

It's usually a joyous occasion, the annual Naranja interclass trip, with students of all grade levels and disciplines being offered the chance to travel abroad for a brief period to celebrate the end of the academic year. Yet Alto sits alone in his hotel room, taking the chance to strum away on his bass now that the other occupants assigned to shared space were out for the night. One would be hard-pressed to call the sound unpleasant, as long fingers expertly glide and tug, drawing out all the right notes, their thrum cutting through the air and into the soul. That is, until his Rotophone's notification sound briefly distracts him. He clicks his tongue as he slips up, the string of his instrument chipping away at his black nail polish.

'Fuck me. I hate having to repaint them...How the hell do girls get the coat to look even?'

Opening his Instantlergram reveals a message from perhaps the last person he wants to hear from right now.



'This had better not be another image of an unphotogenic Pokémon followed by a "you".'

Though if it was, he had at least 3 horribly ugly Spinda pictures in reserve to counter with.

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ribombibi: hey u still made at me?

Xx\_ForgedInHellfire\_xX: My ability to care for the affairs of the mortal realm pale in comparison to the contempt I hold for the deities keeping me bound to it, away from my rightful place on heaven's throne.....

Xx\_ForgedInHellfire\_xX: (but yes i'm still mad at you)

ribombibi: hows it MY fault you bet your money on the preschooler winning?

Xx\_ForgedInHellfire\_xX: I THOUGHT YOU WOULD THROW THE MATCH.

Xx\_ForgedInHellfire\_xX: YOU KNOW.

Xx\_ForgedInHellfire\_xX: SINCE YOU AND YOUR FREAK POKÉMON WERE UP AGAINST SOMEONE WHOSE BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT WAS LEARNING TO RIDE A TRICYCLE.

ribombibi: and screw up my kd ratio? be so fr

ribombibi: anyways

ribombibi: im gonna make it up to you! youre free tomorrow night arent you?

Xx\_ForgedInHellfire\_xX: Yes, but why are you asking?

ribombibi: lol thats what i thought. fracasado

Xx\_ForgedInHellfire\_xX: Has anyone told you that you suck at apologizing?

ribombibi: multiple times. which is why im DOING something nice for you instead of SAYING something nice°.◇ \ (0▽0) / ◇+.°

ribombibi: while were all still in hearthome i got the gang to help me do some digging and we found an ad for a babysitter with crazy pay

ribombibi: i figured youd be available since there arent any contests scheduled

ribombibi: btw why didnt you tell me you were a contest stan earlier? we couldve talked lisia or fantina. think she would be cool battling me even if i dont have any sinnoh badges yet? (◇▽◇)

Alto wasn't keen on explaining that he and Bibi liked contests for very different reasons, his primarily involving cute girls prancing around in short skirts, but luckily he didn't have to, given Bibi immediately got side tracked. He watches as she sends message after message wondering about a fight with Fantina before rerailing her train of thoughts.

ribombibi: oh yeah, heres the rest of the deets on that job, good luck!!!!!!

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The house Alto stands across from is more normal than he expected, used to assuming that anything Bibi got involved with would be obvious trouble and red

flags on red flags. He sticks out like a sore thumb, his garish hair colors and sharp shoulder pads contrasting against the lush natural landscape. It had still been true when he stood in the antiquity of Hearthome's streets, yet nary a pair of eyes lingered on him as he made his way through town, a clear sign of the city's love for and history with coordinators. Not that he was one, but it was the first assumption of many given his visual kei inspired looks. He was frankly banking on that acceptance extending to the areas just past Hearthome, seeing as he didn't pack any more casual looks. After all, he wasn't expecting to have to take on a babysitting gig of all things.

Meanwhile, Luke and his wife have finally set aside time for a date night in Hearthome, and have saved up 1,000 bucks to pay whoever is willing to be a babysitter for their youngest son Radley. Luke has taken the liberty to interview babysitter candidates as all the usual sitters are busy or otherwise unavailable. Something had felt a little off about the out of nowhere message from a friend he had received recommending some kid he had never heard of, but this was precisely why he planned an interview in advance to ensure everything was going to be a perfect fit.

Luke opens the door and welcomes Alto in, offering him a seat on the sofa as he takes the recliner. Alto sits tall and proud as he can, maintaining his typical poker face though acutely aware that his look was probably going to get him booted off the premises before they got far.

'Well, if the guy's generous enough to cough up 1000 for a babysitting job let's hope he's generous enough to not judge a book by its cover.'

He's broken out of his thoughts by the sound of Luke's voice as he kicks off his interview.

"Thanks for showing up on such short notice, you'll be getting 500 bucks upfront, and you'll get the rest when we come back. What did you say your name was?"

It's instinct at this point, his hand's dramatic flourish and his practiced introduction.

"They call me many names, though all know me as the voice that cleaves through the shado--"

A blank look cuts him off.

"A-Alto. My name's Alto, sir."

"Alto, okay, that won't be too hard for him to remember." He calls his youngest child in, "Rad, come on in."

A six year old with dark brown hair and ruby eyes steps in wearing his little bright green hoodie over an equally bright red t-shirt. He waves excitedly, the room warms up in his presence.

Alto tugs at his collar for the first time since entering the cool region, trying to hide his nervousness and discomfort by returning the wave with a finger gun.

Luke leans forward, "so, how this is going to work is: I'm gonna ask some simple questions like experience with kids and set some rules, then ol' Rad here is gonna ask the hard hitters."

Alto leans back trying to piece his persona back together, though he had no confidence it would help him. It would at least be less embarrassing to flub the opportunity just being himself than try to come off as professional as possible and still get turned away.

"Ask of me what you will, for I come bearing all the truths in creation."

Luke, perhaps feeling charitable, smiles and leans back into his recliner, twirling a flat rock with his fingers.

"Alright, first thing's first, it's important to know that Radley has an elemental connection to fire. This being the case, the house is fitted with a top of the line sprinkler system. On a scale of one to ten, how comfortable are you dealin' with a youngster like that?"

'I think that just about tops the list of questions you don't want to hear during an interview.'

"I'm a creature born of black flame, forget 10, my mastery of the element and taming of its misfortune puts me at 13."

The room stays silent for about 5 seconds before Alto almost squeamishly elaborates.

"I've had to put out a lot of electrical fires before, I've learned my way around pretty much every hazard involving them too. My Primarina can also help deal with natural ones."

He'll take a raincheck on mentioning said fires happened because he and Toxtricity accidentally blew something up while trying to amplify their sound.

Luke smiles, "Garage is fireproof, for the most part, he's got kindling in there he can play with so long as he has supervision."

It's all Alto can do to nod, wondering if maybe he should've made himself seem a little less comfortable with the concept.

"Now that that is out of the way, have you ever babysat someone his age before?" Luke asks, twirling the stone a bit faster.

"While not 6 yet six years of age I have found myself the sole guard of the young and innocent."

"How'd that go?"

It was the summer before last that Alto found himself volunteering to help at a local daycare. All in hopes that he could get closer to the gorgeous woman running the place, only for those hopes to be dashed against the rocks when he found out she was taken. He suppresses the urge to grimace as he remembers grubby hands clinging to his legs, grabbing at his hair, and the loud wails of the tantrum throwing types which could put Loudred and Misdreavus to shame.

"Of course I was honor bound to ensure those fledglings' safety until the sun found itself swallowed by the horizon.....So like uh. I'm good with younger kids, but more like 4 or 5, I can get them to nap and stuff. I'm pretty confident about this since I'm used to watching over like, 20 rugrattatas at once."

Luke's smile is now accompanied with a nod, "good to know. Sounds like you have lots of experience. Any certifications, like for CPR or anything like that?"

Alto's carefully maintained neutral face breaks into a grin at the mention of it.

"Hah my ability to drag souls back to our world when the siren call of the far shore beckons to them is unparalleled!"

His chest puffs out proudly as he withdraws his Rotomphone before Luke can ask him to elaborate.

"Check it out!"

Sure enough, displayed on its screen is a PDF of a CPR certification. Earned exactly a year ago as Alto thought the courses meant mouth to mouth action with the local lifeguard. He was, of course, met instead with the cold lifeless plastic of a training dummy, but it still felt pretty cool to be certified. He briefly wonders if having to do CPR on a girl in the future would be good or bad luck.

"Uhh a girl I know also taught me some pretty basic first aid, so like. No wound shall fester when brought care by my steady hands."

Luke smiles and nods approvingly, "never know when something like that will be useful."

Selene, walks through the living room, still putting in her earrings, gauging just how much longer this will take.

"Okay, I'll let Radley take over." Luke sends the stone careening out an open window, it embeds itself within a tree. Then, he listens as his son interrogates Alto, taking careful note of what is said.

Alto has seen weirder than this family of preppers and mystics he seemed to be faced with and already knows better than to remark on it as Radley bounds in. Being fazed was out of vogue. He'd already been confronted by a time traveling Cyclizar, this shit might as well happen.

Radley sits across from him.

"What's your favorite color?"

"Black."

"Why?"

"It's the color of the void that calls out to every soul, but it is exactly that darkness that connects humanity. Also it makes you look skinny and you can pair it with anything and still have it look nice, so jot that down."

"Have you ever juggled fire?"

"No but the fire inside me burns brighter than any around me so I'm sure I could manage it somehow.....Please don't take that as an invitation though."

"Do you like Pokémon?"

"Heh....Heh heh.....No words known to man or beast can define the depths of my relationship to my mournful band of kindred spirits!!! All cast into the shadows, scorned by the forces who fancy themselves the masters of our fate, and yet we rebel! Seeking to dismantle the chains binding the world with our shouts!"

He brags with the confidence one would expect of a world renown musician while Luke and Radley wait out the end of his nonsense. His Rotomphone bobs up and down as his spiel continues, displaying him in the middle of an impromptu performance, surrounded by 6 Pokémon, each the picture of happiness as they contribute to the show. And about 5 displeased onlookers for each team member. It seems as if the blue jolts of lightning surrounding his Toxtricity sparks something in Radley, as he eagerly cuts Alto off to switch topics.

"Today, I learned that Shinx's fur dazzles if it senses danger." He does jazz hands as he says Dazzles.

Alto responds to Radley's gesture by reaching to the sky with a clawing hand.

"Prides of Shinx can-"

"That's not a question I just thought you should know."

"....Right."

"One time I set the bathroom on fire."

"Probably one of the better places to set one honestly, least you got sinks in there."

"Why are your hair and nails so girly?"



"I'm an angel cast from the heavens so of course I look the part. 'Sides, lots of girls like this vibe. You'll get why that's important when you're older though."

"Last time I did my fire inside the house flooded, has your house flooded?"

"Primarina's unyielding torrents could drown the world if she wanted to, and I know that cuz one time she flooded the basement and we had to handle cleanup duty after. Water, fire, we can handle both elements just fine I wager."

"Can you tell cool stories?"

Alto leans forward, tapping the mark over his eye, obviously makeup to most observers but he figures the kid's young enough to buy whatever he says. The great thing about children was that they were usually way more likely to play along with his schtick.

"If you prove yourself trustworthy, I'll regale you with the tale of how this scar was bestowed upon me. Unending winds, the baleful howls of Houndoom packs, me and Toxtricity, fighting our way through the hordes of devils beset upon us. Heaven-sent storms meting out punishment for the wicked.....Knowledge yours to have, if you can show you're worthy kiddo."

"Do you like sports?"

All those sports team try-outs. Taking PE throughout all his studies. Every second of it worth the while if it meant occasionally drawing the eyes of a courtside baddie.

"I'm good at em if that's what you're asking. I'll teach you how to play anything that's not football, I think your dad wants your noggin intact by the end of the night."

"Why do you want to be a babysitter?"

"Evil lurks behind every corner, young one, and it falls on the shoulders of us chosen few to make sure you get to stay safe and sound. Consider my presence here the work of fate." And not in fact, the indirect cause of a lost bet.

"Can I watch TV while you're here?"

"Of course, but only if you're ready for big kid stuff. I'll be picking what we watch so I hope you're tough enough for it."

He shoots a look at Luke as if to reassure him that nothing inappropriate would be watched. Frankly though he was really hoping Radley took the bait since more time spent watching TV meant less time trying to set things on fire.

"Are you a mean babysitter or a nice one?"

"To those with justice in their hearts, I am the gentle breeze that calms the whirling chaos and signals the end of what seem like eternal nights. For valiant souls such as yours, I'm an ally who shall help you soar to new heights. But to bad kids I am everything great yet terrible, the force driving every nightmare. So make your mom and dad proud and show em you're the best son ever by behaving for the night and you won't have to worry about any of that."

"Are there games on your phone?"

"Project voltage colorful stage."

'Fuck. Please don't ask to play.'

"Can I play?"

'Dammit.'

"Play, only if you dare, for it poses challenges most grueling, and only those with rhythm in their soul and connections to the melodies resounding throughout the world can achieve greatness."

He opens up an easy level of the rhythm game, floating his phone over to Radley who eagerly grabs at it. The familiar notes of Elgyem Elgyem come ringing out as well as the sound effects accompanying missed or poorly timed notes. He starts to inwardly panic as he sees the child's face scrunch up in disappointment.

"Uh, h-hey little dude, um.....Fear not the notes soon approaching but instead train your gaze upon the ones emerging at the back. Do so and your mind, body, and soul will synchronize with the beat."

Radley seems to be a good listener for his age, and following Alto's instruction substantially improves his performance, letting him carry out a combo throughout the rest of the song.

"Thanks for letting me play your squeaky music game mister!"

"Squeaky?????- I mean, yeah, no, don't sweat it."

"How old are you?"

"17. So basically a grown up okay?"

"Can you swim? I learned how to swim when I was just a baby."

"Impressive. No swimming would mean no beaches, so I also learned pretty early, you got me beat there though."

"Can I eat more snacks than usual? Please?"

"I'll let you eat exactly as much as you can without inviting the cavity demon into this domain."

"Aaand, what's the funniest thing you've ever seen?"

Instincts! Suppress them!

'Don't say "your mom" don't say "your mom" don't say "your mom."'

"Your m.....Ahem Meowscarada look cool most of the time right? Ever see one fall asleep with its tongue out?" He pulls up his messages from Bibi, showing Radley picture after picture of silly-faced Pokémon. The absolute ugliest of them draw little shrieks of laughter from the child, so he feels like he made the right call.

Luke smiles, he's happy with what he's seen and heard. Selene looks pleased enough and hands Alto 300 bucks, and says "You'll get the rest when we come back and if my son is asleep by then."

Alto posture turns a bit more rigid as the fact that he somehow managed to end up landing the job hits him.

"Oh, uh, th-thanks! And yeah miss I'll make sure he's sound asleep by the time you two get home."

"If you need anything, our numbers are on the fridge and so is the fire department's. Just say "Radley did it again", and they'll know what to do. Also, there's a fire extinguisher in every room and an escape route by every light switch." Luke explains, "bed by 9:00 or 9:30 if he's good."

Selene mouths "8:45" with a stern look.

He salutes. Worked for him, the earlier the kid fell asleep the less he had to worry about ending up charcoal.

"We'll be back by 10:00 or 11:00." Luke says as he dons his coat. "Oh, and one last thing, Hale is the middle child, he's out challenging the League currently and sometimes comes back at night without telling us beforehand. You'll know he's here if he heads this way, he'll be the clumsy 10 year old ninja trying to sneak in through the loudest window in the house."

"Luckily for you, ninjas are also something I've had to get used to. Thanks for the heads up."

"Thank you so much," Selene's voice sounded sweet and threatening at the same time, which Alto thinks he could get used to. As the two leave for their date Radley smiles a toothy grin at the older boy. "Do you have any cool skills?"

"Well Radley, waddya say to becoming a legendary bass player by the end of the night?"