

## **A Very Confused Pokémon Adventure**

Chapters (13-17)

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### **Chapter 13 – Arrival in Viridian**

In a virtual repeat of the previous day, Zoey and 2B had both awoken early and chosen to make good use of that fact. With two pokémon that were still very new and neither of them in a particular rush, they had separated for another few hours once they'd exited the Reception Gate onto Route 22. The Route itself wasn't actually very long, with there only being perhaps two hours at normal walking speed between the Reception Gate at the outskirts of Viridian City.

It was, however, virtually completely empty of any trainers at this point in the season. Which made it an ideal location to continue their familiarization with their new team members. An advantage neither was willing to give up just to get to the city faster, given that neither had anything of particular note they wanted to do in Viridian anyway.

Despite the perfect location and opportunity, a solid three hours of training was really all they could expect to have with their newest team members. Pokémon had far more stamina than humans, but young pokémon new to the idea of training such as Ponyta, Teddiursa, and Chinchou would need time to acclimate to the rigors of training. Teddiursa, in particular, had been Zoey's own focus for the day morning. Meanwhile 2B had taken the chance to begin actual training and development of simply tactics with Chinchou, instead of simple move familiarization.

By the time both had reunited at the main path, again right around ten in the morning, both were quite satisfied with their respective progress and ready to move on to the city at last. The two-hour walk would let their pokémon recover somewhat, and a visit to the pokémon center would have them fully back up to 100 percent. The time in their pokéballs would do for recovering depleted stamina, and the Pokécenter would easily deal with any actual wounds or muscle damage.

It was a combination that would let them either move on from the city quickly or, as they had tentatively discussed the day before, possibly spend a few hours battling with

other Trainers at the Viridian Gym's Battle Courts. 2B, in particular, was looking to do that. Her previous battling experience amounted only to training fights with Daisy and encounters with wild pokémon. Getting some more experience with commanding her pokémon in battle was a must before the Pewter Gym. For the moment, however, as they walked onward toward the city, Zoey started up a new conversation.

“So, 2B, are you only interested in battling? Or are you planning to do Contests as well?”

Unsurprised the topic had come up, given what Zoey had told her about herself, 2B had already checked her possible response against the Common Sense Checklist. Which encouraged her to give more than a short answer, instead choosing to properly elaborate. This was, she was fairly certain, was ‘small talk’ meant to build camaraderie!

“My primary interest is battling. However, the person who has helped me the most since arriving in Kanto was a Coordinator. She encouraged me to try at least one or two Contests, saying I had the needed flare for the unusual use of moves, and that I might discover I enjoyed the experience.”

Zoey nodded, seeming happy with that answer.

“That’s a good way to look at it, I think. I used to believe one should focus solely on one or the other. But I’ve long since realized that both Battlers and Coordinators have a lot to learn from one another. Even if you decide Contests aren’t for you, you might well learn something from giving them a try. Besides, I can help you create a few routines with your pokémon, if you want.”

2B smiled, nodding at the offer.

“I would appreciate that, I think. Despite Daisy claiming I would be good at it, I think I lack the correct sense of ‘showmanship.’ She seemed to think I would likely produce a good show entirely accidentally, which was very strange. Some guidance would be very much appreciated.”

Zoey looked at her oddly for that comment, but 2B simply shrugged. She agreed that the comment was confusing, after all. The fact that Daisy’s friend Mitsumi had firmly seconded the statement only made it more so. 2B thought her pokémon’s combat style was quite efficient, not ‘showy,’ so she was very puzzled by their insistence. Perhaps Zoey would explain it, when she helped 2B make a routine?

The two continued on toward Viridian City, with Zoey carrying much of the conversation, but 2B happily answering any question and contributing what she could...

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“Ah, civilization again! I don’t really mind traveling and camping, but I admit I miss having a Ride pokémon to shorten the travel time between cities. A pity that Johto and Kanto don’t allow an extra team slot for Transport Pokemon like some regions do. I kept thinking about getting a bike at least, in Johto, but never quite got around to it. The folding models are expensive and the regular ones aren’t terribly suited for many terrains.”

2B nodded, having long considered it odd that transport pokémon and vehicles were both relatively niche in this world. Admittedly, only Trainers really moved between the various towns on a regular basis. But she’d have thought that the relative affluence of older Trainer populations would have created demand. She supposed the fact most serious Trainers kept at least one Flying or Teleport capable pokémon likely explained the lack at least somewhat. As did the fact that most or all of them would have developed the mentality of walking everywhere on their own Journey’s.

“Do you know where the Pokécenter is, 2B? I’m afraid this is my first time in Kanto.”

2B raised a finger and pointed to a street on their left, which angled toward the northern part of the sprawling city.

“I have never been here, but I made sure to memorize all the city layouts. Viridian has three major Pokécenters, with the largest being the in the north near the Gym. As there is also a Pokémart there and we don’t have any serious injuries, I believe it would be our best option.”

Zoey nodded happily.

“Excellent thinking! Lead on, 2B! Maybe we can find some lunch, too? I don’t know about you, but I’d like something more than trail food before checking out the Battle Courts!”

2B nodded acknowledgement to that, then blushed as her stomach rumbled audibly. One of the downsides of her body both producing high amounts of aura *and* having superhumanly dense musculature, was an increased need for calories. She’d snacked on a protein bar after training, but her body had already burned through the calorie-dense bar on the walk to the city. Zoey, thankfully, only smirked playfully at the sound, rather than outright teasing her like Daisy did. 2B was fairly certain Daisy had been jealous, even if 2B herself considered it yet another of the small inconveniences being human created.

“I’ll take that as agreement! Oh! Does Kanto have a specialty food? You know, like Hoenn’s Lava Cookies, or Alola’s Malasadas?!”

2B smiled at her companion's apparent enthusiasm. Despite being a small inconvenience, she *did* admit she rather liked food.

"Yes. Kanto makes something called Crunchies. Pewter is supposed to have the absolute best, as they originate from there. But almost every city and town in Kanto makes their own versions. We should be able to find a shop with them in the area around the Pokécenter and Gym, particularly as they make pokémon and human variants both."

Zoey pumped her fist and sped up, clearly just as eager to taste the deliciousness that was Crunchies as 2B was...

"Hmmm, actually we should stop for lunch first. I promised to call Daisy at the pokécenter when I arrived, and I don't know how long that will take."

Zoey nodded. Which pleased 2B. She was hungry!

"Good idea! I can call some friends too! Plus, I'm hungry! Let's goooo!"

2B's smile grew as Zoey grabbed her arm and pulled her into a jog...Crunchies awaited!

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It was the better part of an hour later when they finally checked into the Pokécenter. They had both passed over their pokémon to the staff and acquired keys for a pair of rooms to check into while they waited for the local Nurse Joy to do her thing. Thankfully, since Viridian was one of the strictest Gyms for badge requirements, the surge of new Trainers hadn't yet affected the town much. The Pokécenter was certainly fairly active, with a dozen or so Trainers having been lounging in the waiting area. Yet there were still rooms available, which said a lot about how comparatively busy they *weren't* yet, given that this was the closest Pokécenter to the Gym.

In another week or two, as the Division 1 contenders making a 2-year run started qualifying in larger numbers, Viridian would see its own Trainer surge. For the moment, while there was an increase in traffic, it was still relatively tame. This, thankfully, extended to the public video phones as well. While 2B had a state-of-the-art pokégear, said piece of hardware was audio-only. She also could have set up one of the personal projects, a laptop that she'd upgraded to the best she could personally make so far, and used it for a video call in her room. Coming back down to use the pokécenter's equipment, however, had allowed her to pick up Chinchou so she could introduce him to Daisy.

Holding said pokémon on her lap as she sat in one of the available booths, 2B dialed Daisy's number. Hopefully, she wouldn't be interrupting anything. She shouldn't be, since

Daisy had stated her intention to take a few days away from most of her ranch work to focus on the paperwork portion of her research papers. 2B's help for the last year had pushed her far enough along that Daisy believed she was ready to publish her first set of findings on aura. Something which 2B fully expected would see her friend acknowledged as a Pokémon Professor in her own right. Though Daisy herself had lamented, much to her grandfather's great amusement, that much of what she had discovered so far only generated *more* questions, even as it answered a few old ones.

Thankfully, 2B was proven to have acceptable timing when the call only rung twice before a slightly harried-looking Daisy Oak appeared on screen.

"2B! You're okay! I almost called you when you didn't contact me yesterday! I was worried something had gone wrong, if you hadn't even reached Viridian yet!"

Oh. Oops. This might require an addition to the Checklist. She was fairly certain she hadn't broken any existing rules on it, but Daisy was clearly distressed.

"Ah...I am actually here more quickly than expected. I diverted to Route 26 to catch my new friend."

2B held up Chinchou both in form of explanation and as a shield. Daisy was never anything but kind to new pokémon, so she was less likely to yell at 2B if she was distracted by Chinchou. Particularly given how adorable he was! Daisy blinked, stared, and absently greeted Chinchou, who tentatively touched the screen and said his name, expressing confusion though his aura. 2B latched onto that.

"Ah, Chinchou, this is a device that allows us to talk to someone far away. I'm afraid Daisy is much too far for you to feel her aura...which actually makes it obvious in retrospect that Trainer pokémon really do learn human languages eventually. You might want to make a note of that for your grandfather, Daisy."

Still clearly processing the chain of events, Daisy nodded at that, then shook her head and gave 2B a *look*. One that combined exasperation with the promise that the Checklist was likely going to get an update again. Oh dear. It was starting to get a bit on the longer side at this point, even for 2B's memory...

"2B, as happy as I am that you have found your first new companion. Would you please explain to me how you got to Route 26 *without* going through Viridian?"

Oh, that was all! 2B smiled happily.

"You taught me to swim! It turned out to be useful, after all. I simply headed across the inlet once I confirmed that it's technically part of Kanto and thus allowed during the

circuit. Though I actually only had to swim roughly 43 percent of the way. A friendly Lapras was curious about my aura and gave us a ride the rest of the distance! It was quite a bit faster, so I had more time to find Chinchou on the first day.”

Oddly, Daisy groaned and planted her face in her hands. She did that a lot around 2B. Well, 2B would give her a moment to recover. She always did eventually, and Professor Oak had reassured her that nothing was wrong with Daisy when she’d asked him about it. He’d seemed amused for some reason when she’d asked. Oh, look, she was recovering quickly this time! That deep breath always seemed to be a sign she’d centered herself again.

“Okay. That’s...*probably* not the most insane thing you’ve ever done. And given your aura, it probably wasn’t all that dangerous for you. Please remember that *others* would consider that trip nearly impossible without a Ride Pokemon or a boat.”

2B nodded. That was obvious, after all. Though, thinking about it, she was going to have to consider that Zoey might not be able to do such things, now that the other girl was traveling with her. Oh, and she still had to tell Daisy about Zoey, that would be a good thing to mention, right?

“Oh, I also met someone on Route 26 who was heading to Kanto. I believe I have now acquired a traveling companion like you always talked about.”

Daisy’s gaze seemed to sharpen for just a moment, but her question was casual.

“Oh? Who is this person? How did you meet him or her?”

“Her name is Zoey! She’s taking part in the Kanto Division 1 Circuit this year, though this is actually the third year of her own Journey. She followed the feeling of my aura to find me fishing for Chinchou, though I didn’t know yet I’d catch him. Apparently, she knows Mr. Ketchum and thought it might be him doing it, since she was aware he was from the region.”

Daisy’s gaze turned distant, a finger coming up to her chin as she obviously thought.

“Zoey...ah. One of Dawn’s Coordinator rivals, wasn’t she? The redhead with a Glameow?”

2B nodded, then shook her head.

“A Purugly, actually. She mentioned he evolved in Johto last year. She was attempting to do both Gyms and Contests after Mr. Ketchum and someone named Nando showed her there was a lot to learn from battlers. It only partially worked, however, as she had too much to unlearn.”

Daisy's gaze had refocused as 2B spoke and she nodded at that.

"Which is why she's doing a Division 1 run in Kanto. That makes sense. I remember both Ash and Dawn spoke well of her, even if that was a couple of years ago. Still, it seems like you *have* found a good traveling companion. Is she going to do any Contests in Kanto at all? I recall she was quite good when I watched the recordings of Ash's attempts with Contests."

2B shook her head, pleased that Daisy seemed to approve of her traveling companion acquisition! A step in the right direction!

"No, she wants to try focusing entirely on battling to help her learn. She *did* offer to help me create a few routines when I try Contests myself, though."

Daisy seemed pleased by that.

"Good! Though we'll see how well she handles your particular brand of insanity. Has she seen you battle, yet?"

2B frowned. Insanity? She was perfectly sane, she was pretty sure?

"Not yet. We are intending to visit the Viridian Battle Courts soon, then probably head toward Pewter tomorrow."

Daisy made a strange expression, something that seemed to mix amusement, anticipation, and a slight bit of worry.

"Well, do call and let me know how your battles go, even if just on your pokégear! And remember to forward regular scans of Chinchou to the lab. We don't see many of his species, so it will be valuable to see how one develops with a Trainer. Particularly an Aura Active Trainer!"

2B nodded. Not that Daisy had needed to remind her. Part of her continuing job as a research assistant would be to do just that. No one, even Daisy who was arguably the closest thing the world had to a scientific expert on aura just yet, had any idea what the long-term differences in a pokémon with an Aura Active Trainer would be. If any at all.

The data on how 2B's team developed would be invaluable for future research on Daisy's chosen subject. Vulpix and Jigglypuff were an excellent baseline, having been raised at the ranch and carefully monitored their whole lives. But comparison with a few wild-caught pokémon would both widen and deepen the dataset. If Ash Ketchum actually remembered to scan his pokémon regularly, or kept more than Pikachu around for longer than a single season, they might already have more data. Sadly, he didn't do either of those

things. Nor was he truly Aura Active, despite having the absurd basic potential and inherent reserves.

After her reminder, Daisy asked for more details about 2B's Journey so far and how she'd come to meet Chinchou. She was, of course, quite interested in the idea of 2B's Aura Lure technique, and the two talked for nearly another twenty minutes before 2B spotted Zoey moving away from her own place at one of the videophone booths. Saying goodbye to Daisy, she scooped up Chinchou and went to join her human traveling companion...

## **Chapter 14 – Battle Court Debut!**

Zoey was watching with interest as 2B entered one of the Battle Court. Like most Gyms, the Viridian City Gym had a set of attached 'Battle Courts,' which could be used by any Trainer for a nominal service fee. Such Courts always attracted Trainers of all levels, as they knew it was a reliable way to find battles within their own skill level. There *were* some limitations on such places, such as any move that drastically altered the terrain being forbidden so that the Gym didn't have to remake the Courts constantly. Yet, despite the limitations meaning they weren't a perfect representation of either wild pokémon battles or Gym challenges, the sheer number and variety of opponents you could find at most Battle Courts made them useful.

The two of them had both registered on the local Battle Board, a place where you could post your name, badge level, and who you were willing to fight. The system was *incredibly* useful, as it helped prevent newbie Trainers with only their starter from facing off against, say, a six-badge Trainer with a full team. The ability to select who you wanted to fight also allowed you to include a text blurb, which kept the system useful even for veteran trainers with new team members. They could, despite their badge level, include that they were using only a new pokémon, and get fights appropriate for that pokémon instead of their veteran team members.

Given that it was the early season, it hadn't taken long for both of them to be challenged. They had, in fact, needed to wait longer for one of the Courts to be free than they'd needed to wait for the challenges themselves. Though Zoey had deliberately chosen to let 2B and her challenger go first, as she was a bit...concerned about said challenger.

Dude was a complete dick who was eyeing 2B's tight leather pants in ways Zoey didn't like. Something only made worse by the fact that 2B had, for reasons Zoey didn't yet understand, allowed him to challenge her despite him having 2-Badges and this being 2B's first official battle *ever*. Zoey's own challenger had grimaced when she'd quietly explained that, and agreed to wait and observe the battle in case this was one of the entirely-too-

common Trainers that tried to bully newbies. It was looked down on heavily, but it still happened despite the cultural stigma against it being strong.

Zoey had, of course, tried to warn 2B as well. Frustratingly, the girl's expression hadn't even twitched...even as she'd doubled the already high wager the challenger had offered up. Zoey just hoped that 2B's lack of reaction meant she knew what she was doing, despite her lack of battle experience. She was a Professor-Sponsored trainer, so hopefully that was the case...

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2B appreciated that her companion had attempted to warn her about her challenger. Tabias was his name. She hadn't needed the warning, though. She'd sensed the cruel hostility in him, both through her aura and from simple experience. Malice was nothing new to *her*, of all people. She'd seen it from too many in her past, Machine and Android alike. This was one of the not-so-good humans that Daisy had warned her about. Unpleasant as it was to discover one, she also felt it was her duty to give him a reality check as well. Perhaps he could yet be salvaged, if it was proven to him forcefully enough that he was on the wrong path.

“Rhyhorn! I choose you!”

Her challenger threw out his pokémon first. A Rhyhorn that was, at least, well-cared for looking. Indicating he wasn't truly an entirely lost cause. The pokémon was also quite powerful from what she could see, nearly ready to evolve. 2B cocked her head for a moment, then nodded. Chinchou wasn't up for this yet. Which meant her choice was obvious. Possibly overkill, but this was a 2 vs 2, so she could always let one of the others try his next pokémon.

Throwing out her own pokéball, she didn't bother to shout anything silly. Her opponent, seeing Jigglypuff appear, seemed a bit taken aback. Then he snorted and started the battle.

“Bulldoze!”

“Water Evade.”

Tabias's Rhyhorn was quick, stomping the ground with Ground Type energy and causing chunks of rock and earth to fly forward in an AOE effect that should have easily hit Jigglypuff. Except, of course, that Jigglypuff was even faster, and 2B's simple order had been a command for an entire tactic rather than a single attack. Before the various boulders had gotten even halfway across the field, Jigglypuff had rocketed *up* with a

combination of its light body and Water Pulse, evading the attack area entirely by getting off the ground.

Water Pulse had, once 2B had studied it, been a 'must' for 2B to acquire a TM of for her first companion. The reason for that had been simple...it was *insanely* adaptable. Virtually every pokémon used the move slightly differently. Jets of water like a beam, condensed balls of water similar to an aura sphere, surging waves of water like a mini-surf, even a ring of water the size of a waterfall enclosing the pokémon that had used it, in one Contest 2B had watched. 2B had been both impressed and determined to make the most of the move.

Instead of *only* using the TM for Water Pulse, she'd done that and *then* had half a dozen different pokémon at the ranch who also knew the move teach Jigglypuff their own variants. It had taken over a month of work, but the result was that Jigglypuff wasn't locked into a single variant of the 'attack.' Instead, combined with the malleability she'd already learned from making combo moves, Jigglypuff could switch rapidly between 'variants' for best effect. The one she'd just started with was her most frequently used, a pulse of water that, when combined with her species' ability to float, acted more like Aqua Jet than Water Pulse.

It wasn't *quite* as fast as how a true Aqua Jet would allow a small pokémon to bounce around. But it was still *fast*, and Jigglypuff had learned to rapid-fire the move as a way to enhance her evasion. Of course, 2B didn't *believe* in evasion for the sake of evasion. All evasion was ultimately nothing more than repositing to a new place to attack from, and her pokémon were universally taught this mindset.

Which meant that 'Water Evade' was not a command to merely dodge.

Something which her opponent learned a second later as Jigglypuff used her ability to hover and fired *down* with a second Water Pulse. This one was formed far more like a beam attack, with water spiraling at high speed straight towards the Rhyhorn. To Tabias's credit, he managed to overcome his surprise and call out a desperate counter.

"Rock Throw!"

Already surrounded by a great deal of broken ground, it was easy for Rhyhorn to launch several pieces of rock in an attempt to intercept the beam. It worked...sort of. Instead of taking the full force of the attack, the Water Pulse was weakened greatly. But the super effective attack still clearly hurt it badly, from the shocked cry of the Rock/Ground type. Nor, of course, was it over. 2B had prepared for Pewter, after all, and this was the perfect chance to test their tactics against a common pokémon used by Flint.

“Close and Break.”

Jigglypuff fired off another Water Pulse to accelerate toward the distracted Rhyhorn, giving out a squeaky and adorable roar...even as her fist glowed with Fighting Type energy. The Rhyhorn recovered *just* in time to see its tiny doom coming for it. The pokémon’s face was one of pure, horrified confusion as it ate a speed-enhanced Brick Break to the face. Jigglypuff bounced away into a floating backflip a moment later, ending up back where she’d started and clearly ready to continue from the adorable karate pose she struck on landing.

...only for the Rhyhorn to topple over, clearly unconscious...

“W-What?! What was *that*?! Jigglypuff can’t do that! You must be cheating!”

2B cocked her head.

“Brick Break and Water Pulse are both TM learnable moves for the Jigglypuff line. Just because you did not expect them, does not mean I am cheating. Please send out your next pokémon.”

Tabias spluttered, fumbling with Rhyhorn’s pokéball. He returned the unconscious pokémon, then angrily threw out another.

“Fine! Let’s see how you handle, *Pidgeotto!* Quick, Pidgeotto! Aerial Ace!”

2B had intended to withdraw Jigglypuff, and responded on reflex when Tabias attacked before she could.

“Fairy Gatling!”

Pidgeotto was *fast*, faster as it dove than even Jigglypuff had been while moving via Water Pulse. But Fairy Gatling was the single most practiced and *devastating* move that 2B’s first partner knew. Practiced since she was still an Igglybuff, the move was second nature to her now, and no longer had the buildup time originally caused by it being three moves combined. Which, unfortunately for Pidgeotto, meant that the bird pokémon effectively dove face first into machinegun fire formed of Fairy Type energy.

The move was only normal effectiveness, but it was potent in its own right even *before* the additional momentum from Pidgeotto’s Aerial Ace was considered. There was a cry of pain, then a dust cloud as the Aerial Ace move went out of control and Pidgeotto slammed into Jigglypuff...or where Jigglypuff *had* been. The little pokémon had managed to ride the recoil of Fairy Gatling to get at least partially clear of the attack. She’d still been clipped and thrown a fair distance, Aerial Ace was such a fast move that almost no one ever

managed to dodge it. But Jigglypuff had robbed it of enough energy that she only wobbled once before retaking another fighting stance.

“Jigglypuff!”

Her command to ‘bring it on’ was, sadly, quickly denied as it proved that Pidgeotto had been knocked out by the combined damage of Fairy Gatling and its face-first impact with the ground...

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Zoey stared, slack jawed. She was only broken out of her confused state when her own challenger laughed softly.

“I think you were worried about the wrong person. *I’m* not challenging that Jigglypuff anytime soon, that’s for sure! Now, I think I spotted another Court just open, so why don’t we have our own battle?”

Zoey could only nod dumbly and follow after him. Five steps away, she abruptly realized something and whispered urgently to herself.

“Wait...that was totally the sort of ridiculous thing Ketchum did too. Is *everyone* in Kanto a monster? Should I be expecting that from this guy too?!”

Thankfully, her momentary panic went unnoticed and would eventually prove unfounded as her Teddiursa and Ponyta did perfectly fine against her opponent’s Poliwhag and Oddish...

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“Ice Burst.”

Zoey’s eyebrow twitched as she watched yet another pokémon from a more experienced Trainer go down to the move that her pokédex was still listing as ‘unknown.’ The fact that it, as well as several of the moves she’d seen 2B’s Jigglypuff pull, were registering as *moves* was telling. The pokédex was far more than a mere identification tool, which is why she even *had* one despite being a Coordinator. Only lab trainers got one for free, but others could purchase more limited versions of the devices, and Zoey had done so in Johto. They were utterly invaluable, if you could afford one, as even the ‘civilian’ model you could buy from Sliph Co had quite a few important features.

Features like move identification.

Move identification that was sensitive enough that it could and *did* differentiate between combo moves and move variants like those used in Contests...and completely

original moves. Combo moves, that is moves that weren't actually a single move but two moves fused into a single execution, weren't actually that rare. In point of fact, they were a staple of both high-level Contests *and* high-level battles. Seeing them in use during Division 2 battles was completely normal. Even seeing them in Division 1 League Conferences wasn't anything to write home about. Not to mention that, if anything, they were even more common in Contests. Though usually there they were much weaker and used for aesthetic purposes rather than being battle tactics.

The problem was that what 2B's Jigglypuff had done earlier, and what her Vulpix was doing now, were *not* combo moves.

It was entirely probable that they may have started life that way. But however they'd come into being, they *weren't* combo moves any longer. No, they were smooth and refined enough that her pokédex was identifying them as *Unknown Move*. Not 'Unknown Combination' or, better yet, as a breakdown of two existing moves like it normally would. No, it was identifying them as *moves*. Fully realized, unknown, and likely completely *original*, moves.

Zoey stiffen as she heard a familiar chime. The distinctive sort that came from a *real* pokédex instead of the civilian knock-off versions like hers. She looked around and spotted the culprit, who was looking at his pokédex in confusion. His *non-Kanto* pokédex. Fuck. Time to exit stage left. Hopefully, her new friend had some idea what she'd just done. If not, it might be time for a midnight exit into Viridian Forest...

## **Chapter 15 – Quick! Into the Forest!**

Zoey took a deep breath, let it out in a sigh, and clutched her peace offering of chocolate chip bagels as she hesitated in front of 2B's door. She'd been a bit...short...with 2B the night before, when it became obvious the girl was utterly oblivious to the havoc she was about to unleash. She'd ultimately demanded and gotten a number for Daisy Oak, who she'd called after leaving 2B.

It was from Daisy that Zoey had learned that the havoc wasn't actually unplanned for. The older woman had been *grinning* when she'd asked Zoey to link her pokédex, and promptly uploaded a much more complete database to it. One that, frankly, caused her poor civilian model to *lag* when she'd accessed it for more than a few seconds. Thankfully, she could flip between the 'professional' mode Daisy had given her and its original programing. More to the point, though...she'd found listings of several new moves on the updated 'dex.

Fairy Gatling

Fairy Sword

Lullaby

Ice Burst

Four entirely new move entries. Ones with minimal details admittedly, but present in a completely official format. Apparently, the *Oaks* had realized what was happening with 2B's move creation, but hadn't wanted to 'spoil the process' by telling 2B that what she was doing was supposed to be hard. As in, bordering on outright impossible. Typically, it was rare for a *single* new move to be added to the pokédex archive in any given year. 2B had *four*...that the *Oaks* knew about. Daisy had admitted it was entirely possible Jigglypuff had more. So many undocumented move signatures could confuse things, apparently. The four they'd identified and submitted were ones they'd been able to record her practicing.

The League had been forwarded the results of the new moves as part of said submission, making them officially recognized. But the pokédexes *hadn't* been updated, as the moves had yet to be used in a League setting. As such, even lab-provided 'dex's would be in the dark. Which...neither Oak had apparently considered a problem. Daisy sheepishly admitted that between getting used to 2B doing the impossible and getting caught up in amusement over the idea of how everyone was going to react, that she'd sort of *forgotten* that Trainers were both overly excitable and competitive.

Which meant that, somehow, it was now up to Zoey to both apologize to her new friend for being short with her *and* convince her that they probably ought to leave Viridian *now*. Or as close to *now*, with now being five in the morning, as possible. Talking over the issue with Daisy, they'd both come to the conclusion that it would likely be better for everyone if the first 'true' reveal of the new moves happened during a sanctioned and recorded Gym Battle. There, the League's knowledge of the moves and attribution of them to a 'Researcher for Professor Oak's Lab,' would offset the more extreme reactions and potential accusations that Zoey could almost *feel* coming.

Honestly, they were *probably* overreacting.

But, well...Trainers were melodramatic as heck, as a general rule. Something not helped by the fact that the bulk of them were always teenagers who hadn't settled down into another role in life yet. Zoey was a teenager too, of course, but at eighteen she liked to think she wasn't quite as *erratic* as younger Trainers on their first circuit could be. Sighing at that thought, she raised her hand and knocked, hoping that Daisy was right to believe 2B

would already be awake at this hour. Apparently, the younger girl didn't sleep much? You certainly wouldn't know it from looking at her.

There was a stirring from beyond the door. Thankfully, not one that sounded like someone just waking up. Something that was supported by the door opening fairly quickly. Zoey opened her mouth to speak, only for her eyes to catch up to her brain and temporarily initiated Emergency Shutdown Procedures.

Apparently, 2B slept in nothing but a negligee.

A *partially transparent* negligee that clearly showed her nipples, showed a distinct lack of lines from panties, and barely came to mid-thigh.

Combined with the *utterly gorgeous* pair of bright blue eyes Zoey hadn't seen nearly enough of due to her visor, and the complete and utter innocence of her expression, Zoey was momentarily a bit too stunned to speak. Somewhere in the far back of her mind, one part of her brain was sardonically noting that it was a good thing Zoey had already known she was into girls. Meanwhile, another part of her mind was drooling and frantically scribbling on a mental notepad, chanting 'Write this down! Write this down!' as it recorded the current view for review on 'lonely nights.'

Blushing as she became properly aware of that last mental thought process, Zoey wordlessly shoved her bag of bagels forward as she tried to get her tongue working again. 2B looked adorably confused as she accepted the offering, and Zoey finally managed to get her brain working again.

"Ah! U-um, the bagels are an apology? I wanted to say sorry for being a bit abrupt last night. I was worried about something and...well...Daisy agreed we should probably head to Pewter as soon as possible. Like, preferably before everyone else starts waking up."

Adorable confusion only got *more* adorable as 2B cocked her head.

"We should? Why?"

Zoey looked up and down the hall, then at 2B's state of dress.

"Uh...maybe I should come inside to explain?"

2B nodded solemnly, her serious face doing absolutely nothing to dispel her adorableness. Something that only got worse as she stepped back to let Zoey into the room, retrieved a bagel, and nommed on it with cute bites as she held the bag out to Zoey. Zoey shook her head in denial.

“I already had one. The rest are for you. You explained about your appetite yesterday, and we should probably avoid being seen so we don’t get swarmed. Or, well, so *you* don’t get swarmed.”

Damn it, that head cock was so adorably puppy-like that Zoey wanted to pat her head! Don’t give into temptation Zoey! You can do this! Concentrate on the explanation!”

“Ah...Daisy apparently didn’t explain this to you, so that it didn’t affect your way of thinking, but new moves are *rare*. Combinations aren’t, but something so seamless that it becomes a proper *move*, ingrained into a pokémon’s instincts? *That* only happens very, *very* rarely. Yet your Jigglypuff apparently has *three* and your Vulpix, despite being with you for less than three weeks, *already* has one. One *entirely* different from any that Jigglypuff knows, too. It’s going to be a big deal when people realize it, and at least one lab-provided pokédex recorded Vulpix’s Ice Burst move yesterday.”

2B still looked confused, causing Zoey to sigh. Was it bad that her obliviousness just sort of added to the younger girl’s charm?

“2B, you’re going to get swarmed by people asking how you did it. Some of them more pushy than others, and some even accusing you of cheating. Apparently, Daisy scanned the moves she knows about and sent them to the League, so *the League* won’t cause issues. But Trainers, particularly the younger ones, can be total drama queens. It would be *much* better if you officially ‘revealed’ the moves in the setting of a Gym Battle. That way the League officials can attribute the moves to the lab, which will deflect a lot of the crazier people who will seek you out.”

2B had finished her first bagel, somehow eating it so neatly that the black negligee she was wearing didn’t have a single crumb on it. Zoey was both incredibly jealous of that ability and still trying not to blush at how revealing her companion’s sleepwear was. The girl still looked a bit confused, but shrugged, which *did not* help Zoey keep her eyes above the other girl’s neckline. Though those bright eyes of hers certainly helped the effort on their own.

“I don’t get it. But if Daisy agreed with you, the Common Sense Checklist probably missed something. I can be ready to go in a few minutes.”

Zoey nodded, then stopped abruptly as she processed the clear capital letters in 2B’s use of the words ‘Common Sense Checklist.’ She *really* wanted to ask about that...only to spin quickly toward the wall as 2B started moving toward the room’s small bathroom and pulled her negligee up over her head.

Nope. She *definitely* hadn’t been wearing panties under it...

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It took less than twenty minutes after Zoey's explanation for the two of them to be on their way out of town, towards Viridian Forest. Most of that had actually been for 2B's pokémon to eat. Though the girl *had* taken time to put on a small amount of makeup. It was incredibly minimal, really just lip-gloss and a tiny bit of blush and eyeshadow. Frankly, she didn't really *need* it, but Zoey had to admit that whoever had taught her the simple routine had known what they were about. It made her eyes, sadly covered most of the time, pop a bit more, as well as helped bring a little bit more life to a face that seemed to rest on 'deadpan' most of the time.

A seriously cute deadpan that somehow suited 2B's features. With almost artificial perfection, actually, but distinctly unexpressive nevertheless. The blush she'd applied *did* help her look a little less doll-like. As did, admittedly, the rugged and practical traveling outfit that 2B had changed to. Zoey quietly admitted to herself that she was rather sad not to see a repeat of either the swimsuit from day one, or the tight leather pants from yesterday. Though 2B's current outfit made sense for where they were headed. Speaking of which...

"What can you tell me about Viridian Forest? Normally, I would have spent at least a few hours doing some research before heading into a place like this..."

2B's response was immediate but less than useful.

"It's spooky and full of bugs."

Zoey turned to stare at the girl...and just barely caught the tugging of a smirk at the edges of her lips. Snorting, she fought her own twitching lips as she poked 2B in the arm.

"Yes. Very succinct. Now, how about a more useful version for the poor tourist to the region?"

2B's twitching lips turned into a smile for just a brief moment, before returning to her usual neutral expression. Zoey was going to have to remember that there was a sneaky thread of mischief hidden under that expression in the future.

"Technically, what I said is accurate. Viridian Forest is *mostly* known as a Bug Catcher's paradise. That said, the Forest is *large* and quite old. Even following the paths exactly, it will take us several days to get through it, and it's often hard to actually do that. Despite the Ranger's best efforts, the path just seemed to *vanish* from time to time. They always rebuild it, but it's not uncommon for people to get a bit lost inside. Thankfully, so long as they stay away from the Beedrill territories that the paths are mapped to take you around, there isn't much that's a serious threat to a well-equipped Trainer."

Zoey grimaced. Beedrill swarms were infamously dangerous. So much so that even the regions they weren't native to had often heard of them. Still, so long as you weren't an idiot, you should recognize the signs of such a swarm long before you properly entered its territory and agitated it.

"Are there any pokémon worth looking for specifically? I admit, I'm not much of a Bug-type enthusiast. If I was doing the Contest Circuit, I might consider the Butterfree line, but for battlers..."

2B nodded.

"The Butterfree and Beedrill lines are actually both quite capable battlers. Their early stages are, like many bug pokémon, quite weak however. As a result, they tend to only be used by dedicated enthusiasts. Those willing to put the effort in and knowledgeable about how to best make use of them. There are a few other bug types that less common, but still relatively easy to find. Spinarak, Ledyba and the rare Scyther or Pinsir can all be found if you look around a bit off the main paths."

Zoey nodded. That all fit with the idea of a 'Bug Catcher's paradise,' but none really appealed to her current plans. 2B carried on, moving away from the bug types.

"Oddish and Bellsprout are both present, as are Seedot and Shroomish, each decent grass types that are often caught to help trainers with the Pewter Gym. Flying types are common, preying on the bug types. Most typically present are the Pidgey and Hoothoot lines. Harder to find, but more widely desired pokémon include Pickachu and, *extremely* uncommonly, wild Bulbasaur."

Zoey blinked, almost missing a step at that last little detail.

"Wait you can find *Bulbasaur* in Viridian? I've got to admit that if I saw one of those, my plans to avoid grass types would likely go out the window."

2B nodded seriously.

"It is unlikely. But Viridian Forest is one of the only places they can be found in the wild. Hmm...I think the only other likely finds would be Diglett and Dugtrio, if you pass near Diglett Cave and the tunnels there. Zubat, at night as well, of course. Those are pretty much anywhere in Kanto that has caves. There are rumors of wild Chansey in the caves from time to time, but reports of them are even rarer than for Bulbasaur in the Forest. I think that's about it?"

Zoey considered the list. It was honestly a fairly impressive selection in some ways, yet there was little on it to truly interest her. She wasn't really looking for a bug type and,

aside from the idea of a Bulbasaur, only the Pidgey line was something she noted as potentially interesting. Even that was, she felt, more for their ability to grow large enough to Ride than anything. They were very solid flying types, but hardly spectacular. If she happened upon one she connected with, she might consider it. But that was true of virtually any type of pokémon.

“Not a lot that interests me, I admit. Not when I already have two new captures to train. What about you? You only have Chinchou, really. Though I guess your Vulpix is technically sort of new? It’s hard to think of it that way, given what a little monster you’ve already turn her into.”

Not to mention the fact she’d *somehow* helped it create an entirely new move in less than three weeks. Seriously, what the heck? Struggling once again to ignore her incredulity about that particular subject, she focused on 2B’s answer. She was prompt to respond, clearly showing that she’d considered the possibilities already.

“A Scyther, if there is one willing to come with me. I have some considerable skill with a blade that I believe I could pass on to one.”

Zoey blinked, squinted at 2B, then shrugged and decided to take her word for it. Compared to the *many* other weird things about her companion, the idea that she knew how to use a sword was honestly fairly tame. There was also that Fairy Sword move as evidence, even if Zoey had so far only seen a pokédex description of that particular move. Heck, it also might even explain why she’d fought Chinchou personally. Fighting type trainers and all adjacent disciplines tended to produce oddballs that liked sparring personally with their pokémon. Add in 2B’s ability to use aura and she could probably actually *keep up* with younger pokémon like Chinchou, at least.

“Well, let’s hope we find you one, then! Looks like we’re here, after all...”

So they were. The city had fallen behind them fairly quickly, and it had only taken a half an hour past that to reach what appeared to be a Ranger Station. Not an uncommon thing to see, with them likely wanting trainers to check in so they would know to search for you if you didn’t come back out again in a week or so. Moving forward to speak with the Rangers, Zoey was relieved they seemed to have successfully escaped Viridian without attracting any crazies...

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“Who’s the tagalong?”

A scruffy-looking twenty something hiding in a bush asked the question to the angry-looking teen that had told him about the ‘cheating bitch’ that had defeated him. Personally,

the man thought the kid was just being whiney. But he'd overheard conversations from a couple of pokédex owners the night previous. One of them had even been an out-of-region lab-trainer, with the real deal, a full-database lab-pokedex.

What he'd caught of that conversation meant there really *had* been something odd about the Jigglypuff and Vulpix. Not to mention that the Vulpix was an out-of-region variant. His bosses would want to know, which meant it was worth trailing the girl. Yet, he'd expected her to be alone, given a quick poke into her background had said she was some sort of researcher for Professor Oak's lab.

"Just someone going the same way, I think. They came in together, and I saw them talking, but I don't think they've been traveling together for long. Probably just both headed for Pewter, since it's the start of the season and they're newbies."

The older man chewed his lip. The kid was full of shit, of course. Even if she was just now going on a Journey, his target was officially a Researcher, which meant some level of experience. As for the other girl...she had to be at least seventeen or eighteen. Unless she was a very late starter, that meant she was either doing a two-year run or was, more likely, an out-of-region visitor. Either could be trouble.

"Well, thanks for the tip, kid. Here."

He passed the fool a roll of pokédollars, even as he watched the duo vanish into the Ranger Station. He'd better get a move on if he wanted to keep track of them in some place like the Viridian Forest...

## **Chapter 16 – Viridian Forest**

2B was quite intrigued by the Forest around her. It was *alive* in a way that no place she'd ever been to before had been. Discounting her original reality, in which Earth was no longer capable of sustaining such places at all, was easy. The woods and forests that lay to the direct East and West of Pallet Town, however, had been rich with largely-untamed territory. Those were the places that Daisy had taken her for 'wilderness training,' and they had been fully and truly alive. Yet, now that she was in Viridian, she realized that even those woods had been...curated, somewhat.

Those 'woods' were pinned between Routes and, as such, somewhat patrolled and culled by Ranger teams. Truly powerful pokémon, if they managed to develop there are all, where typically moved by the Rangers. There were far vaster tracks of untouched territory in the far north of Kanto, or in the mountains that bracketed each side of the human territories

of the region. As such, even the 'off-Route' sections of the woods around Pallet Town were relatively 'managed' by humans.

Viridian Forest was not.

Oh, the *paths* through the Forest were well patrolled. If you stuck to them, you were unlikely to run into anything that your own pokémon couldn't help you at least escape from. But there was an air to the aura of the Forest that spoke to 2B about this being a wild, untamed place. A place that belonged to the *pokémon*, not to humans, and any human traveling through had best respect it and its inhabitants or they'd not make it out the other side. Something which had only been reinforced by the attitudes of the Rangers at the entrance station. Rangers who had said much the same thing, in serious tones, as they'd checked in and recorded how long the pair intended to be in the Forest and where they intended to exit it.

Most people might be put off by the feeling.

2B was simply intrigued.

Enough so that without Zoey along, she might well have decided to cut through the woods more directly, instead of staying to the paths. Her companion being less *robust* than her, however, easily suppressed that impulse. She wouldn't put a *human* at risk. Not simply to sate her own curiosity about the place. Particularly when said human seemed to be at least a bit affected by the aura in the Forest, huddling closer to 2B and having brought her most powerful pokémon in Purugly out.

"This place sort of reminds me of Eterna Forest. Less mysterious but...older feeling? Even more untouched by humans than Eterna, somehow."

2B nodded and happily provided a bit of history.

"That's because it is. Viridian Forest has never been settled by anyone. Not ever in recorded history, at any rate. You'll find no ruins or other remnants of humanity here. It's not a place that pokémon have *overrun*. It's a place where *they were here first and never left*. It's never traveled by anyone but Trainers either, not ever. Pewter was, so far as anyone really remembers, founded from *Cerulean City*, not Viridian. There's effectively no land-based trade through the Forest. It all goes either East through or over Mt. Moon, or else uses the few waterways that cut through the Forest."

Zoey seemed fascinated by the idea.

“That’s...how? Most places only stay like that if there’s extremely powerful pokémon living in the area. But in that case, trainers would be barred from entry without enough badges.”

2B nodded.

“True. You’re missing something important though. The Beedrill Hives. Well, they are called Hives for convenience, but it really just refers to collective territory owned by a Queen and her brood. Those ‘Hives’ have *always* been here. While individual Beedrill aren’t enough to prevent humans moving in...”

Recognition lit behind Zoey’s eyes.

“Right. A *swarm* of them would deter just about anyone. Particularly since there are *multiple* Hives from where you’re saying. How are the paths through the Forest kept safe then, though?”

2B smirked.

“Noticed yet that the path is super windy and maze like?”

When Zoey nodded, her eyes narrowing, 2B gave her a moment to think about it before offering the explanation.

“It’s because the paths are actually carefully routed so that they go *between* various Hive territories. There are sort of ‘buffer zones’ between each Hive, where they Beedrill don’t go in any major numbers, because it would put them too close to another Hive. Since the Rangers are careful to keep the populations under control enough that the Hives aren’t prone to expansion, they can almost always find paths that cut through the buffer spaces. Though they often change from year to year.”

Zoey made an ‘oh’ of surprise, before looking warily around the path they were on. 2B was quick to reassure her.

“Don’t worry, unless someone does something really stupid and stirs up a Hive, this is the safest time of year to pass through. The paths are refreshed during the League off-season. So the Rangers *just* re-established them within the last few weeks.”

Her companion relaxed at that comment, though as they continued to talk, she kept a wary eye on the Forest. As she should, in 2B’s opinion. As they had been warned on entry, this was not a place to let your guard down...

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“Teddi, use Fury Swipes!”

2B and Zoey watched on as Zoey's newest pokémon obeyed, swiping repeatedly at the oddly aggressive Hoothoot. It didn't faint from the blows, but it *did* appear that it had had enough. Calling out its name angrily, it swept off into the trees. Which was *another* odd thing, and a pattern that was beginning to emerge. A Nuzleaf shepherding a trio of Seedot had only been placated by 2B's aura, and a Pidgeotto had outright attacked Vulpix before that, though it had quickly regretted that decision. Zoey shook her head at the retreating Hoothoot, making eye contact with 2B.

"This is definitely not right. The Nuzleaf I could understand. Even the Pidgeotto to an extent. But that Hoothoot shouldn't have even been *awake* yet, let alone so aggressive."

2B nodded, frowning as she checked the time on her tactical display. She didn't really need it as anything more than confirmation, her own internal clock still being far more accurate than a regular human's. Still, the Forest could have been playing tricks, so she checked, only to find out that her sense of time was still on track.

"You are correct. It's only 5:35pm. Despite how dim it is in the Forest, there are still a few hours of daylight left and that HootHoot should have been sleeping still. Something is agitating the pokémon."

Zoey bit her lip, patting Teddiursa on the head in thanks for his efforts even as she stared off in the opposite direction from where the Hoothoot had fled.

"All of them have come out of the West. Should we investigate? Or possibly call the Rangers? If I had my usual team with me, I'd say we should check it out ourselves, but as it is..."

2B frowned, nodding in acknowledgement. The problem, of course, was that the Western part of Viridian Forest was by far the most dangerous section. It led straight up into the foothills of the mountains. The same range that included Mount Silver, even if that mountain was now a bit to their south. It was, in fact, the same range which 2B had pointed out to Zoey could occasionally see Skarmony and the like from neighboring Johto. Few of the official paths led that way, the Rangers doing their best to steer people through the eastern and central parts of the Forest, which were considerably more...*tame* was too strong a word. But somewhat less dangerous, at the very least.

Of course, there was another problem.

"The Forest is too thick here. I checked for a signal after the Nuzleaf and there hasn't been one. Perhaps if we climbed one of the trees, we could get a message out. But pokégear signals are notoriously spotty in the Forest."

Zoey muttered a mild curse as the option to summon help, or at least alert the Rangers something was up, was taken off the table. At least until they picked up a signal again.

“That still leaves the question. Press on, or investigate? If we don’t figure out what it is, we might have to push through the night. Setting up camp with an unknown disturbance going on would be a bad—”

Abruptly, the choice of what to do was wrenched out of their hands as they heard screams coming from deeper into the Forest, off the main path. 2B didn’t hesitate, immediately scooping up Vulpix and bolting into the woods towards the screams. Zoey cursed again, but wasn’t much slower off the line, only pausing long enough to return Teddiursa and release Purugly. Of course, despite being in good shape, Zoey didn’t have 2B’s superhuman strength or stamina and started falling behind fast.

2B summoned a katana from her bracer, the closest to a copy of Virtuous Contract that she’d managed to have forged since arriving in this world, and used it to slice through foliage between her and the increasingly panicked yelling ahead. Cutting through one last bush, 2B took in the sight of two fleeing humans and a badly wounded Rattata trying desperately to slow down *seven* angry Pinsirs that were chasing them. With one last superhuman leap, she pushed off a tree at an angle to land between the fleeing humans and the angry Bug-types.

Her facsimile of Virtuous Contract lit up with aura as she batted aside one set of pincers from a Pinsir. Vulpix, who had shifted from her arms to clinging to her shoulder during the run, pushed off and launched a spread of Ice Burst that stopped the next closest pair of the bugs. For a moment, the charging hoard of Bug pokémon faltered...but then one of the exhausted humans, a girl younger than 2B, collapsed. Scenting blood, the enraged Pinsirs pushed forward...but they’d unknowingly lost their chance in their hesitation.

2B did not lock her pokéballs.

This was a choice any Trainer could make, with some official legal exceptions for particularly dangerous pokémon where Trainers were *required* to keep their balls ‘locked’ at all times. Doing so prevented a pokémon from releasing itself, and aside from the small list of exceptions, the cultural rule was that it was up to the Trainer to decide which pokémon could be trusted. 2B, with her ability to communicate with her pokémon via aura, had left all three of her pokéballs unlocked. At least, she had after her very first talk with Chinchou to establish basic ground rules.

This meant that Jigglypuff and Chinchou were both free to release *themselves* at any time they desired and pokéballs provided at least *some* idea of what was going on outside

their balls to the pokémon inside them. Unlocked balls more so than locked ones. Sensing the bloodlust directed at their Trainer, the pair of pokémon didn't hesitate to release themselves now, shifting the odds from two versus seven to four versus seven. Which quickly became four versus six as 2B whipped her sword around, still infused with aura to give it power, and hit the Pinsir facing her between the eyes hard enough to knock it out.

The other bugs were only enraged farther by that, of course, but two had already eaten damage from Vulpix and went down fast to another barrage of Ice Burst. Two more found out firsthand that an angry Jigglypuff, armed with a sword twice its size made out of Fairy energy, was terrifying. Another ate the brunt of an Electro Ball from Chinchou. The last remaining Pinsir finally hesitated...but didn't get a chance to run as it was hit with a brutal Aerial Ace from Purugly as a panting Zoey finally caught up.

For a moment, everyone in the clearing simply stared, before 2B put away her blade and briskly walked to the fallen trainer and her friend. The injured Rattata had positioned itself to guard the duo and bared its teeth in a threat display as 2B got too close to her Trainer. 2B ignored it, plucking it casually out of the air when it tried a Quick Attack as she continued to advance. Knocking it out with a pressure point, she frowned as she assessed that the two humans weren't seriously injured and stopped to pull a potion out of her bracer. The two humans gaped at her, for some bizarre reason, as she carefully applied the potion to the Rattata she'd just knocked out.

“U-um...thank you? Wait! We need to go! That group wasn't alone!”

2B's gaze pinned the girl as she stuttered out the thanks, then panicked as the situation seemed to catch up to her.

“Explain. Pinsir do not swarm.”

The terse response seemed to shut the girl up, causing 2B to berate herself as she flinched away. Thankfully, the male Trainer had raised a pokéball to recall the Rattata and spoke with a slightly steadier voice.

“They shouldn't. I've never heard of them doing so. Or even of them having so many numbers present in Viridian Forest at all. But something has stirred them all up horribly. They are fighting with *everything* they come across, and there were easily two dozen of them in the group we first saw. Most of them got tied up when we deliberately swung past a group of Beedrill we'd avoided earlier, but either the Pinsir *or* the Beedrill could catch up any time.”

Zoey, breathing a bit heavily still from the frantic sprint, had reached them in time to hear the explanation.

“That’s not good, but panicking won’t make it better. Do you know what stirred them up, and what direction they were coming from or heading to?”

The trainer shook his head, but 2B had already noticed something else and leaned down to touch the ground with one hand, holding the other up in a signal for silence. They all stared at her in confusion, then she abruptly stood.

“Onix. Possibly Graveler, but more likely Onix. The ground is trembling like someone not too far away is using strong Ground or Rock type moves. Given that Pinsir aren’t seen much due to the fact that they *burrow*, I’m guessing that Onix have moved down into the Forest for some reason and disrupted all the Pinsir by tunneling straight through a breeding ground.”

The female Trainer gained her courage back at that explanation. Out of pure outrage, it seemed.

“T-there are new mines, that just opened Southwest of Pewter! Flint and Forrest were furious with the mayor for allowing it. Could they have...?”

2B grimaced and nodded abruptly.

“That’s almost certainly it. There’s never been development there and it must be driving the Onix into the Forest. We need to move back to the path and start warning people, as well as try to get in touch with the Rangers so they can start stopping people from coming into the Forest until this is dealt with.”

That got shaky nods from the two unknown Trainers, and a firmer one from Zoey. The redhead gestured back the way they had come.

“Path’s that way, and it heads almost straight East here, back the way we came. If you two aren’t hurt, we can get you there and you can go to the Rangers at the southern station while we move on to warn people. Do either of you still have pokémon in fighting shape?”

The girl, thankfully, nodded.

“Yes! My Oddish and Bellsprout weren’t hurt! They just couldn’t keep up with us when we needed to run!”

The male Trainer nodded as well.

“Same with my Geodude. We’ll be fine so long as we reach the path and stay ahead of the trouble. We only went deeper into the Forest because our pokémon are actually fairly strong for their types and we’re both Pewter residents, so we know where to avoid.”

Zoey nodded and clapped her hands.

“Then, unless someone is planning to capture one of the Pinsir, time to get moving before anything else happens.”

Both of the trainers shook their heads frantically at that idea, clearly a bit traumatized by the Pinsir that had been chasing them. The pair quickly started moving, causing Zoey to smirk at 2B behind their backs...

## **Chapter 17 – Troubled Forest**

The group had made it back to the path unmolested, splitting up quickly. The trainers, whose names they'd finally gotten as Cam and Rita, were both thankfully still largely uninjured. A bit of Citrus Berry, less effective on humans than pokémon, but still able to restore a bit of stamina, and they'd been able to half-jog, half-power-walk down the path which Zoey and 2B had come from. Technically it was taking them farther from their home, given that they were both Pewter residents, but it was the quickest path they knew at least *should* be safe. Not to mention that the Ranger station at the south of the Forest was *much* closer than the one to the north, which was still at least a day and a half of solid travel away. At best.

Zoey and 2B, now with Jigglypuff and Purugly actively out and on watch, had turned their own feet to the path that led deeper into the Forest. With the League Circuit having started around two and a half weeks ago now, there was virtually certain to be other Trainers traveling both ways through Viridian Forest. Those Trainers needed to be warned, and 2B and Zoey felt secure in their ability to do so.

Swarms were dangerous, yes. But so far there didn't seem to be a true swarm. Just a lot of agitated pokémon who were normally far more insular. So long as it was only the Pinsir that were disturbed, they would likely stick to small groups. It was only if either the Pinsir or the Onix disrupted one of the Beedrill territories that things might be dicey. Something that they hoped wouldn't happen, at least until the Rangers were alerted.

Thankfully for 2B's peace of mind, Zoey was in excellent shape. While 2B could have moved more quickly on her own, she also recognized that it was better to stick together, and Zoey was in well above average shape. Despite the rough terrain, her companion was able to keep up a light jog for the next hour, which is when they found their first additional trainer. The individual in question was a Bug Catcher, who grimaced at their description of events.

“Damn it. That’s going to set the whole Forest off kilter if it lasts long. Pinsir are only found in those numbers during summer, when they are ready to breed, and having that disrupted will make them *extremely* aggressive with all of the other pokémon. Worse, they are tough enough that if a group of them already struck a Beedrill group...the Pinsir probably won. Which will agitate whichever Hive those Beedrill belonged to.”

The Bug Catcher, who was in his early twenties rather than a newbie trainer, shook his head.

“The Rangers are going to have to shut the whole Forest, at least until they can clear the Onix out, possibly longer. You’re right we need to warn people, too. Thankfully, I can help a bit there.”

The man had a full belt of six pokéballs, and he withdrew three of them as he said that. A Butterfree, Ledian, and a Dustox appeared from their beams.

“Alright, you three! We’ve got an emergency! Move along the path back toward Pewter and warn off any Trainers you can find. Talk to their pokémon if they won’t pay attention to you, but try to get them to either leave the area, or head to Diglett cave. We passed that...maybe two hours ago. So it and the Ranger stationed there are the best bet for immediate safety.”

The pokémon all called out their names firmly...then took off at speeds faster than even 2B could have run. The bug catcher turned back to them.

“Right. They’ll gather up Trainers, but you two should continue on to talk to the Ranger at Diglett Cave. She’ll need more information than my pokémon can pass on. I’m going to head farther into the forest to see how bad it is.”

When he saw them about to protest, he held up his hand and smirked and patted his remaining three pokéballs.

“I might only be a Bug-type trainer, but I *did* manage to beat all eight major Gyms during my Journey. I kept my two most powerful pokémon, Scizor and Heracross, with me.”

He winked and tapped a specific pokéball.

“More to the point, while she’s not much of a battler, I taught me Venomoth teleport via TM. She’ll get me out of trouble and back to Pewter if I run into something I can’t handle. One way or another, I’ll teleport back there anyway once I figure out how bad this is. My pokémon will be able to find me there easily enough.”

2B and Zoey both relaxed, realizing abruptly that they'd stumbled into a genuinely veteran trainer who clearly knew what he was doing. Breathing a sigh of relief, they both nodded, with Zoey being the one to speak up for them.

"Thanks. We'll head on to the cave and let the Ranger know. I'm sure she'll report it back to Pewter and Viridian even if we don't pick up a signal on our pokégear before then."

The older trainer nodded.

"You will once you get closer to the cave. The area we're in now is a known dead zone. Normally, they try not to put paths out there, but two of the Hives shifted last season and there wasn't a better place to reroute the main path. The new path meets an older one another 2 kilometers along from here, though. You should get reception there."

They nodded, thanked the man again, and then separated from him in a hurry. He moved off into the Forest, even as they picked back up to a light jog, Zoey having caught her breath fully as they stopped to talk to the Bug Catcher...

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2B jerked as her pokégear buzzed, with Zoey's own starting up a moment after hers. Both of them pulled them out, quickly noticing an alert...or rather a series of alerts. It had taken them only twenty minutes to cover the distance to the old path, but it appeared *something* had happened either during that time or while they were out of contact. Quickly reading the alerts, they noted that it was an increase of danger warning to yellow...for both Viridian Forest in general *and* Diglett Cave.

"Crap. Looks like something alerted them things were off, but not any details. The Diglett Cave warning might be bad."

Zoey was already dialing the emergency Ranger number for Viridian Forest even as she said that, beating 2B to it by dint of having run into similar situations before. 2B thought for a moment, then decided to shoot off a direct text-only message to Professor Oak. He might be able to contact the Gym faster than the Rangers, and if there was anyone that could deal with the Onix situation, it was the Rock Type Gym Leader. Particularly as he was already aware of, and unhappy with, the mining. Hopefully, he'd been keeping an eye on it. Meanwhile, she listened in as Zoey reported the situation clearly and concisely to the Rangers.

Zoey hung up just as 2B got a response from the Professor, saying he'd get in touch with the Pewter Gym immediately. Zoey spoke up with her update first, even as another alert came in over their pokégear, issuing an 'evacuate to your nearest Ranger Station' order for all of Viridian Forest.

“The Rangers are mobilizing, but there’s more issues than just the Pinsirs. Apparently, the Onix movements have stirred up the Diglett and Dugtrio in the cave, too. Which makes sense, if they can sense the Onix moving into their territory. It does mean that there’s a full Ranger team already on their way to the small post by the cave, though, so they said that’s where we should head.”

2B nodded, before adding what she’d been up to.

“I contacted Professor Oak. He said he’ll get in touch with the Pewter Gym. With the information coming from the Professor, Flint will act quickly to shut down the mining, at least.”

Zoey nodded appreciatively.

“Good thinking, now we should—”

Zoey was cut off as the ground *heaved*, several trees being ripped out of the ground as a *huge* furrow of earth cut through the ground, heading straight east. They were close enough to the disruption to stumble, though 2B kept her feet and quickly reached out to stabilize Zoey. They both stared at the furrow as it vanished as quick as it had appeared. Zoey, half-stunned, blurted out what they were both thinking.

“Wait! Isn’t that heading straight for Diglett Cave?!”

Not bothering to respond, 2B took action, causing Zoey to yelp as she was scooped up in a princess carry. Pumping aura into her legs, 2B shot off at a full sprint, easily hitting 20 mph (33 kph) despite the extra weight of a passenger. Following the damaged ground took them away from the path, but 2B’s tactical visor had an active mapping function and was telling her exactly what Zoey had blurted out. Whatever was making the furrow was heading *straight* for Diglett’s Cave. Mentally putting the pieces together, the only reason 2B didn’t curse was that her entirely-to-human-at-the-moment body needed to save its breath for running.

Mining meant metals. Metals meant that there were *Steelix* among the Onix. A *Steelix* big enough to leave a nearly 10-foot-wide furrow of overturned earth just from swimming through the ground *below* it? That *had* to be an Alpha Pokemon. Which meant that, if it was headed for Diglett’s Cave, it was likely aiming to assert its dominance over the strongest pokémon that shared underground space with it. Almost certainly one of the older Dugtrio that lived in the Cave System. With the speed it was moving, there was no time to warn the Ranger or Rangers already there. The best they could do was get there as fast as possible to try and render assistance.

2B just hoped they wouldn't be too late, and they they'd be able to help when they arrived! So focused was she on navigating the terrain, that she never noticed a large flying pokémon taking off from the Forest behind her...

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They'd heard the clashing of powerful blows before they arrived, but as 2B skidded to a stop and Zoey staggered dizzily out of her arms, they were still surprised by what they found. The Steelix that 2B had predicted and managed to gasp out a warning to Zoey about between breaths was present. But it was clashing with a large Slowking of all things, while a Kadabra stood between both of the power and clashing pokémon and a group of Trainers, holding a protective wall of psychic energy. The overall scene would, perhaps, have made some sort of sense, if it had been someone in a Ranger uniform that was commanding them.

It wasn't.

Instead, a disreputable fellow riding a Fearow was calling out orders and commands as he circled about the fight. There was a Ranger in sight, but she was busy using a Sandslash and two Donphans to contain a large Dugtrio that was likely the pokémon the Steelix had come here to fight. Both of the larger fights seemed to be *somewhat* in hand, though the Ranger was obviously struggling far more than the unknown man and his team were.

The greater problem was that neither the Dugtrio or Steelix had been alone.

A half dozen Trainers had pokémon out and were fighting to shield still other Trainers. Ones who were looking after what looked painfully like a collection of first-stage starter pokémon that had likely *attempted* to fight but gotten easily bodied. It was obvious that this third fight, which was more of a free-for-all in which the handful of more experienced Trainers were really just trying to keep the various fighting Onix and Diglett/Dugtrio away from the humans, wasn't going well.

It was this fight that 2B turned her attention to almost immediately, releasing Jigglypuff and Vulpix while launching herself personally into the fray as well. