, even to do basic functions like eating and stuff, so the Pokémon would have died of starvation before any of that could happen. Sadly, the Pokémon had to be killed due to time constraints before we could verify that, but there was no progress in the will or emotion part," Professor Sebastian explained. "As far as we know, since it was completely destroyed by the Prison Ball, their willpower and emotions can never be restored."

"Alright," Hun said, pleased with the explanation.

"Well, we have plenty of planning to do... and searching... and data gathering... and... oh man, this will be a lot more tedious than I expected," Attila lamented. "Oh well, at least the long wait is worth it."

"Yes..." Annie said, a sinister look in her eyes. "It certainly will be."

And Chapter 26 has ended! I hope you all liked it! Team Rocket's plan is shaping up nicely isn't it? Don't worry, Ash has a few months to prepare and get ready, enough to do a few gyms and some more stuff in Hoenn, or continue his Pokémon Journey normally, at least until he learns of Team Rocket's new toys. Looks like everyone's favorite chosen one will have a lot of work to do when he does learn of Team Rocket!

Next Chapter (27) is A New Chance At Life's final chapter! Wheee! I can't believe I am finally getting this fanfic done. Wow.

And after that, comes the sequel. A New Chance For Adventure. If you are curious on some of the stuff I'll have in the sequel, next chapter I'll give you some hints as to what you can look forward to.

Anyway, I'll be happy if you all leave a **Review!** =D Have a good day.

Journey To A New Land

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokémon.

"Speech"

'Thoughts'

"Telepathy"

A/N: Here's chapter 27! Sorry for the rather long wait. I had some little difficulties. Oh well. Despite being late, here's the chapter! It's A New Chance At Life's FINAL chapter! =D After that, off we go to the Sequel. Enjoy!

And someone made a TV tropes page for A New Chance At Life! Awesome! =D Thanks a Lot! * Very happy dance* If you are interested in taking a peek, the link to it is on my profile page.

Now, on to the chapter!

Two days passed rather quickly for Ash, who was more eager to go to Hoenn than ever. Latias and Latios were also eager, especially at the prospect of seeing Alto Mare, their beloved hometown, again. However, the two eon dragons also loved the hospitality of Pallet Town. They could go around visibly with no problems, and were always greeted with kind smiles and positive emotions from the townspeople. They also trained more, doing their regular mental exercises so they could expand the prowess of their minds. Latios and Latias often went to the rocky area of Prof. Oak's backyard to do their Rock-lifting, or meditated for hours at Ash's home (Much to Latias's dismay. Thankfully the idea of freely speaking with anyone telepathically was a good motivator).

Ash was currently getting ready for their departure to Vermillion City, the port city from where he would be taking the ferry to Alto Mare.

"So how do I look?" Ash asked as he finished putting on the new set of clothes his mother had given him for his new adventure.

"You look wonderful dear," Delia replied, looking over at her son carefully to see how the clothes fit him.

"Yeah, not bad at all," Pikachu commented, cocking his head to the side.

" *Yep, I agree, those clothes fit you nicely,*" Latias agreed, nodding in approval.

" *I like the excessive blue in them,*" Latios commented. Everyone sweatdropped.

"Of course you like the blue," Pikachu said sarcastically, rolling his eyes. Latios glared at him.

"Thanks mom, it's so awesome!" Ash said, looking at himself enthusiastically. He was wearing a mostly blue outfit again, with even more blue than the previous one. His new sneakers were blue with a darker shade of blue where the ties went. His jeans were a lighter shade of blue than the previous ones, and he now wore a blue hoodie-style sweatshirt with a white 'U' on the lower front of the shirt. It also had a bright yellow line running all along the bottom of it and dark blue sleeves. Ash's usual fingerless gloves were now black. In front of his shirt hung the necklace with the Latias and Latios figurines that Latias had given him all the way back in Alto Mare. He took his old cap off and looked at it for a moment. "I'll miss it... a lot..." he said sadly. To his dismay, the change of clothes also came with a change of hat.

Everyone laughed. "*But you have a new one,*" Latios reminded him, pointing to the new one sitting on the table.

"But this is an Official Pokémon League Expo hat! I sent over a million postcards in to get it!" Ash argued. "It's absolutely irreplaceable!"

"Dear, that model is from two years ago. This is this year's model," Delia informed him, knowing that would do the trick.

Ash looked astonished. "Really? Did you send a million postcards to get it?" he asked, clearly shocked at the prospect, wondering how his mother had the patience to fill out over a million postcards. Ash had spent months filling and sending them.

"Nope, I just had to send one," Delia answered offhandedly.

Ash's jaw dropped in awe. "H-h-how!" he stuttered. She had to send just one postcard to get a hat while he had to send over a million!

"Well, my postcard didn't have the *terrible* grammar and spelling mistakes your million postcards had, and the Pokémon League had special consideration of it because they know you're a trainer with a Legendary Pokémon," Delia answered. Ash scratched the back of his head Mareepishly. His writing wasn't that bad, was it?

" Yes, *it is*," Latios said flatly in his mind, causing Ash to yelp in surprise.

" *And you know it*," Latias finished before he could protest. Ash groaned and decided to not argue a lost cause, not that he had a chance to fight back if he tried.

Ash looked at the new hat on the table skeptically. It was red with a dark blue front and an upside down green Pokéball design. Ash looked at his old hat sadly. "But... this hat has so many memories..." he muttered, a far-off look into his reddish eyes. An annoyed look crossed his face as the only adventure that came to his mind was Mankey and later Primeape beating him to a pulp over that hat. Why was that the only adventure in his mind? Probably because Latias was messing with his memories.

"Hey!" Ash yelled.

" *Sorry, I couldn't resist,*" Latias apologized, though it was clear this was one of her common pranks as evidenced by the fact that she seemed to be holding back fits of giggling.

"Oh, just put it on already and stop whining," Pikachu muttered.

Latias' eyes glowed as she psychically grabbed the new hat and put it on Ash's head. "*Done,*" she said, smiling joyfully.

"Hey!" Ash said, crossing his arms. "That's not fair!"

" *Yes it is,*" Latias countered, giggling softly.

"Hey, it doesn't look that bad, Ash," Delia noted, admiring it. "I think the more extensive blue coloring of the shirt and the redder cap looks great. They also match your red eyes better," she commented. Ash blushed.

" *Yeah, you look great! Red cap and blue shirt really does bring out your eyes,*" Latias agreed, causing Ash to blush at the praise.

"Why are girls always looking at the fashion sense of everything?" Ash asked.

"It's a girl thing," Delia answered.

"Okay..." Ash muttered, not sure what 'girl thing' meant in this situation. He looked at the hat in his hands yet again. "I will miss it..." he muttered... again. Before he had a chance to keep admiring it, Mimey snatched it from his hands. "Hey! Where are you taking it?"

"I'm going to display it with your trophies..." the Psychic-Type informed him. He looked at the hat and did a double take. "But first I'll wash it," Mimey mumbled before heading out of the room.

"And you also get a new backpack," Delia announced, holding out a compact green backpack. "It's already filled with everything you'll need."

"Thanks a lot mom," Ash said as he took the backpack. "I really like it!"

"At least you aren't complaining about the backpack as much as the hat," Pikachu commented.

"Well, I didn't have to send a million postcards in to get it..." Ash responded. He opened it to check the contents, only to blush and close it immediately. His Pokémon tilted their heads, wondering what was up.

"As you noticed, aside from all the stuff you may need, I also packed several extra pairs of clean underwear. Don't forget to change it everyday!" Delia reminded Ash in a happy tone. Latias, Latios and Pikachu snorted as they tried to contain their laughter. Sadly, they failed and started laughing hysterically. Ash blushed a deeper shade of red from the embarrassment.

