

"I.... Have no damn clue...How Alolan kids do it....The hell are they putting in the....Water here...."

Heaving breaths leave the woman all but dragging herself through the last stretch of the canyon that lay before the gates to the cavern marking the final trial. Nyx was no trialgoer but she was easily influenced, and at the behest of her Hydreigon, itching for some action, she cut into her well earned vacation time to fight through the untamed wilds of Poni island to take on the local trial. She could have saved herself a lot of trouble hopping on the likes of Tauros and Mudsdales the whole way through, but frankly, having to use the ride pager was kind of a drag with the device reminding her of her old job. Her mind drifts to the conversation she had with Rina prior to taking on the challenge

"You should attempt it, if not for your own sake then for your partners."

"But....We kinda paid a lot for this suite...." Nyx's statement was emphasized by the sweep of a pale arm as her hand gestured to the high ceiling and windowed walls that offered a nearly complete view of Hau'oli city, shoppers of all ages littering the streets of the districts below, some local, some tourist, all smiling and enjoying the sun and gentle breeze carrying the scent of sea foam.

"And did your team not contribute to the earnings used to cover the expenses? This trip is for their sake as well. Your Hydreigon is the combative sort, a good fight should sate him for the duration of our stay."

"Okay okay I get it I get it! A good day of trekking and battling for Hydreigon and then it's time for...."

"For?"

"I'm actually not sure....I didn't think I'd actually end up staying in Alola. It's kinda like a dream. Sunbathing? Drinks by the pool?....Beach volleyball???" She clutched at her head as she listed off vacation activities, still in mild shock she was actually free to do whatever she wanted without having to act at someone's beck and call or solve some conspiracy she really had no business getting her hands messy with.

"All the more reason to take a hike. You can figure out our exact itinerary while you're there."

"While I'm there? You're not coming along!?!?"

"Oh of course not. You've gotten to indulge in luxury, even sparingly, yes? We're both here for new experiences. A totem Pokémon for you, staying in a 5 star hotel for me. Would you really deprive me of this?"

Rina's whispery yet blunt monotone never failed to make her shocking statements hit harder, and all Nyx could do was groan and lament without a proper counterargument.

"Sometimes I really hate when you're right about things. I'm going to get this all done as soon as I can so I can get back to enjoying room service and AC. We're making every last Pokédollar spent here worth it."

Sluggishly making her way out of the room, saying goodbye to the plush carpeted floor, glimmering crystalline light fixtures, and gorgeous seaside view, Nyx stops as her wrist is caught in Rina's grip. Butterflies fly in her stomach as her heart stops for a split second.

"Nyx..."

"Y-yeah...?"

"Don't forget to pick up some malasadas on your way home. The brochures say they're a must have."

".....Right. Will do."

And now, here she was, her open Alolan shirt and choppy, shoulder-length hair fluttering in the breeze carried through the cave exit. Some would say she was underdressed for the occasion but despite Hoenn's climate mimicking Alola's with its tropical storms, heat waves, and overall humid weather, traversing its many caves made her rather accustomed to temperatures on both ends of the extreme. She freezes entirely when she sees someone approach, a boy, clad in Kommo-o scales. His eyes are sharp, yet his smile is warm.

'I wonder how long it's been since I looked at people the same way...'

"Alola! Name's Koa. I'll be yer -- ehem. I shall be your Trial Captain for today -- the last arbiter before you face Kahuna Hapu and complete your Island Challenge. You must have come a long way, so please, take a rest before we begin. If I may ask...What's your name?"

She stammers for a bit, not expecting to be greeted by a captain, or even really knowing what it entailed exactly. She had vague memories of learning about the island challenge in school, and she'd done some brief readings on Alolan culture before booking a last minute trip to the islands, but she was by no means an expert on the subject.

"Oh, errr, N-nyx, the name's Nyx. Happy to make your acquaintance Koa."

Undeterred by her nervous nature and taut posture the boy continued, seeming eager to welcome another person to Vast Poni Canyon.

"Where do you hail from? How do you feel about your home?"

She tries to take in as much information regarding the person in front of her as possible, assuming from Koa's status as a trial captain hidden away in the mountains that he'd probably be more interested in Hoenn's natural wonders than its port towns and shopping centers.

"Ahhh. Um. That'd be the Hoenn region, Rustboro, specifically. It's...Pretty nice I'd say? Not too dissimilar to Alola in fact, so you might like it there. Easy not to get homesick, and all the ferry rides you end up taking means nobody there gets seasick either. We got deserts, rainforests, mountain ranges, spots entirely dedicated to deep sea diving...So I'll bet both of our regions draw in tons of tourists looking to connect with nature." She neglects to complain about the occasional bouts of harsh sunlight and torrential rain, wouldn't wanna scare the poor thing off a potential visit, especially given the whole ecoterrorism thing wrapped up years ago.

If he's excited at the prospect of a home away from home he doesn't let it stop him from continuing the impromptu interview.

"What's your family like, if I may be permitted to ask?"

If the taste put in her mouth by having to use the ride pager was sour, this question was durin berry bitter. She quashes down her malice with the wrath of an angry Salamence, but the fact that the smile she colors her face with is fake remains plain as day.

"My folks are....Successful. One's a high flying lawyer and the other works in PR. It's boring adult stuff, I doubt you wanna get into the details."

He's either very considerate or very naïve, opting to instead move to the next question rather than continue to pry, at least for the moment.

"How strong is your bond with your partners?"

Nyx can feel her shoulders loosen, her smile melting into something far more genuine as a light shines in once murky green eyes.

"Strong as it's ever been if I had to wager. Let me show you my best and oldest friend." The gentle click of a Pokéball is followed by the excited hiss of the Brutal Pokémon, as he spins through the air, each arm snapping one after the other, grinning at his newfound freedom.

"Wasn't really easy taking care of him in the beginning, but they always say

nothing worth doing is ever easy anyways. Dragons...Well there are exceptions to the rule of course, but they really do tend to love themselves more than anything else, don't they? I might've taught Hydreigon how and when to pick a fight, but he's the one who taught me that I'm worth fighting for. Made every bite and bruise I earned along the way worth it." And despite the Pokémon's rambunctious attitude and infamous reputation, anyone with eyes to see could recognize the admiration held in its 3 pairs of eyes when its gaze fell on the trainer next to it, even if the glint turned mischievous at best, malicious at worst when those eyes were trained elsewhere.

Nyx would hazard a guess that the boy in front of her was probably used to dragons, or at the very least, Pokémon known for difficult temperaments. Koa stood unflinching when Hydreigon showed off and began to glide and dip through the air around them.

"Why did you take the Island Challenge?"

Despite the comfort offered by the proximity of her dearest companion, she tensed up once more. Was that lack of research going to come bite her in the ass? Was she making some awful mistake? Interfering with important customs? Her mind races with worst case scenarios.

"O-o-oh u-um I. I... I heard there was a strong...Dragon...Type...Here. The- the Totem Pokémon or s-something? I um. I'm not actually taking part in the trial. Isn't that a coming of age thing anyways? I'm...Sorta old for that I think?....I'm really sorry if I'm not supposed to be here I promise I'll leave if we're interrupting something important
it'sjustthathydreigonwasreallyitchingtobrawlforalittlebitsoIthought--"

Koa, mercifully, holds up a hand to stop her anxious ramblings, not seeming to mind all that much that she wasn't here on official business of any sort, letting her know that there was in fact a devastatingly strong Pokémon up ahead, but that she would still have to endure a trial of sorts to reach it.

"Oh. Oh yeah, okay, that works. I'll give it my best!"

"Very well. For the first part of your test... Here's my partner! Mo-o, come out!"

A massive, lumbering creature, stumbles forward with loud stomps and chiming scales. It's a Kommo-o. If this one is so large... how big will the Totem be?

'Forget the water, what are they putting in the fucking FOOD here? Bootlegged vitamins???'

Mo-o stops just in front Nyx, and with a scowl, presents his forehead scale to

her.

"All you have to do now is show you're not afraid. Come on, give it a go!"

Nyx was never a brave girl. The buzzing of bug type Pokémon freaked her out. She couldn't look down while rock climbing because heights made her feel faint. Retail jobs were a complete no-go for her, because if a customer yelled at her too loudly, she would probably burst into tears on the spot. For as much as her dark eyebags, piercings, and the occasional smell of smoke that clung to her suggested a hardened heart, Nyx was Swirlix soft. However, one didn't raise a Deino if they feared being bit.

Well, she had at first, but somewhere between the fifteenth and fiftieth time it happened she had gotten accustomed to it, the sting of disinfectant, the wrapping of bandages, and figuring out the next step of earning her partner's trust. Sauntering forward, Nyx brandishes her arms, each bearing faint, long faded scarring that went unnoticed by most humans but could be seen more clearly through the well developed eyes of a Pokémon like Kommo-o.



"Nothing you can do to me that I haven't already been through big guy."

With a gentleness usually reserved for handling her own Pokémon, most requiring a careful and delicate touch, she rests her hand on the scale before moving to scratch at Mo-o's chin and pat his scales.

"Lookit you, were you just acting tough there? No tension in that jaw or those shoulders, no teeth-baring, you have to act a bit meaner if you really wanna scare people!"

Despite the passage of time and the workings of adult life doing their damndest to make Nyx something colder, uglier, meaner, smarter in all the worst ways,

underneath it all was a bleeding heart that bended, but never broke. She startles a bit, as Mo-o lets out a roar that echoes through the cavern, immediately summoning Hydreigon to her side. She shushes her tri-headed companion as Mo-o stops to lean into her touch, the roar one of approval rather than a battle cry. Nyx turns to Koa, standing tall and proud for the first time since she set foot on Alola

"So, what's phase 2 buddy?"