

Timeless

By: Xuan Ying

Wounds heal, but there will always be scars. Latias dreams of meeting Ash once again, and so the heartache burns deep within, breaking past the barriers she so carefully erected. Her friends have left, and she is left to deal with the pain by herself.

Status: complete

Published: 2011-10-27

Updated: 2012-01-12

Words: 21904

Chapters: 4

Rated: Fiction T - Language: English - Genre: Romance/Hurt/Comfort - Characters: Latias, Ash K./Satoshi - Reviews: 73 - Favs: 133 - Follows: 65

Original source: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7498446/1/Timeless>

Exported with the assistance of FicHub.net

Timeless

[Introduction](#)

[Timeless](#)

[Rethinking](#)

[Forlornity.](#)

[Reunion](#)

Timeless

Timeless, by Xuan Ying.

Author Notes:

I personally prefer to finish a chapter before I write what I want to say, but this time, I have to highlight an important thing. This story seems to end perfectly well at the end, but opinions may differ. Hence, I'm leaving it to all the readers to decide the fate of Timeless.

Disclaimer: Pokémon is a registered trademark of Nintendo (1995 - Present).

A personal suggestion, I know most of the readers do not know Chinese, but I'd like to recommend you listen to a song while reading. The song is 还是要幸福 by Hebe. It's just a suggestion, as I wrote the whole story while listening to it. Its melody is just melancholic enough to make tears come to my eyes.

Winter came early; ferocity empowered every single hail which it brought to the city of Alto Mare. The unyielding cold was as hard as a builder's iron chisel. Sleet covered every nook and cranny of the in-lands, leaving no spot vacant. Traffic was thin these days, apart from the market district. Most people preferred to stay indoors, where the freezing frost wouldn't hit straight on.

The situation made easier the needs of privacy. The boats were slight. This time of year was better used to mend nets, rather than casting lines. It wasn't often, but occasionally a gondola would pass through the waterways. Most fishermen never left the isolated island during winter. The weather defied logic in the seas, meaning that a calm breeze could turn into a huge, unrelenting gust in just a blink of an eye. People native to the island preferred to stay at home,

wrapped in their warm blankets rather than bracing themselves in the cold winds outside. Tourists were rare, which wasn't really strange, considering the lack of attractions. The island gained income through events and natural beauty, whom only the most patient of journeyers would glimpse.

The draw for tourists was the recently over Tour de Alto Mare, the annual event which everyone could enter. The water chariot race was joined by trainers from all over the world. The viewers from all over the world rivaled those of the League Conferences. It was, in fact, fun in the best sense. Every trainer who owns a Water type could enter, regardless of age, gender, or qualification. The main event was a simple matter; the participant who crossed the finish line first would be the winner. The winner would be awarded a medal, one which depicted Latias and Latios, the Eons who guarded the city.

The city of Alto Mare mainly consisted of tight walkways. With buildings built so close that every gap had to be filled in. Even if there were spaces which were too compact for houses, there would be a stall or stand selling souvenirs. The disarray was indeed chaotic, yet it had a certain splendor to it. The footpaths were limited to the many riversides, where those who were unfamiliar with the city's geography remained. A trip through the back streets which adorned the majority of the city would mostly result in disorientation, something best avoided by tourists who simply wanted to see the sights.

However, it was in the alleys where one would experience the true beauty of Alto Mare. In one of the many alleys which coursed through Alto Mare, there was a thin amount of people wandering. Unlike most cities, Alto Mare did not have an advanced land transportation system. The infrequent bicycle, or if you were lucky, a motorbike was the most you would see. It was either the canals, or the walkways and alleys. Boats were a necessity for every family. Otherwise, the many tracks were your only choice.

The many footpaths were connected by bridges. The sturdy construction work meant that these were well built, never crumbling over the weight of the users. On one certain overpass, there stood a girl, wearing a plain green shirt. She watched the flowing canals, water flowing at a brisk rate. She almost seemed to be entranced by the lapping waves, nodding in unison to every sound emitted by the water. She was drawing, a mount held the board on which her pencil smudged upon. Every movement decorated the original white nothingness, and seemingly delineated the water canals perfectly.

As a boatman went by, he waved. The gesture was not returned. The girl seemed to be too engrossed in the rhythm of life to respond. It seemed to the boatman like the girl was spellbound, unknowing to everything unfolding around her. The cadence of life in Alto Mare was indeed captivating. It was as slow and free, the organized chaos of buildings further emphasized the adaptability of the inhabitants.

The girl's gaze never wavered from the board, unless it was to refer the background of her choice. She was wearing a green shirt, the collar of which was white, the color matched her skirt. Her shoes were pink, contrasting the culture which seemed to stay in the olden times. Her hair was drawn down, covering her cheeks. Yet the most distinguishing feature were the 'wings' on her hair.

She almost seemed to be mesmerized by the beauty. No mean feat, considering she was there every single day that went by. Everyone seemed to have work to do. Well, all except her. She never moved, and as people passed by, they never remembered the girl. She was just, normal. She carried herself with a verve which signified confidence, yet at the same time made her seem unmemorable.

Everyone who doubled back to see what she was looking at often found themselves staring into a sketch of the buildings. Even without paint, they saw the talent she had. The buildings curved and intersected perfectly, almost as if the city was built straight from this piece of paper. If they stayed, they would find themselves observing the process of coloring, in which the girl would use her paintbrush to

decorate the emptiness. The veneer of paint smothered the surface, and thus came life to nothingness.

As the day wore on, nightfall was inevitable. The girl would eventually leave the alley which she haunted, returning home. However, she always made a stop into one of the small backyards which home owners kept. She would look at the straight water tap through the arch, dripping the final drops of the day. The sodden ground shone in the moonlight. It had a certain beauty, but one so slight that none would notice it. She spent only ten minutes there, but as she walked through the alleys, she disappeared. One would never know that she just entered a gateway, one which to the average passerby was just a wall of bricks and mortar.

One might wonder why she haunted the bridge. Perhaps she was searching for someone. No, waiting was more like it.

And that was right, for she was waiting. She was waiting for the one she loved dearly.

The guardian of Alto Mare entered her home, an unknown garden. This was where she acquired solace from the crowds. Admittedly, that wasn't really necessary these days. The lack of pedestrians made her free movement easier. Latias liked to stroll the streets as a human, living the lives she protected. Her waiting at the bridge and garden meant nothing to the observers. She simply looked like any one of the people who had nothing better to do. Her task was to guard Alto Mare. And she did so flawlessly. Yet these days, there were no problems which required her to intervene. She found herself with more free time each passing day. And she didn't like it one bit.

The secret garden was one built many years ago. For all she knew, it existed before she was even born. This was her home, and she loved it. She would never leave, such was the responsibility she inherited, to be the guardian of Alto Mare. That was her pledge, as it was to her parents before her. It was never to be exempted, no

matter the motive. Even if she wanted to, she couldn't. The promises she made bound her to this place.

The garden was crafted by the ancient masons. The workmanship was impressive, the walls never cracked nor crumbled. She never knew how, but the enchantments placed by her ancestors made the garden seem otherworldly. It was unaffected by the change of climate. The flowers remained in full bloom, flourishing in the tropical conditions. Even the darkness did nothing to douse the lighting that kept the garden lit. The light was perfect, enough to illuminate but insufficient to break a good sleep. The shrubberies managed to look neat, even as they grew undisturbed. The air which hit Latias full on was warm, divergent from the howling winds outside. The walls seemed to insulate the entire patch of grass from the sheer cold.

In the large expanse of grass, there was a small lake. It was where she took her baths, and it was even used as a pool when Bianca was little. A clear path showed the way to the shrine which stood at the centre of the place. As she flew past the flowers, she breathed in; inhaling the fragrance which reminded her of the perfumes Bianca wore. The smell of life was impeccable. It echoed the lives of those who passed, and those who were born. There was a swing which used to be Latias' favorite place to play, but as time passed by, she outgrew the childish pastimes.

Latias and Bianca were the best of friends. They played when they were little, thus forming the tight bond which made them inseparable. Bianca would share her sorrows with her, and she would listen. No matter how minor the matter, she would always give moral support, getting Bianca through the stages of life. She witnessed the birth of Bianca, which happened shortly after the incident which killed her parents. She barely remembered what occurred those days, which lightened the burden of orphanage. Latios was the one who took care of her after the loss. Her brother was barely a year older, and yet he was forced to mature quicker. Latios soon learned that fun was for the young, and that the parents had to forgo it.

Thinking back, Latios changed a lot. He was more than a brother. And yet, now he was gone.

As she reached the end of the trail, she saw the holy place. Its origin happened at the same time as the entire garden. Etchings embroidered the walls and tapestry. It told of the legends, an evil monster's appearance threatened the city, and meteors come down on Alto Mare like drops of rain. As the meteor shards strike the city, the buildings and walkways of the city begin to be possessed. The guardians, Latias and Latios, with the mysterious light surrounding them, defended the city. Many Latias and Latios appeared and together, they defeated and destroyed the evil monster. The power the Latias and Latios conjured was the Soul Dew, which is given to an elderly couple in the form of a glowing, transparent blue orb. Alto Mare became peaceful again, and the Latias and Latios left the city. It is revealed that the Latias and Latios will appear where the Soul Dew is present, and that the city was never attacked again by the evil monster.

And here she was, right where the Soul Dew was. Yet this was not the same one that was conjured that day. This one was another, forged through the sacrifice of her brother. Its radiance pierced the darkness, and the waters flew from here. The orb's glow was the very same blue which cloaked the body of her brother. As she began to reminisce, the evocative images of the day came charging forth, breaking the barriers she raised to hold back the tears.

It happened seven years ago. Two thieves arrived to the city, attempting to steal the Soul Dew. They succeeded, and activated the Defense Mechanism of Alto Mare, which was meant to be the last resort during an attack which threatened the well being of Alto Mare. Their naïve notions caused the Soul Dew to die. Drained and volatile, the Soul Dew caused the beginning of a cataclysm.

The final spark caused the waters to retract, flowing back to the sea.

What happened next was dreadful. The waters returned, but as a tidal wave taller than the highest of towers, faster than the swiftest of

jets.

The Eons, as guardians, had to protect the city. She still remembered that day vividly. Latios was marred, having been used as the source of power for the Defense Mechanism. Both of them felt a calling in their souls, instructing them.

Flying to the tip of highest clock in Alto Mare, they veiled themselves in light. As they charged, Latios left her a final wish, one she didn't take seriously at the time. Both she and Latios smashed straight into the wave, causing the wave to split, and then crash back to the earth.

Take care, sister.

Latias' eyes were now watery. The droplets which hit the pond splashed back, causing disks to form in the pond. They saved the city, but at what cost. She was now alone, Latios was gone. Was it worth it?

Lorenzo always said that Latios would stay in their hearts forever, but was it true? Both Bianca and Lorenzo never cried after a year. Latias knew better than to burden both of them with her grief. She learnt to drown her sorrows in solitude.

It was hard to accept the loss, but the tears eventually dried up. She was on her own now, learning to mature as Latios did.

The loneliness was harder to bear with every passing day. Bianca eventually left the confines of Alto Mare, chasing her dreams of drawing. She had already succeeded in having her first public display, and was on her way to becoming world renowned. She barely had time to explore the places she visited, let alone return home.

Lorenzo was not faring well. The attack of the thieves caused him to have injuries which weren't healed over time. The fractures were impossible, resulting in a limp that evolved into lameness over time.

He was now sick, nothing out of the ordinary for a man of his age. His affliction was killing him, and only time would tell the outcome.

Forlornness filled every gap in her heart. Her seclusion was like a tumor which grew larger over the years, the heartaches only got worse. It was hard to ward the withdrawal which suffused with her. The isolation was now a part of her, growing with her, sharing pain with her. Over the years, she attempted to talk with her brother. Yet her willpower was never rewarded. The conduit from which she shared her spite and sorrow was now gone, forcing her to take in the helplessness.

She matured, but only due to the conditions. She was no longer playful, no longer happy with every forthcoming daybreak. She only felt emptiness, and took the loss of her brother with dignity. The waters within no longer flew true to her emotions.

Sometimes though, she could feel the beads of moisture flowing down her face.

Lorenzo struggled to walk; having a hollow leg did nothing to help. He could have gotten a wheelchair, but that would make him seem weak. The crutches were fine, if slightly inconvenient.

His internal clock was messed up. Thanks to his sickness, he slept through the mornings and awoke at night. He walked past the barren streets, it was barely past midnight.

He felt an urge to check on Latias. She has been acting strange lately. The coltishness and liveliness seemed to have died within the girl. As Lorenzo walked past the alley, he noticed the statues of the guardians. Both Latios and Latias were there.

Not really true in the present.

He shook the thought from his mind. He didn't need Latias to hear his thoughts, especially when he wanted to cheer her up.

As he entered through the illusion of a wall, he saw Latias at the shrine. As he approached, he noticed the wilt of a nearby flower. The brown shell of what used to be a sign of life fell slowly downwards. Lorenzo caught the flower with his free hand; he found it to be hard and cold. The garden was supposed to be immune to any climate changes. How did the wilting happen? He found Latias sleeping at the shrine, unmoving. He wanted to wake her up, but changed his mind once he saw her face. It was one of pure hurt, tears seeping out of her closed eyelids.

Lorenzo decided against his original plan, choosing to leave quietly instead. Perhaps Bianca should be the one to talk to her.

The seasons came and went, snow melted and plants blossomed in spring's first gust. The cool weather and rainy afternoons went and then came the scorching sun of the summer. What never changed was the presence of the girl on the bridge. Whether rain or blazing hot, the teenager would always be there. Waiting endlessly.

Latias looked outwards, seeing the boats come and go. The waves made an almost hypnotizing sound, making her stay. She drew the canal for the thousandth time, making touches where she saw fit. Whether a Pidgy on the roof, or a Mantine on the water, all the little details which people missed.

She never strayed from her routine. She was always there, without fail.

It gave her something to do, which kept her mind off the pain and hardships of life. Every wave of the brush seemed to delay the inevitable breakdowns. Every stroke on the easel seemed to force back the sadness which steamed within. The despair manifested itself as the watercolor on the canvas, drawing itself away from its host.

Sadly it wasn't to last. The desolation could only be suppressed, but never destroyed completely.

Wounds heal, but there will always be scars. That was true in a sense. The few gashes Latias got on the day of her brother's demise still seemed clear, even after years of rejuvenation. What the saying didn't note was that a broken heart would never heal, ever.

Ash.

The images of the boy with the Pikachu riding on his shoulder never left her. Every time she thought of him, the memories of her feelings for him would plough straight through the defenses she so difficultly created. The way Ash rescued her from the thieves; the manner he treated his friends; the determination he had to finish the hopeless Tour de Alto Mare race; the fortitude he had to save Latios; the gullibility which made him so dense; the childishness in his demeanor; the way he looked at her when she first met him.

And the way he was rooted to the spot when she kissed him.

Latias noticed the dots on the ground, her tears damp. She felt the sourness in her eyes. The fortifications broke down, and the flood came. She struggled to impeditment the torrents, but it was all in vain.

The candor and honesty within was all that kept her from following the group. She had to protect Alto Mare. Sometimes, she actually begged for a crisis. At least it would get her mind off her the boy. The adulation she felt wasn't normal. Deities didn't love subjects. And most Pokémon didn't love humans.

Even as the heartache returned, she continued to slather colors onto the canvas. The easel stood firm as the combination of hard swipes and soft strokes turned the drab void into a world. The hue of white eventually turned into a colorful iridescence. Every pigment of paint made the picture more vibrant, dabbing the shapes with their dye. The colors were distinct, a sign of familiarity which came with years of experience. Yet what made the picture fascinating were the flaws. The shades of color felt oversaturated, too murky in the dark spots and too bright at the exposed areas. The painting retained its beauty

through uniqueness. The imperfection emphasized the remembrance everyone had to it.

It reminded her of Ash in the best of ways. He was perfect through imperfection.

For too long, she has looked upon the world with eyes which saw the best in people. Even the lowliest of scum had a chance of redemption, rarely has she seen a man who deserved the punishment of imprisonment. That came with the immaturity in her, which held her back on many occasions.

One of them was the time she kissed Ash.

Why didn't she just reveal her true form? Why did she pretend to be Bianca? She thought it would be obvious, until Ash's companion Misty voiced her thoughts.

So, was that Bianca, or was it Latias?

Only after that did she learn of her mistake. Admittedly, she had the company of more Eons. They managed to fill up the hole in her heart, but not heal it. They were in Alto Mare for two days, and offered to stay behind to help.

She prominently declined.

She would be fine alone, or at least, she thought so at the time. The fissure that opened up never recovered. Bianca's departure further enhanced the pain in her heart.

The painting was just about finished. Its depiction of the alleys seemed to be, sadder, than what it really was. This was caused by the darker tint of all the colors. Latias mixed the other watercolors with black paint, giving the painting a look of despair.

Every masterpiece an artist creates reflects the artist. And this represented the hollowness within her.

The leaves fell, signaling autumn's arrival. Lorenzo's illness came and went, adding to his time. He stood on the docks one day, awaiting the arrival of his beloved granddaughter.

The ship docked, and the passengers came walking down. In the crowds, he saw the unmistakable shadow of his granddaughter, his only family left.

As Bianca ran over, they hugged. She was no longer the girl who lived through loss after loss. Her parents passed away in a boat sink, the same one which took Lorenzo's wife away. They were survivors, living through the storms life threw at them. Perhaps it was time for Latias to move on.

Latias packed up the easel. Rolling the canvas into a circle, she began to walk to her next destination, the leaking pipe. This was the precise tap from which Pikachu sought water. She helped the little mouse, never knowing what she would see next.

Was this love at first sight? That was what she thought at that very moment. The boy who wore his cap with a confidence was not a striking one, but somehow, Latias fell for him. He wasn't attractive, and he wasn't the brightest. How did she fall in love? Well, she wanted to know that too.

It seemed to be the natural reaction, one she dismissed at the time. She ran off, wanting to play with him. And she never thought that the thieves would strike at that day.

Ash was the one who rescued her, and that cemented the flame of love she felt. She found herself thinking of him every single moment, if not seconds. She never knew that once he went, she would have lost the chance of her life.

Love can be the strongest of emotions, healing a soul, but also destroying one. Maybe it was time to let go.

She approached the water spout, the one which always dripped. It never seemed to be closed properly, water seeping out endlessly. She put her hand on the valve, and turned anticlockwise. She was reluctant, but life would have to go on, with or without the memories.

The flow of water finally stopped. After the eight years, it finally stopped.

As the final droplet smashed into the soil, her barriers broke. She started to cry. Thankfully, there was no one there to see her, which made her more comfortable.

Suddenly, she felt the warm touch of a human's hand on her shoulder.

Turning around, she saw Bianca. She's grown after the many years of travelling. Latias' human form was Bianca's younger self. It used to be awkward, almost as if Bianca was talking to herself. Now, it just looked like an older sister comforting her younger sibling. Bianca has long since thrown the shirt she wore when she was young. She now wore an overcoat, which still remained the same color as her original clothes. Her hair was no longer an imitation of Latias' wings. Instead, it was now a long ponytail, long to the waist.

Bianca pulled Latias along, taking her to a more isolated spot. The talk they were about to have was going to take time. "You're still thinking of him, aren't you?"

Bianca seemed to know her inside out, never failing to surprise her with her ability to read her like a book. That was the bond they formed throughout the years at work. Bianca brought her to a staircase, on which they both sat down. Latias nodded, and let the tears flow. She would only trust Bianca, and was not ashamed in the least.

"You know, he might still be thinking of you." Bianca took out her handkerchief, and then used it to wipe the teardrops on Latias' face. "Who knows, he could be coming here right now."

Latias shook her head, it was over. Tuning off the tap meant that the memories would die off too. Why did Bianca bring it all up now? Why?

"I know you're trying to forget, Latias." Bianca talked with an edge of intelligence in her voice, one that was built over years of destitution. "But you know, you never will forget your first love." Latias turned to face her childhood friend, was this true? Bianca didn't leave a long lacuna for Latias to think.

"Ash would have made a great friend, I think so." Bianca was looking towards the sky, seeing the Pidgey fly. She almost seemed to be searching for inspiration, which was important for an artist. As the last bird of the flock disappeared beyond the buildings, Bianca turned to her.

"I know you think so too."

Latias still had tears in her eyes, and slowly pulled them back in. Bianca hugged her; they both lost something that day, not their lives, but something just as much.

They lost their ideas of the sturdiness of life. Life, in truth, was fragile. Sometimes a push was all it took to destroy the hourglass which counted down, hours becoming minutes. Yet at times, the life would destroy itself. Seeing Latias die that day made her understand that lives weren't meant to be forever.

Bianca was now twenty one, Lorenzo was eighty one. If Lorenzo had three years left, that meant Bianca would live for another sixty four years. As they both left, Latias would be the only one left. The cons that came with immortality far outnumbered the pros.

Bianca looked at her friend, she was deep in thought. A sign that what she said got into her. She admitted, Ash was somebody you could instinctively trust. He was cute too. It was no wonder that Latias fell for him, everyone would.

What made Latias' crush different was the fact that Latias had deep feelings. She fell further down the love trap than most people would. She wouldn't be able climb back out for a long time, perhaps never.

Bianca tread carefully, it was hard to remain in the perimeter of safety. Numbness to love would subside after a certain period of time. After that, the future would be uncertain. One might forget about the events that happened before, or they would give up entirely on love. The latter wasn't necessarily worse. Bianca remembered the words Lorenzo used to quash her sorrow after the death of her parents.

"It's natural, Latias, to feel bad." Bianca tried her best to sound like her grandfather, who effortlessly made everything seem okay. "We never know how to cherish the things we have, only once they're gone do we see their importance in our soul." You would never feel the loss of a loaf of bread until you desperately needed it to quench the hunger in your burning stomach. The same principle applied to everything else, let it be things, feelings, emotions, friends, or loved ones.

Especially your loved ones.

With Ash's departure, Latias may have lost a portion of her soul. Ash unknowingly stole her heart, and never knew the implications of unreturned feelings. Such was the sheer might of first love, you never know how to hold back. Hence the hurt, all the suffering and the aftermath one would face.

Giving up was hard, yet it would never be the best course of action. Accepting the fact that her beloved was gone was better. Letting her wounds heal over time was preferable over squeezing the gashes shut. The former would only hurt more, while acceptance was only limited to a night of tears.

Latias continued to cry. Bringing up Ash may not have been the best idea, but it was a necessity. It was normal to cry. When one tried to block a stream of running water, it would adapt, finding another path.

Melancholy was the same. Bianca said what she needed to say, and now it was time for Latias to face her fears.

As Bianca got up and left, Latias was left alone again. However, there lay a roll of canvas right where Bianca sat. It seemed old, yellowish shades were a sign of degrading. Maybe the picture had an age of more than five years. Latias unrolled the picture slowly, avoiding crumples as much as possible. As the work of art was unveiled, so were the curtains which kept the tears at bay.

It was a sketch of Latias and Ash, playing together on the swing in the secret garden. Ash's confused look was one Latias would always remember. He looked surprised by the revelation that 'Bianca' was actually Latias. Bianca perfectly encapsulated the exquisiteness of the moment, outlining the perfect moment. Every line seemed to reverberate with life, giving the dense outlines an opaque presence. It almost seemed like the picture moved, the blanks filled in by the recollection of the day.

Ash's uncombed wildfire of hair, Pikachu's confused look, the angle of swaying, all of them merged together perfectly to form a perfect imprint of that day.

Latias got up, and began to walk back to the garden. She was now reborn, with a strong fortitude to fight the timeless pain she faced.

Bianca stayed in Alto Mare for a quarter of a year. It was partially to keep an eye on Latias, who might do something hasty. Nevertheless, the main reason was to keep Lorenzo company. It was difficult, to say the least, when fate toys with you. Lorenzo was dancing with fire, his time was short, and every day meant less time for him. Sooner or later, Lorenzo would fall prey to the predator which was slowly gaining on him.

Latias didn't mind. She may have been slightly envious of the companionship Lorenzo had, and longed for a friend to spend time

with. However, spending time with Bianca was not exactly fun; laxity wasn't what she wanted either. Lorenzo was focused on the restoration efforts of the museum, which made sure that Bianca was unavailable to play with Latias. Either way, Latias still hated going to the museum, it was where the events of the day killed Latios. It still hurt whenever she got near the Defense Mechanism of Alto Mare.

Instead, Latias returned to painting. The only difference was that she now went to the docks to gain insight. Her drawings were no longer the same canal every time. Instead, it was the rolling oceans which made their appearance on the canvas. Every day, the waves would be different, therefore complementing her skills perfectly. The ruins of the tidal wave added a ruined beauty to her paintings.

What made the change most significant was the fact that she now awaited, rather than waited for, the chance to meet Ash once again. She wanted nothing more than to glimpse the boy with the Pikachu once again. So she waited, and waited, and waited.

Across the ocean, a teenager was now looking towards the sea. He seemed deep in concentration, as if something big was troubling him. He was now travelling the world, getting a moments silence after the noise of fame, a small price to pay, considering he now held the coveted title of Pokémon Master. He trained for years, and now, he finally achieved his dreams. On the shore of Cherrygrove City in the Johto region, he now thought about his next destination.

His best friend and companion rushed to his side, sensing its trainer's disarray. They have been friends since day one, and were closer than anything else.

Ash noticed Pikachu's arrival, and picked him up, putting him on his shoulder. He sounded his thoughts out loud, for ease of understanding. A trainer should always respect a Pokémon's opinion.

"Pikachu, where should we go next?" Ash asked his yellow friend. Pikachu pointed towards the sea, at an island quite far off, but slightly viewable through the mist which shrouded the ocean.

Alto Mare.

"Mr Briney," Ash called to his latest companion, a boatman whom he met during his travels in Hoenn years ago. "Could we head to that island over there?"

The old man's head peeked out from the boat, and he looked straight to where Ash was pointing. "Ain't that the island of Alto Mare?"

Ash nodded, he knew that the island would be familiar to Mr Briney. He lived in the Hoenn region, which was also the region where half of Alto Mare resided. "So, how about it?"

Mr Briney was one step ahead of him, he already started the boat's engine. "Hop on."

Maybe, maybe Ash would meet his old friends.

Especially Latias.

This story is dedicated to Hiyawu and 穹风 , the two most talented Chinese novelists of modern society.

How was the story? Its serious, but its me returning to my roots of Chinese writing. I always wondered how a Chinese novel would meld into an English one. This time, I attempted to work the style of Chinese writing into an English fanfic.

As for the finish, I still think that it ends well enough here, if any of you thinks otherwise, how about leaving a comment about that. I admit that I have more ideas for this story, but

Altoshipping isn't that easy to write. Anyway, if the readers want more, I'll do my best.

About the inspiration, every story has its own source, and mine is a very short and discontinued fanfic called True Love Never Fades. This fic is not on, hence my reluctance to post a link in fear of banning. Anyway, True Love Never Fades only has five chapters, and is focused on Altoshipping. This fic was one I found last year, while surfing the site. I read this, and found it to be good, worth following. Or so I thought, a short scan through the comments and I concluded that the story was not going to be updated anytime soon, perhaps forever.

My story is inspired by its incompleteness; it only managed to center on the aching heart of loss. I never thought that I'd write one of my own, but here it is.

Timeless itself is a name that came naturally, the timelessness of an aching heart was the theme. I think I failed dramatically here, where I put more than one theme in a story. You name it, heartbreak, fragility of life, painting... All of those things seem to be too much, especially seeing as how the whole fic is around five thousand words (give or take). If you're intrigued by the style, it's how I write Chinese novels, except the theme spamming, that is.

I'd like to hear your opinions about the story itself, and the continuity of the whole thing. I will take into account the opinions of many, and write or change the story accordingly. Please review though, I'd like to hear your comments about the overall story, and my English, which is rusty.

And on a side note, the back story of Alto Mare changed between the Japanese version and the English one, I personally chose the Japanese one, which I hope you'll try to watch. It explains the presence of new Latias and Latios after the movie ends.

Hope you liked it,

Xuan Ying.

Rethinking

Note: I'm sorry for the update spam, I'm trying to correct all errors as I find them, and my net connection seems to be acting weird. I cannot replace chapters, like I always do, instead, I can only remove and then reupload chapters. Sorry for the inconvenience. It happened last time too, but that never persisted for this long, sorry.

Author Notes:

I don't want to say goodbye.

Please listen to this song. Its from PMD2, and it is so sad that it makes me cry every single time.

Sorry for the long wait, I've had a case of writer's block, which ironically is the main reason I wrote this for. I had writer's block for my Chinese story, and I wrote this to get that away. Well, at least I got this chapter done. Thanks for the overwhelming support, guys!

The story won't be completed in this chapter, instead, it'll have more chapters. I think that one or two can be expected.

Enjoy the story, and thank you for reading.

Disclaimer: Pokemon is not mine, it is the property of Nintendo and Game Freak.

In the distance, the unmistakable outline of Alto Mare grew larger. The white boat which caressed the waters slowed its pace, allowing its passenger to relish the beauty. The Pikachu came out first, climbing onto the bars which kept the overly curious excursionists

from falling over. His trainer came next, and rested his arms over the railing, letting his body's weight have a moment's respite.

The boat was now cruising at a laid-back speed, slowly slicing the waves. Ash and Pikachu savored the diluted taste of saltwater in the wind. The waves caused the boat to rock, to the left, then to the right. It was perfectly suited for a tense soul. The seemingly infinite hourglass never lost its balance, as the sands flew towards the bottom, more were added.

Whiling away time, Ash started to reminisce the time where he once stepped onto the granite floors of Alto Mare. The slow sound of waves lapping in the distant ocean, and the chaos that seemed to follow him wherever he went.

Amazingly, he managed to get out of that dilemma unscathed. Well, luck was his main characteristic. How many times has the good fortune helped him? That was a number most would cringe at, seeing as how providence not only won him battles, but also saved his life on a number of occasions.

The Alto Mare incident still retained its high position in his memories. This was partially because the disaster would, if not averted, destroyed the entire island. And then there was also the artsy feel of Alto Mare itself. The city almost seemed to be crafted out from a painting, decidedly built as the artist thought. Even Ash could feel the love that went into the creation of the buildings and walkways, which was worth noting due to his 'tastelessness', as his friends liked to put it.

And there was one more thing that cemented Alto Mare as his most favored place.

The kiss.

Was it Bianca, or was it Latias? That was the question that troubled him for all these years. It may have seemed difficult to answer, but the truth was that Ash always knew the answer. He never confirmed

his suspicions, but somehow, he knew it. Deep down in his heart, he just knew it.

It was Latias, he was sure of it.

Just somehow.

Latias stood at the docks in her human guise, drawing the ships that came and went. She was always there, perhaps this would be her new haunt. That would probably be comforting to those who were used to seeing her at the waterways. Her patience never failed to amaze her. She'd been standing at the same spot throughout the day, repeating the same actions which formed the backbone, and then the form of her drawing.

It almost seemed like an eternity. Bianca went, Lorenzo was busy, it almost seemed as if they were avoiding her. Who could blame them? It wasn't that hard to know that it was her own fault. Her playful self was long gone, overshadowed by the Latias who wanted nothing more than solitude. She never thought herself capable of such peace, considering her old self's blithe and lighthearted approach to life.

Sometimes, she longed for a tumult in the wind. At least she would have someone to share her sorrows with. Sadly, such a wish was never granted. Those who did pass the secluded area did not make a motion to acknowledge her presence, and those who did were always given the cold shoulder.

She was rather conflicted, and who could say otherwise. She needed nothing more than a friend to share her thoughts with, but apparently, that was too much to wish for. She only wanted Bianca to notice her change in attitude, possibly even continuing the long conversation they had. Was that really that hard a wish to grant?

Yes, it seems that it was.

She didn't shed tears upon the departure of her childhood friend; she was too tough on the surface to show any weaknesses which would cause Bianca to stay. She had her own dreams, and staying would only compromise her chances of fame and glory. Latias wasn't going to force Bianca to stay, whether by free will or under pressure.

Latias saw the ships as they were, but she also drew out details which she herself didn't notice when she first observed her source of inspiration. Most people would only notice the ship's designation, but she saw the man with the yellow T-shirt talking with his son. Most people would only see the flag wavering in the wind, yet she saw the surreptitious Pidgey on the tip of the pole. It was these details which gave life to the dreary waters and ruins. It was never stunning to look at, but it was compelling to look at. She found her interest in the unimportant details somewhat strange at first, but she eventually understood her interest. She was searching, after all this time, the urge never left her.

She searched the incoming ships for the sight of the boy who once saved her life. Any sight of yellow was a chance, she knew that Ash would never abandon Pikachu, especially considering how much they've been through. Every sighting of a red and white cap brought a ray of hope into her heart, as that had the slightest possibility of being the teen who dreamed of being the best.

She loathed the feeling of helplessness that came with the longing. Even a simple glance of her loved one would be enough to swathe the ache. She knew that she would be able to find Ash by leaving the island, but that wasn't allowed. The oath she and her brother were sworn to when they were still little still rang clear in her ear.

We shall protect Alto Mare. No matter what stands between us and the safety of the island, we will defend it, together.

Together.

First teardrop fell. Then the second came. The droplets soon turned into a stream, and they came quickly.

Together.

It was all I that final word, it was the base from which they built the sturdy pillars of kinship. It wasn't easy to see her brother go. Thinking back, perhaps her brother broke the oath. They were supposed to protect Alto Mare together, so what happened to 'together'? Latios sacrificed himself to let Latias have a chance at life, but was she really happy this way? She sometimes thinks that she would rather have left with her brother that day. At least she wouldn't be this consumed in sorrow, vulnerable to any slight attacks in emotionality.

Subjugation was fine, but not necessarily acceptable.

Latias was so caught up in her thoughts that she didn't notice the small ship slowly cruising into the docks, the very same one which her beloved was currently on.

Ash held on tight to the bars as the ship came to a stop. The shudder he felt as the ship hit the walkways never felt good, and he wasn't in a rush to feel another one. As he stepped on the plank which connected the boat and the docks, he heard a voice shouting at him. He looked back, careful to not fall off the thin plank. It was Mr Briney, his ship pilot.

My Briney looked back, and started to speak. "We're here, now have as much fun as you like. I'll be headed back to Hoenn for a while, call me once you're ready to go." Ash nodded, then continued to the docks, once he stepped on solid ground, he turned back.

"Are you sure you don't want to stay here?" Mr. Briney wasn't exactly one to give up on a sightseeing chance.

"Nah, you have fun. I'll just go back to Hoenn and meet my friends for a while."

"Won't you be lonely?"

"Never mind, I have Peeko." Just as he said the name, a Wingull came flying down from the top of the flagpole. Of course, Ash thought, the Wingull was Mr. Briney's lifelong companion.

"All right, have a safe trip."

"Sure thing. Have fun." The old man started off for the wheel, and the sound of engines momentarily deafened Ash and Pikachu. They covered their ears with one hand, and tried their best to combat their natural reactions and wave.

As the ship went off in the distance, Ash started to think of the attractions in Alto Mare. There was the museum, but he didn't manage to recall of another draw for tourists.

As he struggled to recall another place which would whir away time, he heard a familiar sound of his tummy rumbling. Pikachu's ears peaked up at the sound, and he looked at his trainer with a look that said 'again already?'

"Ah, I guess it's time for lunch," he said with an edge of embarrassment. "Let's find a restaurant to eat in, shall we?" He then began to walk off into the many alleys, in search of a place in which he could drain the feelings of hunger.

Pikachu quickly raced forward, not wanting to lose sight of his trainer and friend. From his previous experience of Alto Mare, the alleys were dark and crisscrossed in ways which could confused those not familiar with the layout. Their last attempt was being chased by the thieves who stole the Soul Dew, and that time the distortion helped them. They won the chase simply because Latias, who was with them at the time, knew the island's geography like the back of her hand.

They soon found themselves at a restaurant located at the crossroads of the city. They took a seat, and made their orders. They started to think of the days where they first came to Alto Mare. Ash in

particular felt a tug at the heartstrings. He remembered to final hour, the one where he was kissed.

Latias began to pack up, but before that, she still had one more thing to do. A check of her work was still in order. She unrolled the canvas of the day, and looked at her work. She was always impressed by how vividly she recreated each and every detail of the areas which she looked at every day. Today's oceans were more peaceful, rarely did a wave so strong come forth. The walkways remained dry, and the seawater never exceeded the limits which were set by nature itself.

She looked at the ships, and was impressed by how much detail she managed to cram into such a small canvas. Even those as insignificant as the floating waste were recreated perfectly. There was a Wailmer in the distant waters, and there were Pidgey circling the tip of one boat. And there was also a boat with a Wingull, a rare sight these days. Considering Alto Mare's close proximity to Hoenn, it wasn't that hard to see a stray Wingull flying apart from its flock.

What made this sight rare was that the Wingull belonged to someone. It was circling the small boat which was slowly caressing the ocean. The boat was tiny when you compared it to the other cruise ships which carried tourists and trainers. They were actually here for the forthcoming tournament; either they would be the contestants, or the viewers.

There were many outsiders these days. It was soon to be another annual Tour de Alto Mare. That meant that traffic was tight these days. She tried her best to avoid crossing paths with those who roamed the streets, unsure of their destination. Meeting outsiders really wasn't good for her. Her habit of probing their every movement was really not the best of greetings.

She scrutinized her drawing, looking for the slight imperfections which could be saved with a quick stroke of the brush. She noticed a few blotches and quickly dampened her paintbrush. A quick swipe

blurred the mistake, the paint melting into haziness. When she finished, one would never notice the original blemish.

She found another spot which was uncovered with paint, and began to restore it. This particular one was located at the bottom of a small boat's whim. As she used the wet brush to reinstate the beauty, she found herself looking at the person standing on the boat's railing. She could see the small yellow smear on the shoulder of that very person. It was the unmistakable shadow of her once loved.

Ash.

How could she have missed this at the first time? It was so obvious when she looked at it now. The only excuse was that she was too engrossed in the creation of the masterpiece that she never let her conscience wander. She now regretted her absolute density at the docks; it may have cost her a chance of reunion.

She could feel the tears welling up. She quickly made for a retreat, packing up and beginning for the canals. Once she escaped the eyesight of the many startled tourists, she began to run. She passed many familiar faces, to her at least. They never seemed to notice her, yet Latias understood that tears were an attention grabber. No matter the acquaintance, it was a guaranteed eye catcher. The last thing she needed now was to be reminded.

As she ran, her eyes drifted to a poster on the wall. She suddenly stopped in her tracks, ending the scuttle. She stood at the front of the poster, and a sudden light shone through the cloudy skies in her heart.

No, it still wasn't the end.

There was still a chance.

Ash and Pikachu left the eatery with satisfied looks on their faces. They were filled, and they were now slowly walking through the

disorienting roads. Normally they would be afraid of the endlessly crisscrossing roads, but this time, they weren't in any hurry. Without the stress of urgency, there really is no need for rushing. It made the entire situation that much more enjoyable, exploring the many turns in the city was rather relaxing.

Swift recoveries from perplexity were easy to come by. The locals were frequent in the alleys, and they were happy to help out a traveler. This considerably made everything easier, and that obviously came with the price of minutes of lost time.

As Ash was asking a fisherman for directions, Pikachu got sight of a small poster on the wall. It was advertising the upcoming Tour de Alto Mare. The water chariot race was always a major attraction.

"Thanks," Ash was coming to pick up Pikachu. That was the perfect opportunity to get Ash's attention. Pikachu hopped on to Ash's shoulder, and began to point at the placard.

Ash's attention was now directed onto the announcement. It was an announcement about the water chariot race which Ash once entered years ago. It was a loss that time, but somehow, he had a feeling that this year would be different. He now wanted nothing more than to enter the race.

"Excuse me, sir." He was now moving back to the fisherman's side. "Do you know where the registrations are?"

"Sure, just go forward from here, and then take a right turn at the second alleyway." The old man was barely finished speaking when he saw the young man running off in the way he was pointing to.

"Thanks!"

The man could barely hold back the chuckles. "Sure thing! Be careful. Remember, it's the second turn!"

"Thanks again!" The fisherman was then laughing out loud as Ash went sprinting into the first turn, rather than the second.

Ah well, he'll probably find his own way out.

...

Latias was now roving in her true form, and she was invisible to human eyes. She was now at the registration stand, hoping to see Ash. She actually began to think that her painting was actually just her mind drifting off.

Her patience, however, was rewarded when she saw the familiar silhouette coming out from the alleyways. It was Ash. After all these years, she actually got to glimpse her beloved again.

Ash was noticeably fatigued; he seemed to have been running for many, many hours.

As Ash signed up for the year's annual Tour de Alto Mare, her heart did a backflip. It almost seemed too good to be true. How could her premonitions be perfect? It was almost like a dream, one she hoped to never awaken from.

Ash finished the paperwork which was necessary for partaking in the tourney. As he began to walk back into the alleys, Latias knew that this was the perfect time to reveal herself. It was now or never.

Or was it.

She abruptly backed down, and cursed herself for her bashful thinking. It was not as easy as walking up to Ash, then grabbing his hand and running off into the setting sun. It was never that simple.

Ash left Alto Mare for years, it almost seemed like an eternity here. Why would he even remember her? It wasn't as if he stayed at Pallet Town, his home, which was not really a packed area. He travelled the entire world, defeating Gym Leaders and Champions alike. He

was definitely not the same boy she fell in love with those years back.

Ash probably met many new companions, and those probably included friends.

Many, many friends.

Friends which would take her place in his heart. That was assuming there even was a place she belonged to in the first place.

She was so conflicted, they were friends once. Why shouldn't friends get together, a simple reunion? It obviously wasn't hard. So why didn't she go forth?

There was the matter of the kiss to consider.

The kiss.

Friendship changed when you show the other one affection. It would never be the same again. Imagine having to talk to the one you awkwardly kissed as a goodbye years ago. It wasn't the same as talking to a friend.

She made her decision to stay away from Ash. At least until he went back, she would have to keep her thoughts locked away. It was now harder to keep those feelings canned up, especially when they were in such close proximity. She longed for the chance to meet him, and she got it, partially.

Ash was now out of sight, and Latias made for her home. She would have to practice a certain amount of patience to get herself out of the hole she dug for herself.

Hopefully.

Ash entered the hotel which he and Pikachu rented for the week. They decided to stay until and after the entire ordeal with the race was over. It would take place on the day after the full moon, which was the day after tomorrow. They decided to have a very rudimentary trip around the island. Starting from tomorrow, they would be walking to the many attractions from the islands.

Pikachu was now fast asleep, Ash wanted so much to be with his partner in dream land, yet that wasn't to be.

Ash was now thinking about the final chapter of his last journey in Alto Mare. The wave, the death of Latios, all of those things didn't really matter that much to him. He had more than enough time to think about those things during the journey. He did think about the final moments on the docks, but he never really focused on the entire thing. Partially it was because he never considered the fact that the kiss came from a true heart.

Back then, he assumed that the kiss was a thank you after the ordeal with the thieves, but as he grew, and thought back to the events, he actually understood that the kiss was more than just that. It haunted him throughout his entire journey throughout the world. He learnt to push back the memories, suppressing the distractions they brought along. He actually thought that his immunity would actually hold, but he underestimated the strength of distance. As soon as he got to the docks, he felt a tug at his stomach. It seemed to force him to find Latias as soon as possible.

Yet he fought back, knowing that a reunion could make matters worse. What would he say? Hi, long time no see? None of those things would make things better. The worse thing was that he himself had a few skeletons in his closet. He actually liked Latias, in a way which made him think that Latias was more than a friend.

What caused this? He's been friends with girls his age all his life. Misty, Dawn, May, even Iris. Yet all of them never actually got a place in his heart's deepest reaches. They were friends, and that was all they would be. The romantic in him never actually had time to

voice its thoughts. Considering the training and help he had to do, he never really had time to think.

When he started to travel alone, he actually had time to let his thoughts take control. Instead of doing brash maneuvers, he would rather make a good analysis of the situation. This may have been what took him to the top tier of trainers and beyond.

He also began to think of things that happened in the past. The many adventures he had would make those who longed to glimpse a Legendary Pokémon envious. He couldn't count on one hand the times he saved the world, and he was proud to have been successful every time. At times, he actually thought about the events which built up to the climax of a story. The Lugia event was one that he held in high regard. It wasn't necessarily because of the recognition he got from Lugia that day, it was also because of the kiss from Melody, the very same girl who chose him as the chosen one that day. Perhaps the same reason applied to the fact that he got a kiss after Alto Mare too. Maybe, maybe.

He now found himself even less tired than before. He got up from the bed, and walked to the window. He was careful not to wake Pikachu, as the last thing he needed was for Pikachu to question him.

As he moved to the window, he was surprised to see lights blaring in the distance. They weren't moving urgently, so this wasn't an emergency. He found his legs taking him to the origin of the lights.

The walk was uneventful, and apart from the occasional boat, there was no one. As he reached the centre point of attention, he found himself looking at workers decorating the grounds for the race. What intrigued him the most wasn't the decoration efforts themselves, but rather, it was the man who led the many volunteers. It was Lorenzo, the museum's curator. He couldn't resist the urge to move forth and greet the old man.

He definitely saw time take its toll on the man whom once looked at old age in the eye and laughed. Lorenzo now had a hunch when he

stood. And the man was noticeably more worn out than any one of the others at the site.

"Lorenzo!" Ash called out. He hoped that the man would recognize him, especially since the years actually changed him from the young boy to the grown man he is now.

Lorenzo turned back, hearing the call. As he looked into the face of the incoming teenager, he didn't at first recognize the young fellow. As he came closer however, he clearly saw who it was.

"Ash! You've grown a lot since you last came! Nice to see you!" Lorenzo could barely hold in the feelings of happiness that he felt. This was the very same boy which helped save Alto Mare those years ago.

"Nice to see you too, Lorenzo." Ash was also very glad to meet an old friend. Solitude was never really good, even though he's gotten used to it as the years went by. "I see you're in charge here, good thing they have someone they can count on." Ash knew that Lorenzo was one of the most responsible people in the world. He still remembered the way he over-reacted when he touched the Defense Mechanism of Alto Mare absent mindedly in his last visit. The race would go on smoothly this year, that's for sure.

Lorenzo smiled at the comment. "Yes, and I'm really very appreciative of the chance they've given me." Lorenzo shouted at a few men who were walking off in the wrong distance. He then turned back to Ash, and offered to take him for supper. Not wanting the chance to let itself go, Ash agreed.

They were at a café which was open throughout the day, and they were deep in conversation. Ash told Lorenzo all about his journey to become a master. Lorenzo on the other hand, told Ash about his ailment and the many efforts that went into the museum's restoration.

They both were talking like they've known each other throughout their lives, and that was attributed to the fact that they did know each other at some part of their lives. Ash was sorry that Lorenzo had a sickness which wouldn't go away, but Lorenzo said that it really was the condition itself which gave him the chance to be in charge for once. He's been trying for years to get a position in the race's preparations, and now, he finally got the opportunity to do so.

Lorenzo was extremely glad that Ash managed to get to his dreams. He was slightly jealous, but who wouldn't be. Those who attempted to get to their aspirations were never quite successful, but Ash managed to pull it off. Lorenzo never really had a dream, like most of the boys on Alto Mare, all he ever wanted was to find a life, then settle down. Thank goodness Bianca had dreams of her own; otherwise she would be stuck on this secluded island for the rest of her life.

Ash and Lorenzo both steered clear of speaking about Latias, and Latios as well. That day, Lorenzo lost a friend as well. It was never good to bring up something sad to a cheerful conversation. Ash knew better than to force the chat to that side, but Lorenzo was keen to talk about Latias.

"You know, Latias has never been the same."

This caught Ash off guard, especially since he wasn't ready to face Latias. He knew that the die was cast, and that he would have to face up to his fears one way or another. He answered carefully.

"That's normal, considering she lost her brother."

Lorenzo didn't seem convinced, and who could blame him, Ash was acting terribly. "She isn't sad about that. I mean, she does cry from time to time, but she isn't the same playful Latias that we both know." Lorenzo took a sip from his cup, a well timed play which both gave Ash time to think and to pass the baton to Ash.

"So, what do you mean?" Ash himself was starting to doubt his instincts, which he trusted throughout his journey. "I would feel bad if

I lost my friends and family too."

Lorenzo was now shaking his head. "You know, me and Bianca both knew what happened after you were leaving that day."

He knew about the kiss?

"Um, what do you mean?" Ash played dumb, knowing that anything he said wouldn't be able to change what Lorenzo had to say.

"The kiss, Ash, I'm not daft." Lorenzo now moved closer to Ash's side, probably to talk about the revered legendary in the area.

"Latias was never the same, even after two years. She doesn't cry as much, and she doesn't leave the table when we talk about Latios, but each time we bring up you, she leaves in a hurry."

Ash now felt the tug in his stomach again. This confirmed his thoughts, every single strand of them. It was Latias who kissed him that day. He knew it all along, yet letting someone else confirm the suspicion still surprised him.

"You know, we always knew that Latias liked you. It was really quite obvious." Lorenzo left a pause in his words, probably to let Ash take in the sudden revelations. "We were actually wrong, she didn't like you." Someone was running outside the café, it was one of the volunteers. He was probably here to get Lorenzo, Lorenzo told him that he would be there soon, and then turned to Ash.

"You know, she loved you." Then he left, without a goodbye. Ash was left alone, with his cup of hot chocolate cooling away in front of him.

Latias dreamed of Latios that night, and when she awoke, she saw tears on the grass patch in front of her. She never liked to do this, but things weren't in her control. There was a limit to everything, and her control of reality was one of those.

She couldn't have foreseen the implications of Ash's arrival, and her decision not to interact with him. She now found herself thinking about him for the duration of the entire day. It was very hard, and she knew that she wouldn't be able to hold back the feelings for long.

The race was coming up soon, and Latias hoped that Ash would leave after the race. Perhaps once he left, things would go back to normal.

Honestly, she didn't believe that. Not one word of it.

She made her rounds, making sure that Alto Mare would be safe. As usual, there was nothing suspicious going on. She saw that the decorations were already finished. She applauded Lorenzo's efficiency. The decorations mostly took two days, yet for the first time in years, it took less than that. This meant that the volunteers got a free day to spend with either family or friends.

Family and friends.

Family.

Latias didn't want to face Lorenzo, yet she knew that the lonesomeness was killing her slowly inside. The same thing was happening to Lorenzo, though perhaps more literally. That was all the convincing she needed. She flew straight to Lorenzo's home, hoping that he wouldn't already be at the museum.

She never appeared at the docks that day, nor did she appear at the bridge. She was with Lorenzo, and she never left his side. Yet that wasn't because of their ties, instead, it was because Lorenzo told her about his meeting with Ash.

Latias knew that Lorenzo meant to heal the wounds, but that didn't happen. Instead, he may have just dug them deeper. Latias held back the tears, knowing that a breakdown was the last thing she needed now.

She had to meet Ash as soon as possible. And tomorrow would be her last and only chance.

Note: Mr Briney was in the anime, a very short appearance, but still, I wanted to keep using anime characters rather than original ones.

And that's it for this chapter. No reunion yet, but that comes soon. I'm sorry for the long wait, and I won't let that happen again. This isn't the end, and I'll update again before December. That's a promise.

As usual, please read and review. The comments are what keep me going, and thanks to those who read through the story.

Xuan Ying.

Forlornity

Author Notes:

I know I promised before December, but apparently I had a vacation planned during the time limit I set for myself. Anyway, please forgive the late update. Either way, Happy December!

Following the tradition I've been doing these two chapters, please listen to 我们怎么love by Wu Jia Hui. It kind of suits the feeling I want to bring out.

youtube.com/watch?v=9azXrkJEk7o (Remove spaces)

Oh, and please read and review. I still have one more chapter in the works, so stay tuned.

It was already soon to be daybreak, and the sun dilly dallied behind the clouds from which it was hidden from the naked eye. Most people were still sleeping, barely ready to face the first ray of sunlight. Some, such as the hawkers, were already awake, getting ready to begin another day of work. There was however, one conflicted soul who stumbled between the two extremes.

Through a window which was ajar, one would be able to glimpse a person inside the blankets turning around, seemingly unable to fall into the embrace of a good slumber. This person, coincidentally, was Ash. Understandably shaken by the turn of events of the few hours before, the Pokémon master was barely able to get a wink of sleep, let alone forty. He returned to his rooms a few hours ago, yet the time went wasted as he tried in vain to doze off. His mind was far from the point of blackness, and rather, it was still racing. This actually raised more questions than it managed to answer through time. One of them really caused him to slow down and consider his position.

Was he running away from the truth?

That was the precise question which troubled him in his day dream. It was all he thought about. His mind slowed down and considered his position. Latias loved him, why wasn't he surprised?

It seemed so obvious, and he was actually dense enough to be oblivious to the entire fact. And then the wave of memories came rushing forth, breaking every single precaution he made. Looking back, the way she looked at him for the first time, the way she glamorously showed him the secret garden, the way she came to him for help when everything seemed hopeless.

Why was he so hopelessly stupid?

It was practically written in front of his eyes that Latias liked him. And he knew that, what he didn't know was that the dividing line between love and like was a thin thread, one which would snap easily from the slightest tension. The very point where it snapped may have been the very same day where she lost her brother. Tension, such a powerful thing.

He returned in a bad state, and he was surprised that he failed to enter the sleepy state. Lorenzo was the one who drank the coffee, he only had juice. Perhaps Lorenzo's words not only got to him, even the consumed caffeine entered his brain. His brain now worked overtime, trying to make him understand something. The question remained, however.

What was he to do next?

...

Latias awoke to the sounds of cheering. He was atop a roof which was situated somewhere far from the crowds. She was invisible, which was reassuring. She glanced to the distance, and she saw the many people making the final preparations for the big race tomorrow. She applauded Lorenzo's capability for organization, most

of the work had already been completed yesterday. It was the first time in years that the preparations weren't done at the eleventh hour.

What troubled her the most was her current location. It was far from normal, especially since she was used to sleeping inside the garden which she called home. Somehow, she ended up outside. She couldn't fathom how or why she ended up here.

Her extreme recognition of the entire layout of Alto Mare actually came in handy at this time. She remembered the three story buildings which made the street so unique, it was slightly more unique from the others. The choice selection narrowed, she looked for some other distinctive features. There was the few runners that clambered the walls, seemingly in search of nothing more than a ray of sunlight. Then there was the slight area which was covered with hollow floor panes. She soon noticed a sight which was more unforgettable than anything else. It was one more familiar than she would have liked.

It was none other than the leaking pipe, still dripping away.

She now understood her capability to love, one she underestimated in the past. It seemed that the mind was a strong thing, its capacity to control the actions of one was not to be underestimated. Latias now found herself under the servitude of its every whim. It wanted her to meet Ash, she knew that it was true.

She couldn't really hate herself for forcing her mind's hand, it was only natural. She managed to hold back the memories, yet at such a close proximity, it was harder than hard, it was unfathomable.

Even as the memories started to fade, they came back. It was like trying to hold back the water in a tap, impossible. The pressure would always overcome the walls, and eventually, they would crumble.

She left her hiding spot, and proceeded to do her job as a guardian. It somehow managed to take Ash off her mind.

Even for a second.

...

Ash now found himself waking to the sounds of the chirping Pidgey. Admittedly, he never actually slept at all. He rarely got up earlier than Pikachu, and the confused mouse looked at his trainer with a look that asked 'Are you all right?' It was a sight to behold, Ash getting up on time, let alone before than Pikachu himself. Ash seemed to have no energy of any sort. The life was sucked out of him, and all that remained was exasperation.

He found himself searching desperately for ways from which he could escape the feeling of fatigue. He tried to think about the many close, memorable and amazing battles he had throughout the years, but it was all in vain. Nothing could make him forget the talk which took place in the lowly cafe last night.

There was, however, one place he could hide to. The race would take place tomorrow, and that meant that he needed to choose a Pokémon which he would use in the following day. It had the same numbing effect on his romanticism as the endless training he had during the years of travelling. Admittedly, he developed a certain trepidation against affection, mostly attributed to his good friend Brock's many encounters with the hands of Max, Misty and Croagunk, the last of which being a particularly painful one.

Nevertheless, his years without Brock had allowed him to mature, breaking pass the barriers which the Poison Jabs and ear pulling had erected.

He shook the many thoughts from his head, and returned to the matter at hand. He needed to make a choice of which Pokémon he was going to use. And that selection was no slouch. His years have not only earned him experience, but also many more friends. His Pokémon were no longer limited to the handful he caught during his travels in each region. Not counting the other types, which were not allowed in the Tour de Alto Mare, he had a lot of Water types.

His first ever Water type was a Squirtle, a very skilled and powerful Pokémon. Apart from that, he had the Totodile which was filled with glee, the Crophish which never seemed to lose its sense of humor outside of battling, the hot tempered Buizel, and his more recent Oshawott and Palpitoad.

His choice was immediately narrowed down to three of them. Squirtle was currently in the firefighting force, which meant that free time was hard to come by. His Oshawott was absolutely terrible in water, which hydrophobia added hurt to injury, all things said, Oshawott did overcome his aversion, but this was a competition, and he was in it to win, rather than to prove that his Pokémon had no fears at all. Palpitoad was more offensive than speedy sort, which meant that he was far from the best candidate for the race.

That left Buizel, Crophish and Totodile. Somehow, Ash's thoughts instantly flew towards Totodile. It wasn't the best choice, seeing as Buizel was faster, but it almost seemed natural. He didn't commit so soon, however. Instead, he opted to take a walk, and think about the entire ordeal.

Why Totodile? Honestly, it was very obvious. The memories seemingly caused him to go back through time, back to when he was a kid.

Maybe he just wanted to have fun.

...

Latias wandered around, not seeing anything worth her intervention. And then her mind went back, back into the time where she barely had a care in the world.

She could have restrained herself, but the matters at hand had barely enough to take her mind off the facts.

The race may be her last chance to meet Ash, but what would she do? Would she talk to him, or would she run off like the scared little

immature girl she was? It seemed obvious that the former was the best choice, but there was always the factor of mindset to consider.

Nevertheless, her duties took the tip of the mountain of priority. There was a very low crime rate in Alto Mare, which sometimes raised questions, such as why the city needed a pair of guardians in the first place? The answers came up as quickly as the questions arose. Back then, people had more belief in magic, and for a good reason. There were those who mastered the ability to wield the otherworldly powers. Those who had no such ability learnt to believe. They thought that it was what brought everyone into this world, and that it was the same thing which took their lives away.

And then they also thought that love was all part of the magic.

Now they called it fate, but back then, it was faith. It was fate that brought two people together, but it would be faith which made them fall in love.

And now, Latias thinks that everything made perfect sense. It was fate that brought her and Ash together, and it was faith that made her mind linger in the past.

Running was not necessarily the solution, especially since her past now caught up with her. She decided to meet with Ash on the following day, right after the race ended. What she would say then depended simply on the situation. Besides, rehearsals were never really her thing, and it made no sense to change right now of all times.

Tomorrow, she made herself promise that nothing, not even her personal feelings would come between her and Ash. She promised, and she swore to commit to her choice.

At least, that's what she told herself.

...

Ash and Pikachu went out for a walk, and they visited the few attractions which they knew or heard about from the many residents of the area. Yet no matter where they went, they found themselves in the shadow of many other tourists, and Ash was unable to find a place of solitude, one where he could actually stop and think of his current predicament.