"Mom! You're embarrassing me!" Ash whined, knowing that this was going to become another topic for his Pokémon to rag him about. "If you three mess with me for this... please don't do it in public..." he pleaded.

"Ash... the general public can't understand us," Pikachu reminded him. Ash groaned in despair.

"I don't care, no matter how old you get, you'll always be my cute little baby boy," Delia said lovingly, walking to Ash and hugging him tightly. Ash hugged his mother back.

Latias, Latios and Pikachu 'awed' at the family scene. "I want a family hug too!" Latias squealed happily, and before Latios could react, she threw herself on him. "Hug brother!" Latios chuckled at her antics and hugged her back.

Delia smiled and parted from Ash. "Take care dear," she said, her voice filled with worry.

Ash grinned. "I'll be fine! Don't worry. It's my third region, so I'm not a newbie by now."

"You still act like one," Pikachu commented, chuckling. Ash wisely ignored him.

"Sorry, I can't help it. I'm nervous that you're going to a new region alone, with no friends this time..." Delia muttered sadly.

"No friends? What are we, chopped liver?" Latios muttered.

"I wouldn't like to be chopped liver, that sounds painful," Latias said, causing her brother to sweatdrop.

Ash smiled at Delia reassuringly. "Brock said that maybe he'll rejoin us later."

"I'm still worried," Delia said, a concerned expression on her face.

"Don't worry, I have my Pokémon, they'll take care of me," Ash assured.

"Ah, now they mention us," Latios said. "About time."

Delia glanced at the eon dragons and Pikachu, smiling softly. She didn't doubt their devotion to Ash in the slightest, and they were all very strong. She walked up to them and glanced specifically at Latios, who she knew was currently Ash's strongest Pokémon, and the reason why other trainers might mess with him in the first place. "Latios, promise me you aren't going to let my little boy get hurt," she said firmly.

Latios smiled at her and nodded, giving a low bow. *"I promise on my honor as a Legendary Pokémon I will not let any harm befall Ash. You have my word."*

"And I promise too!" Pikachu said, smiling proudly.

Latios chuckled. *"Pikachu says he promises that too."*

" *Me too!*" Latias added.

"See mom, there's nothing to worry about," Ash assured Delia, smiling at his Pokémon, silently thanking them.

"Okay," Delia agreed, feeling somewhat relieved.

"Since you aren't letting me get hurt, does that mean I can do all kinds of stuff with no worries since you'll be there to protect me?" Ash wondered, glancing at Latios.

Latios grimaced at the idea. "*Hell no! If you start doing silly antics and expect me to bail you out of them all the time, I'm putting a psychic leash on you!*"

Ash's jaw dropped in terror. "You wouldn't dare!" He exclaimed, utterly horrified at the idea.

" *Try me,*" Latios dared.

"But I'm the trainer!" Ash argued.

" *Am I supposed to care?*" Latios countered, grinning.

"Okay, okay I'll behave," Ash said quickly, giving in since he knew that arguing with a Legendary Pokémon was probably not a good idea. Latios laughed. Everyone else chuckled in amusement. Delia smiled, clearly happy not only about Latios protecting Ash because of the promise he made, but also because he and Ash were very close friends.

"Anyway," Delia started, attracting all the attention. "Like before I packed up things you might need for your journey in your backpack. Like maps. Lots of maps. Though I'm not sure how useful they'll be if you never actually read them." Ash sweatdropped and his Pokémon snickered. "And here are your tickets to go to Alto Mare, and from Alto Mare to Little Root Town," she finished, handing Ash two tickets. "Your ship leaves in two hours."

" *Hey, the ticket from Alto Mare has pictures of us printed in it!*" Latios commented excitedly.

" *Awesome!*" Latias agreed.

"Hehe, it certainly looks good," Ash agreed.

" *Thankfully Pokémon don't have to pay a traveling fee,*" Latias commented.

" *Even if Pokémon had to pay, we could turn invisible and go for free anyways,*" Latios said.

"How long did you say it'd take us to reach Vermillion, Latios?" Ash asked.

" *About forty-five minutes at a moderate speed. It's not that long of a flight,*" he answered.

"Okay," Ash acknowledged. "I'll go to the professor's lab to say my goodbyes before taking flight to Vermilion."

"Alright Ash," Delia said with teary eyes. "Goodbye, and take care on your new journey."

"Goodbye mom," Ash said, hugging her once more.

"Win the league dear, and take care... goodbye! And... and... Waaaaahhhh!" Delia cried, bursting into tears at the sad departure.

Ash smiled sweetly. "Don't worry mom, I'll be fine," he assured her yet again, comforting his mother. They parted with a smile. Ash walked to the exit, his Pokémon beside him. He turned back to Delia before departing. "Wish me luck!"

"Of course I will, dear," Delia said, a proud tone in her voice. *'Make your dreams finally come true and win the league... I know you can!'* she thought to herself, hoping that her son would manage to finally win and not feel the disappointment of losing again.

"Don't worry, mom, my dreams will become reality thanks to Latios! The next time you see me, I'll be the winner of the Hoenn League!" Ash said happily. "Until then... bye, mom!" He gave her one last quick hug, turned to the exit and walked out of the house, Delia blinked in confusion.

Delia closed the door behind him, biting her lip hard and doing her best not to cry. "Oh, Ash..."

"Good riddance," Mimey muttered to himself. "Now I don't have to clean up after him anymore." He smiled sinisterly. "Plus... I have Delia all to myself! Muwahahahaha!"

"Mimey, this is a sad occasion! Ash is gone and it's just you and me again! Now is not the time to laugh!" Delia scolded, completely unaware of the clown's true thoughts now that Latios and Latias were gone.

"Er, yes, of course," Mimey said, assuming a sorrowful expression... while smiling on the inside.

"Now go and clean something!" Delia scolded again. Mimey nodded sadly and walked away. Typical jealous Pokémon...

...

An uneventful five-minute walk later, Ash and his Pokémon reached Professor Oak's lab.

"Hello!" Ash called, knocking on the door several times. "Professor, are you there?"

Professor Oak opened the door. "Oh, hi Ash." He gasped. "Wait a second... Ash? Shouldn't you be going to Vermillion already! You'll be late for your ship!"

"No I won't," Ash responded. "Latios will take me to Vermillion, I'll get there in time."

"Ah, right," Professor Oak muttered. "So, what brings you here?" he asked.

"I just came to say goodbye," Ash said, smiling at the professor.

"If I recall, you departed to the Orange Islands without saying goodbye, and you did the same thing when you went to Johto," Professor Oak deadpanned.

"Er, sorry about that... I don't want it to happen again!" Ash said, scratching his head Mareepishly.

"It's good that you came by, actually. I forgot to update your PokéDex with the information on Hoenn Pokémon," the professor said.

"The only entries mine has are of Latias and Latias, correct?" Ash asked.

"Yeah, only those two. I can't believe I forgot to tell you sooner..." the professor muttered. "Not that it'd change a thing, you could have still gotten the update from professor Birch."

"Well, here," Ash said, handing over his PokéDex. Oak took it and walked to a computer that was on a desk nearby and plugged a cord into the small machine.

" *Why do you even need that? Latias and I can tell you nearly anything you need to know about other Pokémon,*" Latios asked telepathically.

"It's for reference, just in case," Ash answered. "And I happen to like my PokéDex."

"It called you stupid on your first day as a trainer," Pikachu reminded him. Ash bristled while Latias and Latios laughed. Professor Oak looked at them oddly, since he hadn't understood what Pikachu had said.

"It didn't say me in particular!" Ash countered.

"No, but we both knew it was literally screaming that to you," Pikachu replied, a smug smile tugging at his lips. "It said, and I quote, 'Rattata often leave their habitat to steal food from stupid travelers.'" Ash fumed. How could Pikachu remember that so well after all this time?

"You know Ash; it's really weird to see you talking to Pokémon so openly. How do you understand their words?" Professor Oak asked. "All I hear is Pikachu saying his name a lot."

"I hear the same thing you hear," Ash answered. "The difference is that I can somehow make words and sentences out of his speech patterns, same for all Pokémon. Even I don't know how it works yet..."

"That's really interesting," the professor noted. "I wonder if I can replicate that..."

"*Considering how Ash got his gift of Poke-speech, I doubt you can replicate it,*" Latios commented. Professor Oak moaned in disappointment.

The computer beeped. "Update completed," it said on a mechanical voice. Professor Oak unplugged the cord and handed the PokéDex to Ash.

"There, it's updated with information on all the Pokémon from Hoenn," Professor Oak said.

"Thanks," Ash said, grinning as he took the PokéDex.

"You're welcome Ash," Professor Oak replied, smiling at the young Pokémon trainer.

"Hey, where's Gary? I want to say bye too to him," Ash asked.

"He left an hour ago for Viridian City. He wanted to check up on some things before he starts his new work as a Pokémon

researcher," Professor Oak informed him.

"Aww, I really wanted to say goodbye," Ash muttered. "Well, I'll try to catch up with him before going to Vermillion." Ash turned to the door. "Thanks, Professor! I'll make sure to call from Hoenn every once in a while."

"Before you go... Latios!" Professor Oak began, causing the eon dragon to turn to look at him. "Please, can I have a feather! I really want one! It'd be a wonderful opportunity to study a feather that can turn invisible!"

Latios rolled his eyes. *"You aren't leaving me alone about that, right?"*

"Just one!" Professor Oak pleaded. "Considering the dimensions of your body and the apparent size of your feathers, you could have thousands! One won't hurt..."

"Go ahead Latios, it's just a feather," Pikachu commented. "I doubt it affects you in any way."

"*Alright,*" Latios conceded, causing the professor to grin happily. His eyes glowed as he plucked a random blue feather from his neck and levitated it to Oak's outstretched hand.

"Wow, its smaller than I thought," Oak muttered, looking at the relatively tiny feather in his hand. "Can I have a white one too?" he asked. Latios' eye twitched. "What! The coloring of the feather may affect the way it manipulates light to turn invisible!" he said quickly.

"*Ugh, fine,*" Latios said as he psychically removed another feather, a grayish white one this time, and handed it to the professor.

"And a red one," The professor said. Before Latios could say anything he continued. "Difference of colors!" he argued. Latios's eye twitched.

Latias giggled and handed him one of her reddish feathers psychically. *"There."*

Professor Oak blinked. "You didn't put up a fight..."

" Well, I don't really mind. If you had asked me in the first place, I would have said yes the first time," Latias told him, smiling.

Professor Oak facefaulted. "I really should have asked you first instead of Latios..."

" Yep, you should have, I'm not a grouch like my brother," Latias said. Latios glared in annoyance at her as everyone else laughed. Latias put a really sweet face and looked at him, and Latios found himself unable to stay angry.

Professor Oak looked at the three small feathers in his palm. "Finally!"

Ash laughed. "Yep, finally."

Professor Oak walked to one of the desks and took out a small glass container. "Don't want them to get contaminated," he muttered, giddy that he had something new to study. He carefully placed the feathers in the container and walked back to the group. "Thank you Latias, Latios."

" No problem," Latias said, smiling.

"Well Ash, I wish you the best of luck in the Hoenn League," Professor Oak told the trainer. "Make Pallet Town famous!"

"Thanks, and don't worry, I will!" Ash promised. "Bye! Tell Tracey I say goodbye too!"

"I will," Professor Oak said. With that Ash walked out of the lab and started running in the direction he remembered Viridian City was, wanting to catch up to Gary.

"Ash, what's the hurry?" Pikachu asked, almost getting knocked off his shoulder from the running.

"I need to cover the distance Gary has walked in this hour!" Ash answered. Pikachu facepalmed.

"When do you think he'll realize he has two dragons that can fly faster than the speed of sound that could take him there in a flash?" Latias asked her brother.

"In about half an hour when he drops from exhaustion and realizes he hasn't covered much distance... and that Viridian City isn't even in that direction..." Latios answered, stifling a laugh.

"Brother..." Latias began, an almost scolding tone in her voice.

"Oh, alright, I'll spare him the waste of time and the tiredness..." Latios conceded, Latias smiled and nodded approvingly.

Latios floated up to the running Ash and levitated him up and onto his back. "Hey!" Ash protested.

"You do realize that Viridian city is *not* that way right?" Latios asked, shaking his head in amusement. "And that you aren't going to reach Gary in time."

Ash blushed in embarrassment, sulking. "Alright, you lead the way," he said, embarrassed by his poor navigation skills. Latios chuckled and took off in the right direction to Viridian.

"One day you'll be jealous of my navigating skills..." Ash muttered. His Pokémon all stifled laughs. Ash grunted in annoyance.

After a few minutes of flying, they quickly closed in on the other Pallet Town trainer, seeing him on the road off in the distance. Pikachu stiffened when he saw that Gary's Umbreon was walking at his side. "Damn... why is she out of her Pokeball *now* of all times!" he groaned, sinking on Ash's shoulder in despair.

"Because you two are fated to battle," Ash responded jokingly. Everyone stared at him. "What? That joke sounded a lot better in my head..."

"Actually, I heard it in your head too, and even there it sounded terrible," Latios deadpanned. "Pikachu, if you want to get her off your back, let her beat you up."

"No! She'll get *angrier* if that happens because she wants to fight me at full power!" Pikachu replied, horrified at what she might do to him if he let her win.

Latios considered this. "Who knows, maybe there's another reason she wants to fight you alone," he commented, grinning.

"Which might be..." Pikachu trailed off, having a bad feeling about the Dragon's next comment.

"She just might be into you," Latios concluded, nodding to himself in approval. Not a second later Pikachu shocked him (and Ash, who was unfortunately riding atop Latios too) with several hundred volts of electricity.

"Not a chance!" Pikachu yelled, shaking his head rapidly.

"How cuuute!" Latias remarked. "Denial is kicking in!" Pikachu's eye twitched in annoyance.

"Ow... was that necessary?" Ash moaned.

"Yes, it was. Sorry, you were collateral damage," Pikachu told his trainer apologetically.

"I'll get you for that," Latios growled. Even with his Dragon-Typing, he had to admit Pikachu's zaps hurt. "But, that doesn't take away the fact that she said she wanted to fight you alone."

Pikachu shook his head rapidly. "That's not it! She just wants to fight me alone because that way Ash won't see through her attacks with

the powers he got from *you* ."

"It's still *alooooooooone*," Latios repeated, drawing the word out and stifling giggles. Pikachu's cheeks sparkled dangerously. "I just wonder if with all this denial, Pikachu is also into *her*..." he commented slowly. Pikachu stared at him in utter terror, gawking in disbelief.

"And I can confirm it... remember, I can sense emotions and the feelings of others..." Latias followed, grinning all too sweetly at the Electric-Type. Pikachu flushed in embarrassment and sunk into Ash's shoulder.

"I'm not!" he yelled. Latias smirked and pretended to ignore him. He grinned a second later, getting an idea on how to keep the dragoness quiet just in case she sensed something. "Oh Latias, I don't need any fancy senses to know who *your* little love interest is, so I think we have a fair deal... unless you want me to tell him..." he told her, smiling devilishly.

Latias blushed and looked away. "Deal," she said quickly. "Don't say a word and I won't say a word, either psychically or verbally." Pikachu nodded in satisfaction. Latios had to suppress a laugh, earning himself a mental glare from Latias.

"Can we go down already?" Ash asked in exasperation. Despite understanding every word they said, the terms they were using seemed too alien for him to hope to comprehend so he wisely decided not to ask.

"Yes please! At this rate I'd rather face Umbreon than you two!" Pikachu pleaded loudly. Latios laughed and glided downwards, followed by a giggling Latias.

"Hi!" Ash called as he neared the ground, causing Gary to turn around, mildly surprised to see Latias and Latios hovering towards him with Ash on Latios' back.

"Heh, already exploiting the convenient transport advantages Latios gives?" Gary chuckled.

"Yeah, I guess I am," Ash answered, hopping off the eon dragon's back. "I try to avoid that since I prefer walking, but for emergencies he's great."

Umbreon looked at Ash and blinked in confusion. Pikachu wasn't on his shoulder. How odd. She shrugged and walked up the eon duo while Ash walked up to Gary. "So, what brings you here?" Gary asked.

"I just wanted to wish you luck on your journey," Ash answered.

"You came all the way here just to say that?" Gary asked in surprise.

Ash laughed. "Well, I do happen to have that 'convenient transport advantage' so it's not that big deal. I was going to talk to you at Oak's but you weren't around."

While the humans talked, Umbreon was making her demands known. "Where is he?" she asked.

Latios shrugged and did a barrel roll, causing Pikachu, who had been trying to hide on the Dragon's back, to fall off him and land in front of Umbreon. She grinned, looming over him. "Hello there," she said.

"Hello," Pikachu said nervously, standing up and taking a few steps back.

"Oh don't worry, I can't fight you now... lucky for you..." she grumbled.

"Really?" Pikachu asked hopefully.

"Yeah, Gary decided to only take me and Blastoise with him for now, and since we're going to be in this forest until we reach Viridian, I need to preserve my strength in case some silly wild Pokémon

decides to mess with us," Umbreon explained, shaking her head unhappily. "Not that they'd be too troublesome, I could beat them easily, but you know how humans can get."

Pikachu sighed in relief. "Thankfully," he muttered.

"But that doesn't mean you're off the hook!" Umbreon snapped, causing Pikachu to fall back in surprise. "You better train hard, because when you get back from Hoenn, or if we meet along the way, we're having our battle. I'll be ready, despite Gary leaving the battle circuit."

"Alright," Pikachu said, giving in. At least the fight was put on hold for now.

She smirked. "See you until then," Umbreon said as she turned and walked back to Gary's side.

" *Looks like you got yourself a date,*" Latios teased. A vein throbbed on Pikachu's forehead.

"Why did you have to roll over and expose me? I was perfectly safe hidden on your back," Pikachu said angrily.

"Nah, if she discovered I was hiding you, she'd use Faint Attack on me! Or worse..." Latios protested. "So I exposed you... not that I really mind." Pikachu growled as his cheeks sparked.

Meanwhile the human's were finishing their own conversation. "So Gary, I wish you the best of luck on becoming a researcher!" Ash said, grinning broadly.

"And I wish you the same in the Hoenn League!" Gary said. "Try not to mess up or do your usual silly antics."

"I won't..." Ash answered, chuckling. "So, where are you going now?"

"I'm heading to check on something in Viridian, and after that I'll return to Gramps' place to start learning how to be a researcher," Gary explain. "My new goal is to be the greatest Pokémon Professor of all time!"

"Wow, awesome!" Ash commented.

"Of course it's awesome!" Gary agreed proudly.

"Well, good luck. I've got to go now, I have to get to Vermillion City to take the ferry," Ash told the other Pallet Towner.

Gary laughed. "Gonna use Latios again?"

Ash nodded. "Yep!"

"Hehe, how convenient..." Gary commented.

"Yep, Well, take care Gary," Ash said as he held his hand out.

Gary smiled and shook it. "You too," he replied. *'And please don't do anything stupid, like you usually do,'* Gary thought, sighing worriedly. He knew very well that Ash tended to get into all sorts of trouble on in his travels... like messing with Legendary Pokémon, for example.

"Hey, I don't do stupid things!" Ash snapped "I think..." Gary blinked in confusion, but before he could say anything a loud cry was heard. Both turned to see Latios recovering from a Thunder attack and Pikachu nodding to himself in approval.

"Hey!" Latios yelled. He was beginning to think that Pikachu zapped so hard his Dragon-Typing didn't help much.

"You've had it coming," Pikachu told him. "You know the reason."

"I'll get you back for that..." Latios muttered.

"Doubt it," Pikachu said confidently.

" *You're defending your love aren't you? That's so cute! That means the denial phase is over!*" Latios commented teasingly, using Telepathy so Umbreon didn't hear him. Pikachu shocked him again, adding a lot more voltage this time. "Owww..." Latios moaned. He grinned again, despite the pain. "*Let's hope you don't take after Ash and aren't as dense as he is...*" He commented teasingly again. Pikachu shocked him *again*, adding at least double the power from last time. "Ow..." Latios moaned weakly.

Latias giggled. "Oh, brother..."

"Why is Pikachu shocking Latios over and over again?" Gary asked, looking at them in confusion.

"I don't have a clue," Ash answered.

"You don't?" Gary said. "I thought you could understand them."

"Yeah, but I haven't been paying attention to their conversation..." Ash said Mareepishly. "Well, I better get going to Vermillion City. Goodbye Gary, see you later... good luck with the research and Pokémon Professor stuff!"

"Haha, well, good luck to you too *Ashy-boy*," Gary replied. "Good luck with the Hoenn League."

Ash smiled. "Thanks Gary." He turned and walked back to his Pokémon as Gary resumed his own walk... and Umbreon shot one last glare towards a certain Electric-Type. Pikachu looked away quickly. Ash looked at Latios. "Ready?" he asked.

"I think," Latios answered, recovering a bit from the constant shocks, he prepared to lower himself to the ground to allow Ash to climb aboard. As he did so, one of Ash's Pokéballs shook slightly and released Pidgeot in a bright flash of light, causing Ash to fall back in surprise.

"Hello!" Pidgeot chirped, bending down and nuzzling ash lovingly, this time minding the beak.

"Err, hi," Ash replied, mildly confused, but nonetheless hugging her to return her affections. *'What's up with her?'* Ash thought, knowing that the eon dragons would pick up the question.

"She's just riding the high of knowing you'll be taking her to Hoenn," Latias answered. *"She'll be back to her normal calm demeanor in a few days."*

'Okay,' Ash thought. "Er, why did you break out of your Pokéball, Pidgeot?" He asked as he stood up, brushing himself off.

"Well, it's been a long time since I've carried you on my back. Since the next flight is a long one, I was wondering if I could take you there," Pidgeot explained, spreading her wings wide to emphasize her point and eagerness to have her trainer flying on her back again. "Don't worry, I'm very fast, as you'll recall from the last time we flew, so we'll get there in no time."

Ash smiled, nodding to the Flying-Type. "Sure, why not?"

Pidgeot would have smiled happily if she could, so she just nodded back. "Thanks!"

"You know the way to Vermillion City?" Ash asked.

Pidgeot nodded. "Of course I do! I've been around these parts a lot, I know them pretty well."

"Alright," Ash told her, reaching up and petting her gently. She lowered herself, spreading her wings wide and beckoning for Ash to get on her back with a light nod. He slowly climbed aboard, accommodating himself like he did the last time.

Pidgeot frowned. "Ash... haven't you grown at all? You weigh practically the same as the last time, and it was over a year ago! Are

you eating well?"

Ash chuckled nervously. "Err... Must be all the walking exercise I do. Besides, remember you've become a stronger flyer since then."

Pidgeot shrugged. "Okay. But try to eat healthy! You really need a growth spurt. At this rate, people will think you're still ten years old for years to come!"

"I do need one... I want to be taller!" Ash agreed.

"You'll grow up sooner or later, don't worry," Latias told him.

"Aww, but I wanna grow now!" Ash complained again.

"Be patient," Latios advised him. "The more anxious you get, the slower it will seem."

"Alright..." Ash muttered, crestfallen.

"Hehe, don't worry Ash, you'll grow up one day," Pikachu assured him, nodding slightly. "Now we better get going." Instead of jumping on Pidgeot, Pikachu hopped on Latios's back, earning a questioning look from him.

"What's up with you?" Latios asked, turning his long and slender neck to look at him.

"In case you make any smart comments and I need to shock you, I'll ride here since Pidgeot wouldn't like a midair shock. You, on the other hand..." Pikachu explained. Latios groaned.

Pidgeot flapped her wings a few times before rising to the air, Latias and Latios following her. She quickly began to rise high to the sky, the eon Dragons right behind her. "It's nice to fly with you without worrying about some bully Fearow," Pidgeot commented.

"Yeah," Ash agreed. "I'm glad he won't be bothering anyone else ever again."

Latias grinned mischievously. It was going to be a long flight so she decided to do something to pass the time. Without warning she tackled Latios and drew back quickly. "Tag! You're it!" She chorused happily. Leave it to Latias to want to play the entire flight to Vermillion. Latios knew that if he said no to her game he'd make her sad, and he'd never want to do that, so he complied and began to chase after her.

"Waaahhh!" Pikachu screamed as he clung to Latios' neck for dear life.

Latios chuckled. *"You wanted to fly on my back didn't you? Deal with it."*

"If I had known Latias was gonna play tag with you I would have ridden with Ash!" Pikachu choked in between screams.

Latios laughed. He was considerate enough to generate a small psychic shield on his back to make sure Pikachu didn't fall off, but the Electric-Type didn't know that. *'Payback for all those shocks...'* Latios thought happily as he chased after Latias, Pikachu screaming and clinging to his back all the way. Ash couldn't help but chuckle in amusement as he watched Latios chase Latias around the sky.

After a forty-five minute flight, they arrived at Vermillion City, seeing the city appear over the horizon. "Finally!" Ash said happily. "It's been a long time since I was last here..."

Latias and Latios returned to his side, seeing that they were nearing the city. "Thanks for playing with me, brother," Latias said, smiling at Latios.

"You're welcome sis," Latios replied, smiling back. "You still alive back there Pikachu?" Latios asked, tilting his head to look at his back.

"Y-yeah..." Pikachu muttered, still clinging to Latios' back from a newly gained fear of heights, or probably extremely high speeds, it

was hard to tell.

"Should we land in the outskirts?" Latios asked, turning to look at Ash.

"No, we can land at the docks. You two turn invisible, I doubt anyone would be surprised to see a trainer arriving on a Pidgeot's back. You'll have to hand Pikachu over, though," Ash said, Latios nodded in agreement and flew beside Pidgeot until his wing was a foot or so away from Ash.

"There, Pikachu, jump over," Latios told him.

Pikachu shook his head rapidly and clung to his neck harder. "No!" he screamed. "I might fall..."

Latios sweatdropped. "When we played in the garden back when we first met, you didn't have any problem jumping between me and Latias," he pointed out.

Pikachu clenched his teeth. "In the garden, we weren't flying hundreds of feet off the ground!"

"I think you went too rough on him, Latios..." Pidgeot commented. "Forty minutes of extremely high speed flying on a Pokémon that can't fly or levitate can be very traumatizing... or thrilling, if you like that sort of thing..."

"Yeah, the first time I flew on his back I was kinda dazed too, but he went slower after a while," Ash recalled.

Latios laughed. "True..." he admitted. His eyes glowed as he levitated Pikachu off his neck and into Ash's arms quickly. "There."

"Hey buddy," Ash greeted.

"Finally back home..." Pikachu murmured, a dazed tone in his voice. Latios and Latias turned invisible as they neared Vermillion City.

"Head straight to the docks, Pidgeot," Ash ordered. The avian Pokémon nodded.

"I wonder how the crowds would react if you arrived on the docks flying on my brother instead," Latias commented.

"They'd probably freak out," Latios replied, laughing at the prospect.

"Yeah," Ash agreed, laughing as well. "Being able to turn invisible sure is a convenient ability isn't it?"

"Yep," Latias agreed, nodding. "Sometimes it's *too* convenient..."

"How so?" Ash asked.

"... Hmm. Good question," Latias said. They sweatdropped.

They were now slowly closing on the docks of the city. Several ships were anchored in the harbor. Hundreds of people were moving around the place, loading and unloading the boats or embarking and disembarking, depending on the function of the vessel.

Pidgeot landed in a relatively clear spot on the dock. A few people turned to look at them, but they quickly dismissed it as nothing out of the ordinary and resumed their business. Ash hopped off Pidgeot's back. "Finally! Solid ground!" Pikachu cried, feeling a wave of relief wash over him as he jumped out of Ash's arms and started kissing the ground, only to gag and start spitting when he got a good taste of it. Latios had to suppress a laugh.

Ash chuckled. He turned and gave Pidgeot a light hug. "Thanks for the flight."

"You're welcome," Pidgeot chirped happily, bowing low.

Ash smiled and held a Pokéball up. "Pidgeot, return." A red beam shot from the Pokéball and returned Pidgeot inside the sphere. Ash replaced it on his belt and turned to look at all the ships. "So... which one's our ferry?" he asked aloud.

"Look on the ticket, it should say so there," Latios suggested.

"Can't you recall? You looked at it in Pallet Town," Ash replied.

Latios laughed Mareepishly. "I was too distracted by the fact that the ticket had me and my sis on it..."

Ash chuckled and reached for his ticket, which was in his backpack. He quickly found it and held it up to read. "Let's see... the ship for Alto Mare leaves at midday, a ferry called the 'S.S. Great Sea.' What time is it?"

Latios looked at the sun. "It's-"

"Eleven forty," Pikachu cut in.

Latios stared at him in astonishment. The Electric-Type wasn't even remotely as good as him in telling the time with a simple gaze at the sun's position. "How did you know?"

"Because there's a big pillar with a huge clock over there..." Pikachu deadpanned, pointing to a massive clock at the center of the docks, probably placed there to make sure everyone kept track of time and met their schedules. Everyone sweatdropped.

"Brilliant brother..." Latias commented teasingly. Latios flushed in embarrassment.

"Well, we should get on board and get ready to set sail," Ash suggested. He felt the eon twins agree with him mentally and turned to look for a ship that had the same name as the one in the ticket. He found it on one of the side docks. It wasn't as colossal as others, but it wasn't small by any means. On the side of the ship was painted the words 'S.S. Great Sea'.

"Yep, that's our ship," Pikachu said, nodding. "Let's go."

Before Ash could walk over there, a familiar voice interrupted him. "Well, well, well, seems we have a baby on the docks," a deep

masculine voice boomed.

"Ahhhh!" Ash screamed in fright as he turned and saw a colossal human that was probably bigger and had more muscles than a Machoke. Scratch that, not probably, he *was* bigger and stronger. Both Latias and Latios turned quickly, and their jaw dropped in astonishment at the sight of the massive human.

" *The... Hell... he's huge!*" Latios commented.

" *Understatement of the year!*" Latias exclaimed in astonishment. "*Are humans supposed to get that big?*"

"Hahaha!" Lt. Surge laughed. He loved scaring younger trainers. Even if Ash had beaten him long ago, physically he was still a child, though almost everyone was like a child when compared physically to the Vermillion Gym leader.

"Oh, it's you..." Ash muttered once his fright had died down. "Don't do that again!"

"Sorry, couldn't resist," Surge apologized. "Mmhmm, I see your Pikachu hasn't evolved yet, I thought that should have happened already with all the fights he had in the Silver Conference."

Ash blinked. "You watched the Silver Conference?" he asked.

"Of course I did! It's a tradition for Gym Leaders to watch other leagues," Lt. Surge answered. "Just look at the baby I met over two years ago, barely knowing the basics of Pokémon battling... and now you're a kid with a Legendary Pokémon... amazing."

"Thanks," Ash said, happy to be recognized "At least I'm less of a baby than back then... right?"

"Yeah, just don't let that go to your head," Lt. Surge warned him.

Ash laughed. "I won't."

"So, which region are you going to now?" Lt. Surge asked.

"I'm heading for Hoenn, that's where I'll be competing next," Ash answered.

"Hoenn eh, that's an interesting place," the Vermillion Gym Leader agreed. "I wish you the best of luck, kid."

Ash smiled. "Thanks, Surge... and please stop spooking people and beating up helpless beginner trainers."

Lt. Surge laughed. "No way kid. The first two Gyms usually go easy, I like to give trainers a taste of reality and burst their little I-am-unbeatable bubbles that they get when they start out. I like to show them what being a trainer *really* means. Didn't that help when I did it to you?"

Ash found himself agreeing, especially since the badge he got from Lt. Surge was the first one he won in a real battle. The first two he had won were from helping and proving to be a good trainer to Brock and Misty despite his pathetic performance in his battles against them.

" *No, you won them out of pity and you know it,*" Latios said flatly in his mind.

' *Hey! You don't know that for sure!*' Ash argued, thinking his response so the Electric-Type Gym leader didn't hear it.

" *I'm a Psychic, of course I know it for sure,*" Latios answered.

Thankfully, the voice of the dock's Port Authority over the main speakers saved Ash from further painful truths. "All passengers for the S.S. Great Sea with Alto Mare as their destination please board the ferry, it will be leaving in ten minutes," a female voice boomed.

"That's my ship," Ash said, feeling relieved, though he just *knew* Latios was smirking at him. "Well, it was nice talking to you again.

Bye, Lt. Surge!" Ash said as he turned towards the ship.

"Alright kid, smash those Hoenn Gyms apart!" Lt. Surge cheered.
"Oh, and give my old pal Wattson my best wishes when you get to Mauville Gym, we go way back!"

"Sure, no problem!" Ash said as he neared the ship. He began walking up the boarding ramp along with several other passengers. When he reached the top a guard stopped him.

"Ticket please," the guard said. Ash handed him the ticket. The guard spared it one quick look before he ripped part of it and pocketed it, returning the rest to Ash. "Enjoy the trip."

"Thanks," Ash said as he walked inside the ship. "Neat," he commented, looking around the interior of the very impressive ship. It looked even fancier than the last big ship he was on, the S.S. Anne. He shivered when he recalled that doomed voyage.

"It's not a good idea to think of a ship that sunk while you are in another one," Latias told him.

"I agree..." Pikachu muttered, getting the same feeling.

"Well, let's go look around" Ash suggested brightly. He paused, an idea occurring to him. "Let's go to the restaurant!" He said as he took off running, his Pokémon following him, not the least bit surprised that the first place he wanted to go to was where he could get something to eat.

Meanwhile...

"There, the twerp boarded the ship already," Jessie announced, holding her binoculars as she looked at the ship. "There's a small cargo door there, we should be able to sneak in easily."

"Hm, we should move quickly, the Gym Leader is in the area," James grumbled, easily spotting the towering figure moving through

the crowds.

"We oughta be careful... once we sneak on the ship, we can do something ta get close ta da twerp and steal his Pokémon!" Meowth said, smirking.

They nodded to each other. "When do we go? It'll set sail any minu-" Jessie started.

The ship's horn sounded off as the ship began to move out of the dock, setting out towards the sea. The trio looked at each other dumbly. "After it!" Jessie shouted as the trio ran towards the dock as she ship edged away from it. "Hurry! We have to stow away on that ship!"

"Huh?" Several dock security staff said at the same time as they heard that and turned towards the source of the shout. Several silent seconds passed in which no one moved.

"AFTER THEM!" The security chief roared, and about twenty or so guards began chasing the Team Rocket trio towards the edge of the dock to stop them from getting on the ship, but, with their stupidity and luck on their side, we all know they were going to succeed and elude the guards and stow away on the ship, right? How would they do this? You decide.

Meanwhile...

"Where is the restaurant?" Ash whined in despair as he got hopelessly lost inside the large ferry.

"You could ask one of the staff," Pikachu suggested.

"True..." Ash agreed after a moment's thought.

"Hey..." a voice said. Ash blinked and looked around. "Hey, you," the voice said again. Ash turned and saw a weird guy behind a wooden sales stand nearby.

"Err, what?" Ash asked, clearly confused.

"Check this out, its perfect if you want to be rich!" the man said, Ash walked closer to the stand. He reached from under his wooden counter and pulled out... a golden Pidgey?

"A golden Pidgey?" Ash asked, astonished over the odd coloration.

"Yes... you see, this Pidgey is special, it can lay eggs made of gold! If you sell them every time it lays an egg, you'll be rich! You'll be getting a nice healthy income from Golden Eggs alone!" The Salesman informed him. "It's very expensive for that reason, but for you I'm happy to make a special one-time discount. What do you say?"

Latios snorted. *'No one is stupid enough to fall for that cheap trick,'* he thought to himself.

'Everyone knows Pidgey can't lay golden eggs,' Latias thought to herself. *'It's obviously some cheap scam...'*

'Ha... eggs made of gold? That's biologically impossible, plus the feathers clearly look painted. Whoever painted that Pidgey did an awful job...' Pikachu thought, chuckling at the stupidity of the scam. *'No one's falling for that...'*

"AWESOME!" Ash commented in pure amazement, his eyes turning into stars over the Pidgey. "That's so cool, I want one!" he said giddily.

Latias, Latios and Pikachu stared at him incredulously and facefaulted. "I can't believe he fell for it..." Pikachu groaned.

"*Ash!*" Latias yelled in his mind, causing him to let a startled yelp. *"That Pidgey is just painted up to look golden!"*

"It's biologically impossible to lay eggs made of gold!" Pikachu yelled at him.

" *He's trying to trick you, you idiot!*" Latios added.

It took Ash a second to process all that. "Hey! You're trying to trick me!" Ash realized.

The salesman paled in utter terror. He quickly packed up his sales stand and Pidgey at a colossal speed, so fast no one could keep track of it. "Gotta go!" The salesman shouted as he ran down the corridor, probably to try to scam someone else.

Ash laughed Mareepishly, rubbing the back of his head in embarrassment. "I messed up a bit..."

You think? Latios said deadpan.

"Let's just go to the dining hall..." Pikachu suggested. He couldn't help but chuckle at what Ash had almost fell for.

"Sorry... it just seemed so real..." Ash apologized.

Latios laughed. "*It's okay, we're here to save you from doing anything too stupid. Gary was right to warn you to be careful. It's a good thing we're here to save your from yourself, right?*"

Ash glowered at him. "I suppose..."

Latias nodded. "*Yep, that's why we're here. Come on, we'll lead you to the dining hall.*"

Ash blinked. "How do you know where it is?" he asked.

" *We can read the minds of the staff, since you're so dead set on not asking...*" Latias answered.

Ash shrugged. "Lead the way then!" he said cheerfully. With that he followed Latias to the restaurant, his stomach growling in happy anticipation.

...

The travel aboard the ship was relatively nice and uneventful, Ash was delighted with the food and the relaxation, and everything else the ferry had to offer was great.

They were rather surprised to see Team Rocket on board as well, but before they could get in a fight, the trio told them they were too busy to bother them right now, leaving Ash confused... until they heard something about James demanding a refund over a Golden Pidgey he'd bought.

Their three days aboard the ferry may have been pleasant, but as the boat docked at Alto Mare's main port, a certain pair found the travel aboard it to be nothing compared to the happiness of seeing their beloved hometown again.

"It seems exactly the same as we left it..." Latios commented, gazing at the island city.

"Yeah," Latias agreed happily. Both of them were looking over the railing of the Ferry as they waited for the boarding ramp to be extended so passengers could get off the ship. They could simply fly into the city, but they decided to wait for Ash, since he'd probably get lost within the first few streets of the city without them to hold his hand.

"We have arrived at the island city of Alto Mare," the ship's captain informed everyone over the speakers. "All passenger may now take the ramp down to the city."

As the boarding ramp finished being set into the dock, the passengers gradually started to leave the ship and disappear into the city. Ash was among their number. After he was on solid land, Latias and Latios smiled as they flew off the ship, looking at their surroundings. "It's still as pretty as ever," Latios said, looking around.

"I feel so nostalgic..." Latias commented. "But the city does feel... different."

"Sensing more power around us? That's dad's power, flowing through the canals of the city, watching over and protecting the people who live here," Latios told her.

"Yeah, it's really neat," she responded. "So, where should we go to first? Bianca's place or the Secret Garden?"

"Let's go to the garden, I'm eager to check on it," Latios suggested. "After that we can go to Bianca's and see how she's doing."

"Alright," Latias said, nodding. Both dragons began to fly towards the nearest entrance to the Secret Garden. They did so at a relatively moderate pace so Ash could follow them without falling back. Since they were invisible, he retorted to his other senses to follow their movements.

After a few minutes of walking they turned into an alley, and then into another. After a series of turns, they stopped and stared into one of the nondescript walls on the side of the alley. "Here," Latios said. "This is an entrance to the garden." He flew threw it.

Ash walked forward and looked in wonder as his body passed through the wall effortlessly. It had been a while since he saw the illusions. "Neat," Pikachu commented, glancing back as the illusion shimmered back into place.

Latias and Latios dropped their invisibility as they entered the garden, smiling as they took in the unforgettable scents and views of the place they had grown up in, the place they had called home for over a hundred years.

Despite their absence for several months, the garden was still very pretty and well-tended. All the statues had been kept neatly clean and polished, the plants were neatly trimmed and in full bloom, and the water as pure and clear as it had always been. "Bianca's done a good job keeping the garden tidy for us while we were away," Latias commented.

"Yeah," Latios agreed.

They flew to the main pedestal where the Soul Dew was placed, Ash trailing after them. They all peered down at it once they arrived at its resting place. The Soul Dew emitted a small pulse of light, almost like it was delighted to see them again. "Hiya dad!" Latias said cheerfully.

"Wow, it's as bright as ever," Ash commented, seeing it shining brilliantly.

"Yep," Latios agreed, smiling, clearly content with his home's condition.

Ash looked up at the open skies above the garden. "Hey, does this place have a roof... or an illusion of one?" Everyone sweatdropped.

"You remembered that?" Latias asked, surprised.

"I was really curious on the matter," Ash said, glancing at her.

"Now that I think about it, who was the one that placed the illusions in the Secret Garden in the first place?" Pikachu asked.

"Well, according to what Lorenzo and his father has told us way back when we were young, our dad made them," Latios answered.

"Apparently, when my father moved the entire ocean to make Alto Mare an island and save it from that evil trainer way back then, he wanted to make sure we had a safe haven within the city when we hatched. Using what last bits of power and life he had left, he created the Secret Garden and placed all the illusions to protect it," Latios told them. The Soul Dew seemed to agree with this and it pulsed lightly, sending small motes of light rippling across the water. Latios chuckled. "Guess that confirms it."

"Interesting," Pikachu muttered. "So Latios, as a species, can make illusions?"

Latios nodded. "Yes, we do have some skill for it. Just look at how much illusions my dad made, and they're so powerful they've lasted for over a hundred years, though I suppose the Soul Dew is what's maintaining them."

"Wow," Ash commented, clearly astounded. "Can you make them too?"

"As I am now? No, it takes a lot of knowledge and training to make illusions as advanced as my dad's. Me and my sis only know some basic stuff, like our human disguises and how to become invisible. We still have a long way to go to become true illusionists," Latios answered.

"I see..." Ash murmured.

"Well, now that we've seen everything's fine here, we should go and see Bianca," Latias suggested. "We'll come back here later, we have two days to hang out, after all."

Ash nodded. "Sure, lead the way!"

Latias bent down and gave a small kiss to the Soul Dew, silently thanking the soul that resided within for everything. It resonated with the feeling and pulsed slightly, like it wanted to return the affection. She pulled back and dried her face feathers with a quick psychic pulse before floating to one of the exits, the others following her. She grinned, and in a bright shower of blue sparkles assumed Bianca's form. "It's been a while since I disguised myself," she commented.

"Yeah, wanna surprise Bianca?" Pikachu asked, Latias nodded.

"Just don't go off running," Ash told her.

Latias smiled. "*I won't*," she said telepathically. Unsurprisingly, she took off running.

"Wait up!" Ash called to her as he chased after her, trying to keep up. Latios chuckled to himself and followed them quietly.

After lots of running, they arrived at Bianca and Lorenzo's house. Latias turned to look at the panting Ash as he struggled to keep up. "You're... as fast... as ever..." he panted.

Latias mentally giggled . *"I love doing that,"* she told him.

"I don't..." Ash muttered tiredly. Latias knocked on the door.

"Who is it!" a voice asked from inside, followed by the sound of someone approaching the door.

" *Guess who!*" Latias called telepathically.

Bianca eagerly opened the door, a look of pure elation lighting up her face, but before she could voice her greeting, Latias tackle-hugged her playfully, causing both of them to fall to the floor. *"Hi Bianca!"* Latias greeted happily.

"Hi Latias," Bianca greeted once she got her breath back. Latias smiled and got up, allowing Bianca to stand up. "I was wondering when you'd come and visit," she commented. "I wasn't that worried though, I knew you'd come."

"Of course we'd come," Ash said, smiling at her. Once they closed the door, Latias resumed her Pokémon self and Latios dropped his invisibility.

" *Hello Bianca,*" Latios greeted, smiling.

Bianca walked up to him and hugged him. "Hi Latios, how are you? Feeling better after that Semi-final fight?" Bianca asked, looking at him in concern.

" *Yeah, I'm all healed and better now,*" he answered, smiling down at her.

"That's good to hear," she answered. Bianca then glared at Ash, causing him to stiffen in fright. "You better make sure he's not beaten up like that again, you hear me?"

"I will!" Ash said quickly, holding his arms up defensively.

She paused. "Nice new clothes, they look good on you. And hey, they bring out your eyes better," she complimented.

Ash blushed slightly. "Thanks... I've been told that before..."

"Hello everyone," Lorenzo said as he walked down from upstairs, everyone turning to him. "It's good to see you all again."

" *Hi Lorenzo!*" Latias greeted.

" *Hello,*" Latios said. Ash and Pikachu greeted him as well.

"Long time no see," Lorenzo commented. "Congratulations to all of you for your splendid performance in the tournament!"

"Thanks," Ash said gratefully.

" *Yeah, thanks,*" Latios agreed.

"Oh, I just recalled, guess what?" Bianca said excitedly. Both Latias and Latios looked at her. "No mind reading!" she said quickly, causing both dragons to laugh.

" *Well, without looking into your mind to figure out, we can't really guess,*" Latias said.

"Well, I talked it out with my grandpa, and I've decided that I'm going with you to Hoenn!" She said excitedly. "I want to start painting new Pokémon, and what better way to do that than to travel around in a new region, and I could go with Ash so I can stay safe and hang out with you guys," she said.

Latias grinned happily. "*Awesome!*"

Latios smiled too. *"That's great, Bianca."*

"Yeah, it'd be great to have you!" Ash agreed, relieved he wouldn't be the only human of the group after all.

"Wow, and you didn't even have to destroy her bike to get her to join you, too," Pikachu commented, causing Ash to sweatdrop

"I know," Bianca replied with a smile. "The only thing I'm uncertain of is if the garden will be okay with just Grandpa to take care of it."

"The garden will be fine," Latios assured her. "The Soul Dew's power helps it brim with life. Besides, me and Latias can ask the local Pokémon that spend their time in the garden to help care for it. With us being Legendaries, I'm sure they'll agree.. But what about you, Lorenzo? Will you be fine all alone?"

"Don't worry Latios, I'll be fine. My job at the museum and the gondola workshop will keep me busy. Besides, seeing how happy Bianca is over the prospect of traveling is all that I need to keep me motivated," Lorenzo answered.

"Thanks grandpa," Bianca said gratefully, glad to be given the chance to travel.

Latias hovered over to Bianca and hugged her. "Yay! No sad good-byes!"

Bianca laughed. "Yep, no good-byes."

"So, do you already have your ticket for Hoenn?" Ash asked.

"No, I wanted to wait to know which ship you were going to board," Bianca answered.

"Alright then, let's go and get one for you," Ash suggested. "After that we can hang around the city, I'm sure that'll delight Latias and Latios."

" Yes, *it will*," Latios agreed, nodding happily at the idea.

"Then let's go!" Ash said cheerfully, glad that it seemed he'd have a new traveling companion. With that the group set out yet again, all of Alto Mare open to them.

Two days later...

After two days of nonstop fun around the scenic city of Alto Mare, the big day for Ash had finally come. The day he was boarding the ferry that would take him and his friends to Hoenn. It had been a nice stay and a good break before he returned to the hard and arduous work of being a Pokémon trainer, and a part of Ash was actually sad to leave, but he knew it was time to continue his journey. They were waiting in the Alto Mare harbor for the ship they were taking, a massive cruise ship called the 'S.S. Blue Star,' to lower the boarding ramp to allow all passengers to embark on the ship.

Ash was acting like he was on a sugar high, barely able to contain the excitement of going to a new region. Bianca was also excited that she would be getting the chance to see a brand-new region. "Finally! It's almost time to go to Hoenn! Just a few minutes!" Ash commented eagerly. Pikachu, Latias and Latios smiled, none of them wanting to point out that it would take almost four to five days for the ship to reach Hoenn. Well, Latios wanted to, but Latias wouldn't let him.

In the meantime, hidden behind some cargo crates... "There's the twerps!" Jessie hissed. "This time, no Salesman is going to stop us from attacking him and getting his Pokémon!"

"Which reminds me, I have to get back at that guy! What am I supposed to do with a Pidgey!" James said angrily, holding a Pokéball containing a common Pidgey that a few days ago had gold paint on its feathers. "First he tricks me with a Magikarp, and now a Pidgey!"

"Well, it's one Pokémon more to fight the twerps," Jessie commented.

"Jessie, dat Pidgey is still a kiddie, you can't pit him against Latios!" Meowth told her worriedly.

Jessie glared at him. "How about you fight Latios, then" she suggested.

Meowth paled in terror. "N-no thanks! I'd rather fight Pikachu!" he said quickly, terrified at the prospect of fighting a Legendary Pokémon, who knew what Latios would do to him in a real battle.

"Let's stow inside the ship. This time we must make sure we aren't stopped, eluding the guards might be more difficult here..." James grumbled. They nodded to each other and started planning how to infiltrate the S.S. Blue Star.

They were unaware that just as they were watching Ash, someone else was watching *them* through a pair of binoculars...

"Yes!" the Magikarp Salesman said happily. "It's those idiots again! Time to prepare a new scam! Oh, I'm going to make so much money off those knuckleheads!" With that, he followed the Rocket trio to stow away on the ship as well.

"All passengers traveling in the S.S. Blue Star to Littleroot Town, please board the ship," the dock speakers said as the ship lowered its ramp to start allowing people in.

Ash and Bianca walked to it, followed by the invisible eon dragons. "Tickets please," the ramp guard said. Ash and Bianca handed him their tickets. He ripped part of them off and pocked it, and returned the stubs to Bianca and Ash. "Have a nice trip," he said. They nodded and walked up the ramp into the ship.

"Finally!" Ash shouted enthusiastically. "Prepare yourself Hoenn Gym Leaders and League, because trainer Ash Ketchum's coming

for you! The Hoenn League... will be mine!"

And finally done! I have finished A New Chance At Life! =D Amazing isn't it?

Well, writing this Fanfic for all of you my dear readers was certainly a delight to me. Now comes the sequel. I'm sorry to tell you all that it'll take me a while to post it since I have to plan it and all that. I don't know when exactly I'll be posting it, probably in two or three months, I'm not really sure, it depends on how long it takes for me to get a rough draft of what I want for it, sorry It'll take a bit... but remember I'll be rewriting an *entire freaking region*, not easy, and I want it to become an splendid Fanfic so taking my time will be good to make sure it turns out cool.

Don't worry; I won't leave you all story-less until then. While I plan it, I'll be working on my other Fanfic Gods and Mortals. If you ever want to know what the progress is on the planning for "A New Chance For Adventure," fell free to PM me, I'll gladly respond.

Also, I promised I'd say a bit on what you should all expect from the sequel. Well, I thought of something way better. I'll write a teaser chapter of it! I'll post it here at the end of A New Chance At Life. Note that it's not a part of A New Chance At Life itself, you can all consider it a prelude for what's coming in the next Fanfic. I'll post it when I'm a bit more advanced into my planning of the sequel. I'll update Gods and Mortals before that, probably.

Finally, I'd like to mention the credits for A New Chance At Life. Here's the people I want to thank for their assistance in helping me shape up and write this Fanfic.

Credits:

Writer: **ARCEUS-master**. (Of course XD)

Beta Reader: **Ri2**. I want to sincerely thank Ri2 for all the help he gave me on this fanfic, especially at the beginning. He gave me lots of advise on how to improve my writing and many suggestions to shape up this story when I needed them the most. He's been there for me ever since I started writing, and I'm sure he'll be helping with the sequel too. Thank you, my friend.

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Just like they've helped me in shaping up A New Chance At Life, I offer thanks in advance for all the help I'm sure I'll get for the sequel, A New Chance For Adventure.

That's all for now, until I write that teaser chapter. Also, please be kind and leave a review! It'd be awesome to hear the opinions of my readers on how my fanfic has been as a whole, from start to finish.
REVIEW ! Yay!