Admittedly, the problem wasn't with his choice of the Pokémon he was going to use in the race. It was the confrontation he somehow knew was coming.

He would have to face Latias sooner or later, and there was no question about the awkwardness of the situation. It would either be painful, or it would be the kind that ended with a walk, hand in hand, into the sunlight. Which it would be was for time itself to decide.

He was wandering aimlessly, and that was no lie either. He didn't have any idea of where to go. He once thought that a trip to the secret garden was inevitable, but there were two reasons that explained his reluctance to do so. One of the reasons was because he forgotten where the place was located. The other was the stones in his heart which he felt were best left unturned.

It was not really considered to be aimless roving either, because in reality, his legs were actually bringing himself to a place which he could call familiar, and at the same time gain the privacy and stillness he so desperately searched for. He noticed the statues of the guardians, which he happened to see during his last visit those years ago. Pikachu was enraptured by the beauty, but any passerby could clearly see that the trainer and Pokémon's mind were at two different places.

He soon found himself at the gates to Alto Mare's prestigious museum, the very same one which sparked the closely avoided end of Alto Mare. It was the Defense Mechanism itself which caused the entire disaster to begin in the first place, but the museum itself had too many bad memories in there.

His legs were moving on their own accord, and he found himself looking at the many relics of the old days. And then there were the slightly more older relics. These things added up to the climax of the Museum, the Defense Mechanism of Alto Mare.

The day which nearly destroyed the city was never mentioned in the papers, nor did it become another legend which the fishermen shared after each day's catching. It may not have been a well known event, yet it still left traces on the walls of the areas which held key to the entire event.

The museum was one of the few zones which had the most battle scars. Its walls were already half crumbled, and the roof itself seemed to be curved in. Considering that this was the precise place which held the Defense Mechanism, it was obvious as to why the scars were concentrated on to the place.

Lorenzo was standing atop an aisle, overseeing the restoration efforts. It has already been a long time, but that didn't mean much, especially since the museum suffered more damage than your average earthquake or tsunami. The machine which was made to defend and protect was moved, and it clearly could not handle another day like the one those years ago.

Ash clambered up the stairs, and found Lorenzo using cement to cover up the holes which formed all over the walls. They seemed to be as deep as endless crevices. Seeing as they never let light in. A dark past brought to dark futures, it seemed.

Lorenzo looked up, possibly hearing the sounds of footsteps on the stairs. He found the very same teenager he gave a lecture to yesterday standing right in front of him. Formalities were exchanged, and Ash then sat on the floor, striking a conversation with the museum's curator. Yet it was indeed a one sided affair, seeing as any attempt to connect with the old man fell on deaf ears.

"I'm entered in the race tomorrow, and I was hoping that you could give me the route for tomorrow's race." As soon as Ash finished his

query, a leaflet was already lying beside him. Lorenzo didn't even bat an eyebrow to his comments, and continued to fill up the holes which covered every single viewable spot in the museum.

Ash didn't really get the message, and he attempted another topic, trying to start the fire of dialogue with another match. "I've been thinking about how much Alto Mare has changed lately. Do you need any help with the rebuilding?" Once Ash completed his offer, he noticed that Lorenzo wasn't even listening to him. And once he looked towards the hallways of the museum, he saw why. There was more than a dozen men working on the refurbishment. There was practically no need for anyone else to help, and even if help was welcome, there was a severe lack of tools. A few men were using screwdrivers as mallets. Ash noticed that all the restoration efforts may have been causing more damage than it fixed, seeing that a nail and hammer was no substitute for a drill.

Ash tried one more time, this time trying to be as casual as the situation allowed. He knew that some people actually liked working in complete silence, but Lorenzo was definitely not included in that category.

"I've been thinking about using my Totodile in the race tomorrow, what do you think?"

That may have been the last straw, since Lorenzo instantly turned to face him. He may have wanted to reply, but all he said was this.

"Honestly, I think that you're the worst liar I've ever met in my whole life."

Ash was barely able to react as he watched the man descend the ladder. Lorenzo was not angry in the least bit, however, he said his words with a tinge of sarcasm. And he actually made Ash feel worse than he had in the first place.

"Come on, you know as well as I do that you came here to talk about something else." Lorenzo didn't need the boy to nod, he knew

perfectly well that Ash came to talk about the talk they had yesterday. He hadn't seen Latias for some time, and he knew perfectly well that she was avoiding Ash. And the irony was that Ash also seemed to be evading Latias.

And Lorenzo knew perfectly well that the similarities showed that they were made for each other.

"I really think that you should get your mind off avoidance and start to think about what you're going to do," Ash seemed to want to reply, but Lorenzo cut him off before he even managed to make a noise. "Why did you join the race, what were you thinking?"

"I really didn't know that Latias had any feelings for me, all right?" Ash kept his voice low, scared for attracting attention, and then he continued. "Honestly, I didn't know anything until I met you that night." Ash buried himself in his arms, and then waited for the curveball that Lorenzo was obviously going to throw back.

"Like I said, you're a horrible liar Ash." Lorenzo actually had a smirk upon his face, claiming victory upon the argument.

"You'd know, wouldn't you?"

Lorenzo then laughed out loud. "You're just too easy to read."

"And how did you do it? Ash asked curiously.

"Why else would you be wandering around at night in your pajamas?" Lorenzo said obviously. Ash could have slapped himself on the spot, especially since the explanation dilapidated the fog which surrounded him.

"Argh! Why am I so easy to read?"

"It's not your fault, everyone is like that when they come back to the place where they had their first love." Lorenzo's mind fluttered back to the time when he first returned to Alto Mare after a short leave of

absence. Back then, he felt a calling to come back, and to smell the roses which made him fall in love in the first place.

"Yours may have been a little bit worse, you probably had no choice at all in the matter."

While Ash thought back to the past, Lorenzo continued. "Then again, those are the ones that last the longest." The pain started to recede, and it was all replaced with tides of curiosity. The boy then started to talk to the old man as his mentor, rather than a friend. Most of the things hidden behind the glass covered with thick fog started to seem clearer.

...

Latias still wandered, feeling the wind caressing her feathers. There may have been no need for all of this if she had just followed her instincts on that very first time. Why did she fly away? Looking back, it must have been one of the brashest maneuvers she ever pulled. It seemed so obvious that she should have just walked towards him, giving him the hug he deserved, and she desired.

Nevertheless, whatever happened in the past was gone with the wind. And there was but a slight, if any chance at all to get it back. She could run, but she would never outrun the rushing wind in terms of speed. There was, however, one way which would allow one to emerge victorious from the battlefield which one called love.

It was to simply outwit fate itself.

She already planned a quick reunion. And everything that would happen after it as well. It wouldn't be the sort of meeting which started off with two strangers who barely knew each other, and then ended as two lovers, walking hand in hand. Nor would it be the kind which had a table, atop filled with food, and two edges seated with occupants which would slowly edge towards each other.

No, this would be simple. It would start off with the race itself. And once the race ended, Latias would do the very same thing which she did the last time Ash left. She would kiss him.

Only this time, she would not run off. And hopefully, neither would Ash.

Everything seemed so simple, yet it did come with its own catch. The race had to be won by Ash himself. Otherwise, well, there really wasn't another option. Ash had to win, otherwise, the sudden appearance of Latias and the unexpected kiss would be something somewhat embarrassing.

She still can't accept the fact that she's in love, and that she would have to live with the emotional scars for the rest of her life if this ends in failure. She couldn't think of another excuse to meet Ash, and she spent all day trying to figure out something that could work out better, but her efforts were rewarded with nothing but a blank slate.

Did she really need to put so much effort into finding another excuse?

Honestly, she thinks not. For it was Ash, the most prestigious trainer in the world, that was entering. And nothing could stand in his way of winning.

If anyone could do it, it was Ash.

Her Ash.

...

Ash did some training with his Totodile that evening. They were determined as ever to win, and this time, not only because of his honor at stake, but also because he aimed for a reward at the end of the race. The medallion which depicted the two guardians was

enticing, but what he really wanted was to manage to meet Latias once more.

Pikachu read him easily in the past years, yet maturity seemed to have hardened his mind's exterior, so much that Pikachu could no longer look at him and understand his inner workings. They could pass comments and orders without even making a sound, but their minds were somewhat closed.

Ash was used to sharing his thoughts with Pikachu, yet this time, he failed to bring himself to the point where he could tell his friend everything. He couldn't even understand it himself, let alone comprehend it.

Pikachu could sense that something was amiss, yet he discharged it as the race. The other contestants have been training all year for the competition. Ash, on the other hand, had barely even grasped the surface of water chariot racing. Yet even when all the odds were against him, Pikachu knew that Ash would somehow twist fate to his side, earning another victory which seemed inconceivable to others.

He remained wary, though, as Ash seemed to have his mind somewhere else. During training, Pikachu acted as a supervisor, and he learnt to capture the small mistakes which Ash would have pointed out as well. Yet this time, Totodile's Aqua Jets lacked a certain oomph, and their accuracy was somewhat off. Yet Ash was still leaning towards the tree, his mind wandering.

Pikachu ran over, pulling the sleeves of his jeans. Ash seemed to get brought back into reality, and looked at Totodile's moves. Aqua Jet was one of the main things in Water type Pokémon which required speed. In battles, it was one of the moves which always went first. Mastering it required speed, lots of speed.

Ash noticed for the first time that Totodile's Aqua Jet tilted towards its left. He crouched down and told Totodile its mistakes, hopefully fixing, and at the very least, avoiding it, in the future.

He never noticed Pikachu's questioning gaze, and he returned immediately to the tree after the lecture. And so many more mistakes went unnoticed, all of which Pikachu took into his own hands.

...

The first ray of sunlight had barely grazed the opening of Ash's window pane when he awoke to the sound of his alarm clock. Old habits dies hard, and his infamy as a late waker was well known. He had, however, prepared to be in his best condition for the race today. He actually purchased an alarm clock, as opposed to using Pikachu. If anything, this only confirmed Pikachu's suspicions. Ash was not acting normal.

A bit of last minute training was in order, and Totodile was as psyched as ever. The horns sounded all around, signifying the beginning of the awaited event. Calling the attention it got warm was an understatement, it attracted more attention than the lesser known leagues.

Ash was already fully awake when he entered the racing grounds. There were around thirty contestants, and admittedly, that was a somewhat disappointing number, especially since there were no empty streets, due to the tourist traffic. Nonetheless, the main point of the tourney was already achieved. The profits by far outnumbered the expenses required to organize and maintain the race.

Pikachu stood on the bridge which overlooked the starting point. This was the best part to watch, since you can easily see the racers starting off and the winners getting close. For those areas which were obscured by the many buildings, there was a large screen which showed live coverage from around the city. It was currently making a quick aerial sweep of the area, and there was a swarm of spectators standing at every single spot where you could see the canals.

Last time, Pikachu actually fell into Ash's chariot. That may have contributed to his eventual loss, but not by any considerable factor.

This time, Ash seemed more determined than ever to win. For what reason, it remained a mystery, but what mattered was that Ash would win for sure.

The three birds which resided on a pedestal were Natu and its evolved form, Xatu. They acted as the signal for the beginning of the race. The two Natu were the red lights, and once Xatu spread its wings, the contestants would all rush forth. Timing wasn't the most essential part, instead, skill in maneuvering the combination of both large, open spaces and enclosed canals were the key.

Either way, the announcer was nearly finished in working up a stir in the crowd. The applause was deafening, and then the signal was given for the race to start.

Natu number one, wings spread out wide. The contestants' Pokémon started to flip their legs or fins, gaining a slight bit of momentum.

The second one did just the same, and the contestants tightened their grip.

The next thing seemed to happen in slow motion, the Xatu spread its wings out, and then everyone rushed forward. Amazingly, no one collided with another, and everything went smoothly.

Pikachu's eyes swept from the real deal to the representation on the screen, it was time for some fun.

He never would know that someone else was watching, more closely than he was.

...

Go Ash.

Slightly less words than my previous chapters, and I apologize.

As usual, please read and review. Thanks for all the support. It really means a lot.

Xuan Ying. 旋阴。

Reunion

Author notes:

A must on for perfect effect, *Nothing* by The Script. You really need to listen to this one. It seems like the best one for writing.

Happy New Year, guys. I hope this acts as the perfect gift.

The rush of adrenalin was something new. The rushing wind that spreads itself upon Ash's face, the water that drenched his shirt, all of them managed to bring up a feeling that might have been long forgotten.

Simply put, it was fun.

The straightforward goal, the obvious path, everything was so easy. All he had to do was follow the route set in stone. Straying wasn't exactly prohibited, but the disorienting canals were the true reason which made contestants stick to the path.

Ash was in perfect sync with Totodile. Every turn was taken at the best possible angles. There was no way they could fail from their current situation. The syncing was rare between trainers and their lesser used Pokémon. However, Ash somehow managed to get Totodile's absolute trust in two short days.

The rules for the race were plain. Only water types were allowed, though on some occasions, other aquatic Pokémon were allowed. There were exceptions, though. Pokémon like Gyarados and Wailord tend to be too large for the canals, and there were some like Peliper with the ability to fly. These were some qualities which gave those riding them an unfair advantage.

In the end, it came down to a trainer's ability to connect with their Pokémon. It didn't matter how much practice they did, for the route

was too complex for complete memorization, let alone remembering the perfect timing for each turn and charge.

Ash made a few risky maneuvers, such as taking a turn later than considered safe, but it all paid off. Making the corrections to the Pokémon's slant and the chariot's tilt with a quick jerk, rather than a slowly escalating pull would allow the rider to maintain his velocity without sacrificing speed. The danger was in losing balance, which would result in instant disqualification.

Ash kept his rhythm throughout a large portion of the race. He had a good start, and that counted for a lot. Totodile's was very fast, especially considering its relatively short practice period. Together, the two managed to overtake many challengers. After a good part of the race's duration, they were in the lead.

A second timer getting such a good lead was not commonly seen. The old Ash may have gotten overconfident at this point, but the more mature Ash wanted to win. He wanted that so badly that he pushed away all notions of gloating. His focus was on the width of the next canal, the sharpness of the twists and turns and the distance between him and the contestant in next place.

All because of the award he promised himself.

...

Pikachu found himself dumbfounded by Ash's ability for composition. Most other contestants not only fell behind, but also fell off their chariots. The more skilled and experienced found themselves looking at the shadow of this relatively green newcomer. As they struggled to keep control, Ash would overtake them.

Even Pikachu, who knew Ash better than anyone else, found this display of proficiency stunning. He was obviously glad that Ash stood a chance of winning, but then again, the chances being so unbelievably good? Not so much.

The screen was focused on the leading three, but while the current second and third placers fit in one screen, Ash was way ahead.

Pikachu couldn't help but gasp when Ash made a few moves. He sometimes took the sharp turns a little too close for comfort. A few times, the chariot came too close to the 90 degree limit.

Sure, Pikachu had faith, but was it well placed?

Only time would tell.

Latias acted as the guardian for this yearly event, and she was normally amazed by the contestants' ability. This year, however, she was blown away by the skill of one.

She would generally choose one contestant to root for, and then hope for the best. This year's choice was practically non-existent. She never would have guessed that Ash won. Admittedly, Ash was still a long way from victory, but judging by the distance between him and the second placer, it wasn't a bad bet.

She had the urge to stick with Ash, making sure that he remained safe. However, the other contestants were already beginning to pile up behind. She had to cushion a few blows and help a few chariot's retain balance.

Ash was still in the lead. He may have some tough competition in those who spent years training, but looking at his synchronization with Totodile made her less anxious. What she was anxious about was the recklessness of a few moves. A couple of times, she gasped at Ash's iron grip on the rope. He never let go, no matter how hard the tug was.

Somehow, watching that reminded Latias of herself. Never willing to let go, no matter how unfathomable that choice seemed to be. All things said, today was the day those thoughts got pushed aside; because this was the day she would confront Ash about her feelings.

A million reactions flashed through her mind, and yet none of them seemed to be the right one. The confrontation, she reminded herself time after time, was certain.

Only time would unveil the outcome. Judging by the current situation, the meeting was set in stone.

All she could do was wait.

Ash was now one with the waters. Totodile's pull was strong, but not too potent that his grip loosened. He felt good, better than he felt after beating the toughest of trainers, in fact, it felt as if he was flying through heaven, bliss was the only thing he sensed.

Of course, he still retained a grasp on reality. That was a must to wade through the canals. He was close to the end of the race. Even without looking back, he could tell that the others were a good distance away. He relaxed a little, knowing that the race was his.

He closed his eyes, trusting Totodile's instincts. His concentration didn't waver, but he suddenly felt the chariot slowing down.

Once his eyelids opened, he saw Totodile dawdling. The rush must have drained Totodile completely. Ash thought that the lead they earned would be enough to let them win, but he then heard the sounds of rushing water behind him.

He didn't even turn back. He wanted to tell Totodile to move, but there seemed to be a knot in his throat. How it got there was anyone's guess, but it surely wasn't caused by dehydration. As the sounds of the other contestants shrilled, his mind started racing.

Why was he even in the race? Was it for the glory, the fame? No, he had more distinction than he liked.

Was it to take his mind off the many thoughts of his life? Close, but not exactly.

It was just to get an excuse, an excuse to meet Latias.

That was fine though. What was stopping him from passing the victory line? Totodile had more than enough strength to move further, all he needed was Ash's encouragement. Ash tried to find the words, but none came.

He wasn't being honest with Totodile. And what made things worse was his fraudulence with Pikachu, and more importantly, himself.

He faced more challenges than he cared to count, but this seemed like the toughest one yet. He was adept in Pokémon battles, but this internal conflict was more than he could handle. It seemed that he couldn't bear to make Totodile do something without knowing what it was for.

What was wrong with him? Couldn't he lie just this once?

Well, maybe not.

Pikachu could not believe his eyes. Ash was actually stopping.

What happened? The camera panned towards him. The others were catching up, and if he didn't do something soon, he would lose.

Then there was a sudden gust of wind above him. When Pikachu looked up, he couldn't see anything, but somehow, he had a perfect idea of who that was.

Latias couldn't bear to see Ash that way. When he bended down to talk with Totodile, there was a tinge of helplessness, one that could be easily dismissed as tension, but she knew Ash better than that, there was something wrong.

She rushed straight to the place where Ash was as soon as she saw the incident. What she didn't expect was for Pikachu to call her name

out. She was invisible, and that probably guaranteed the impossibility of detection. Apparently, Pikachu was more alert than others.

She slowed down just that bit, enough to let Pikachu get on. There was a slight chance that the bored among the spectators would see the levitating Pikachu, but the likelihood was extremely slim. Chances had to be taken, especially since more than just the prize medallion dangled upon this thin line.

Pikachu said little during the flight, and even when he did, it was a very one sided conversation. As far as things went, Pikachu gave her a sum up of Ash's arrival to Alto Mare. And all she heard only helped build up the belief that she wasn't the only one who wanted the romance to burn stronger. If anything, this made her fly faster, filled with the desire to help Ash complete his wish of reunion.

Ash slowly regained his composure, and decided that the best way to combat his feelings was to confess them.

"Totodile, I'm really sorry for pushing you so hard, but I really need you to win this." Totodile struggled for a while, but barely moved an inch. Ash was getting desperate; the other competitors were getting close.

"Totodile, remember the statues we saw at the town square that year?" The water type didn't answer, but Ash knew that he understood every single word. "Remember how Brock and Misty said I was thickheaded?" This time, Totodile responded, but instead of accelerating, it was a snicker. Two seemingly unconnected things started to link themselves together.

In the end, Ash himself confirmed the correlation. "I think I'm in love, and I really need you to win this." Totodile now managed to recuperate an ample amount of stamina, allowing a much needed burst of speed.

Ash, relieved by the progress, began to relax. There was still a chance to win this. As long as Totodile managed to retain this velocity, there was no way the rest could catch up. There were, however, a few factors to include in his calculations. For one thing, fatigue could do a lot to hurt the chances, and Totodile was more than just tired. The other more deciding one was the availability of his own confidence. There was no way he could force Totodile, simply because he couldn't bear to see any of his Pokémon suffer.

Well, the old way of trusting them always came through, maybe this time would be no different.

He risked a glance backwards, and saw the closest competitor. His Buizel was coming up fast, the natural ability with water helping a lot.

Well, destiny was all that could decide the winner now.

Latias was just about to let Ash know that she was there. Doing so may not have gotten the needed effect, but it would at least allow Ash a moment of peace. He would at least know that he achieved his goal. Well, it seems that he came through yet again. The competition just got fiercer, no longer was Ash the undisputed champion. This time, there was going to be another close call.

Ash had a slight lead, but the Buizel and its trainer shortened the distance. There was no telling who would win this time. From time to time, one of them would gain a trivial lead, but in the next second, the space would be nonexistent. Ash was clearly struggling to keep up, especially since Totodile was more than just tired. The other trainer faced similar troubles, his Buizel was starting to pant, a good sign to Latias.

The final bend loomed up ahead, once they made the turn, there was only a few inches separating them from victory. The two were so close that the winner was anyone's guess. The finish line was the very same bridge that acted as the beginning. The Pokémon was the main reference. The winner was decided by determining which one

passed the bridge first. The noon sun cast a perfectly aligned shadow which could easily be used as the reference point.

They were no longer fighting for first place. Instead, there was no conceivable distance between them. From her point of view, they were at the same speed, and they were matched in both speed and skill. Ash did have an advantage though, he had determination.

Once the two contestants got past the finish line, it was all for fate to decide. It was the equivalent of a coin toss, any one of them could be named the winner.

The wait wasn't long, but it seemed like an hour before the winner was announced. During the wait, there were a few later arrivals. They weren't qualified to win, but then again, finishing the race itself was a hard task. They deserved acknowledgement.

She let Pikachu off a distance away from the crowd. She made herself scarce, settling atop the roofs of the buildings. She searched the crowds for Ash, and saw him at the rest area. Ash was busy cleaning himself up. Even drenched, he looked as cute as he was those years ago. She didn't even attempt to push the thought away. This was the day she would speak to Ash again, and that alone was more than comforting enough.

The wait ended before she could think of anything else. Lorenzo, being the man responsible for the decoration and planning of the race, had the honors of declaring this year's champion.

Lorenzo stood to the top of the bridge, and took the microphone. "It is really an honor to be standing here, and I also have to thank the city council for giving me the opportunity of being the organizer of this year's Tour de Alto Mare."

Absolute silence fell upon the spectators. Everyone was awaiting the moment where the champion would be revealed.

Lorenzo continued after a short dramatic pause. "After looking at the footage, we finally have a winner." Another short gap added to the anticipation. Latias was practically begging for Lorenzo to be quicker, the tension was killing her from within.

"This year's winner is,-" Another pause, one that got its desired effect. Latias was praying, praying for Ash to win. "Colin from Cherrygrove city, congratulations."

The crowd erupted; applause was the only sound to be heard. Latias looked at Ash, and saw a look of depression, one that went beyond her mind's remembrance of him. He went to Colin, the competitor who won fair and square. Anyone else would have just punched him in the face, but Ash just shook his hand, giving courteous congratulations.

And then, he walked away, delaying the meeting that Latias so badly craved. Well, she waited for so long, a few hours were nothing.

Little did she know that Ash had other plans.

He lost.

He actually managed to screw this up.

Ash walked back to the hotel. He didn't even give the receptionist a nod, all he wanted was to pack up and head home. There was the challenge with Cynthia coming up, and that would be the perfect dissolvent to his heartbreak.

He called Mr. Briney, wanting to go back to Pallet. The ship was set to arrive at ten tonight.

He only just noticed that Pikachu was absent, but then again, that was a minor issue. Knowing Pikachu, he was already on his way back. In fact, he was quite amazed that he got back at all. Pikachu was the one that helped him out in navigation.

Either way, there was a lot of packing to do. He had around eight hours to do it all, and there was no better time than the present to do it.

Pikachu was surprised with Ash's taking leave. Sure, he could find his way back, but it just didn't seem like Ash to run off like that. Either way, the way to the hotel was burned in the back of his mind. He could possibly find the way back before an hour passed.

Latias' sudden departure seemed quite similar in its questionability. Was there some sort of connection between them both?

No, that couldn't be.

No, Ash wouldn't do that.

Surely not,-

Oh god, he was almost as stupid as Ash was. Those two were in love. And they both promised to meet each other as long as Ash won the race. That's why Ash couldn't bear to stay.

There was still a chance to get them together. Instead of taking the left route, the way back to the hotel, Pikachu made a right turn. He didn't know for sure, but this seemed to be the way to the secret garden. He replayed the chase from the first time they met Latias. It was a right turn here, and then a left one after the second junction. After that, it would be another left turn at the third intersection and then a straight run until-

Oh great, there was no left turn, and there were only three junctions.

Never mind, he still remembered the flowerpots with flowers on the right side of the path just now, which meant that he could just retrace his steps and head back.

Only problem was that there was neither flowerpot nor flower. That meant only one thing, he was lost.

Latias went back to the secret garden, knowing perfectly well where Ash would be if she wanted to meet him. He tried his best, and that was all that counted. She made a quick routine patrol of the city, but nothing much was going on. The major contrast between the crowded lanes of this morning and the nighttime's deserted ones was something she would never get used to.

When she reached the western side though, she heard a few cries for help. It wasn't from a human, but instead a Pokémon. As she went down to check it out, she saw the very same Pikachu that rode her a few hours ago.

Even though he didn't admit it, it was obvious that he was lost. Seeing the sun set, Latias let him on, promising to take him back to Ash.

Pikachu peppered her with questions, all of which concerned her feelings with Ash. She didn't want to answer any of them, but she answered them eventually.

Whether it was annoyance, or simply because the secret would be out soon, she didn't know. One thing was for sure though, she felt like a stone just got removed from her mind as soon as she let out those preserved feelings. It appears that Pikachu knew all about her feelings, no big surprise there. Pikachu's questions weren't hard to answer, especially since most of them revolved around how she managed to keep them in for so long.

Pikachu asked, she answered. It was just a routine that kept repeating itself. Only when Pikachu asked his last question did the cycle break itself.

He asked, do you love him, and she couldn't answer. In her mind, she yelled out an affirmative, but her mouth seemed unable to open.

Why this happened was beyond her.

She was decades older than Pikachu, but it seemed that Pikachu was the one who had the wisdom. If she wasn't able to admit it, how would she tell Ash? That was another question Pikachu asked, and this time, he didn't want an answer.

The rest of the flight passed in silence. Latias' mind, however, was working overtime to find the answers she needed. It was true that she couldn't tell Ash, and that wasn't only because of the language barrier that all Pokémon faced when conversing with humans. Even in Bianca's human form, Latias couldn't speak, and telepathy was an ability beyond her. If only her parents were still alive, perhaps under their tutelage, she would be able to have some mode of exchanging words.

Well, she would handle it the same way she did every time.

Improvisation.

She was waiting for an excuse to meet Ash, and this was the perfect chance.

Where in the world was Pikachu? It really wasn't like him to be gone for so long. Ash's anxiety rose, and he panicked. The boat was set to leave soon. He finished the packing up, and everything was already set. All that was left was Pikachu.

Grabbing one of the Pokéballs which was left unopened for a few days, he released Staraptor. The Predator Pokémon was the first Pokémon he ever caught in Sinnoh. It became one of his best Pokémon in battles. Staraptor also acted as a great help when he got lost. This time, Staraptor was going to be the best bet to find Pikachu.

"Go find Pikachu, and hurry." Staraptor acknowledged him and flew off. Ash checked out, proceeding to the docks where Mr Briney was

waiting. Seeing Staraptor a distance away, she shouted out, "If you find him, take him to the docks!"

He may just be able to buy Staraptor some time. As he walked away, he would never know that Latias was just around a corner.

Latias found the hotel, and with Pikachu's guidance, she managed to find the room which Ash booked. Surprisingly, it was empty. Not only was Ash absent, but everything that belonged to Ash was already gone.

Pikachu saddened up, understandably uneasy with the current situation. Latias tried her best to comfort him, but there was no way to hide her own apprehension. Ash not being here was like fate playing her for a fool. Why was it that whenever she tried to avoid Ash, he was always there? And inversely, when she wanted to see Ash, he was never there.

Pikachu looked to be deep in thought; Ash's whereabouts were anyone's guess. The peace of the evening was broken by a bird's cry that wasn't familiar to Latias. The Pidgeys' cries were lower pitched and less intimidating. When she looked at the origin of the sound, she saw an alien creature, one that was not usually found here in Alto Mare.

It was definitely a flying type. It had a daunting shape, large yet sleek. Its face was half covered by the sharp arc of hair, red at the tips.

Pikachu however seemed relieved at the sight of the Pokémon. Then it hit her that the bird may be Ash's. Staraptor gave Pikachu a quick recap of Ash's orders, and told them to get to the docks as fast as possible. There was also a more startling disclosure: Ash was leaving Alto Mare already.

Latias didn't let Staraptor finish, she was already speeding straight to the docks.

"I see. Don't worry though. I know Pikachu will be just fine."

The boatman was as punctual as always. He always lived with the mantra that if you were there on time, you were late. Mr. Briney arrived a full hour before the stated time. Ash told him about the current state of affairs, and luckily, Mr. Briney gave him all the time he needed.

"I really hope so." Ash was looking up to the sky, hoping to see Staraptor with Pikachu on his back.

"I know so."

"Thanks." Ash said everything without even looking at his only friend in the Alto Mare now.

Mr. Briney, seeing a difference in Ash's demeanor, dug deeper. "You really seem different, like you've just lost that happiness in you."

"You noticed, didn't you?" Still Ash didn't look at him.

"In love aren't you?"

And that was all it took to get his attention. Ash now turned to him, and he asked, "Am I really that obvious?"

"Well, it really doesn't hide itself that well."

Ash buried himself in his arms. In the short moments, Mr. Briney continued to talk exactly like Lorenzo did a few days ago. "So, what happened?"

"I wanted to meet her, but set a goal to get through before that happened."

"And you failed, right?" asked the boatman.

"Obviously."

"And so you're giving up right here?"

"Right again."

Mr. Briney took the stairs to get down from his boat. "This isn't like you Ash, you really wouldn't just give up like that." The Ash he remembered would fight against the unbeatable odds, taking out his opponent's entire team even though all he had was his last Pokémon.

That made Ash even madder. He stood up, and started to raise his voice. "I just did, all right? I gave up, so what? I had so many chances and I blew them all!"

Mr Briney didn't seem the least bit staggered by the show of force, and continued to say, "So?"

Hush came over the entire scene.

Ash broke the ice. "You're saying that I should give it another shot."

A nod.

"I guess you're right." Just as he finished that query, he saw Staraptor in the distance, but Pikachu was not on his back.

Just as Ash was about to ask about Pikachu, he saw a shadow coming through the alley down the street. First, he saw Pikachu, but then, he saw another shadow, one that seemed so recognizable.

This was it.

She finally gets to meet Ash face to face. After all these years, she finally gets to meet him.

She knew that her presence would astonish the man Ash was with, but that was nothing to be concerned about. All she wanted was to run up to Ash, and let him know how she felt.

Ash's reactions weren't astonished, nor were they relieved, instead, he just stood there, stunned.

Pikachu ran up to Ash, jumping straight into his arms. Ash didn't seem to even acknowledge that action. He just stood there, looking at Latias. There was also the man who owned the boat, but at least Latias was under her human guise.

"So this is the girl, how nice to have your little reunion right here." Mr. Briney seemed to enjoy the moment, but honestly, another person really ruined the moment. He almost seemed to take this as one of those television dramas. Ash snapped out of his baffled state, and returned Staraptor to his Pokéball without even saying thanks.

Then, he turned to his travelling companion. "Mr. Briney, could you give us some time alone?"

The captain took himself to the wheel, and started the engines. "Sure thing, I'll be back tomorrow." As the ship started to leave the port, Mr. Briney poked his head out of the window. "If anything happens, give me a call and I'll get here as soon as possible." He winked at Ash, and then took his leave.

The sounds of nothing at all returned. There were the sounds of distant celebration, but none of the glee spread to this same spot. Ash looked at Latias, and she did the same. Pikachu was still lying in Ash's arms, waiting for one of them to make a sound.

Since Latias couldn't talk, Ash was the one who spoke first. "So Latias, long time no see."

An awkward start, but Ash's tongue was tied. Brock was the 'expert' when it came to girls, and something told him that the gym leader's approach was not going to work in this situation. Or any other one, for that matter.

Latias took a step forward, one that cultivated into a sprint. Whatever Ash wanted to say had to wait, all she wanted to do was bury herself

in his arms, letting silence say what she wanted to.

And what seemed like an eternity went by, step by step, Latias approached Ash. She didn't know how, but when she leaped for Ash, she was already in her original form.

Pikachu managed to leap out of the way in time, because Latias crashed straight into Ash. They both fell to the ground, Ash taking the brunt of damage. Seeing all of this, Pikachu stifled a giggle, but failed to hold it back when Ash said one of the worst things possible at the time.

"Wow, that hurt."

Pikachu decided to leave the two alone. Besides, they had a lot of catching up to do.

As night's curtain fell, Ash and Latias were on the rooftops. How they got there really wasn't that important. They barely shared words, letting nothingness speak for them. The lack of light in the area let the stars shine brightest. Everything was just so romantic, and that was the perfect enhancer for the adulations the two on top shared.

Ash was lying to the left of Latias. While his gaze was aimed upwards, Latias was only looking at him. It was amazing how she could fall for Ash without even being with him in the first place. Saying that Ash was attractive wouldn't be stretching it, but there was another thing, maybe it was his childishness, or maybe it was his always cheerful manner. Either way, it felt so good to finally have him close.

It was weird, thought Ash. He wanted to share so many things with Latias when the time came, but now, he found that silence was the perfect speaker. It felt better this way, saying nothing, but somehow, saying everything.

It made no sense, but the entire story wasn't any better.

After an hour or so, Ash turned to Latias. Latias, whose gaze never wavered, just stayed the way she was. There was no blushing, nor were there any sudden movements. Ash said the perfect things for the instant.

"I love you."

Then they kissed. For how long? Who knows, for when the sun rose to take place of the crescent moon, they were nowhere to be seen.

Cynthia was expecting Ash's call any minute now. She let him choose the place where their battle would take place.

That boy was something else, growing so much in so little time. The Sinnoh champion awaited the day where she would finally clash with him eagerly.

Just as the thought finished itself, her phone rang.

Picking it up, she heard Ash's voice on the other side. "Is this Cynthia?"

"Yes, it's me Ash. Have you decided on the location of our battle?"

"Yeah, that's why I called. Have you heard of Alto Mare?"

She wasn't familiar with the name, but considering that Unova was the only other region she'd been to, it wasn't that much of a surprise.

"No, where is it?"

"In the Johto region, just off Hoenn."

"I'll check it out sometime soon. Is there any special reason for choosing it?"

"It's a long story, Cynthia, maybe I'll tell you someday."

"Well, I do have time right now. I'd like to hear more of your adventures, Ash."

"Really, well I guess that I'll tell you once you get here. How's the day after tomorrow sound?"

"Perfect."

And that ends the Timeless story. For those of you who've been following from the start, you'll probably remember how it was meant to be a one-shot. I guess it turned out to be something more than that in the end.

Firstly, I'd like to say that I'm sorry for the long wait, I wasn't home for a few weeks, and there was also song writing for my friend's band. Either way, I'm finally back.

Thanks to all of you for your reading of this, and also for those who reviewed, a very big thank you is in order.

If you want to read more Altoshipping, I'm afraid that I may not write more of it. I may, but that's a big maybe. I can, however, point you to other great fics. There are so many out there.

Please read and review, thanks a lot to those who do.

旋阴。 Xuan Ying.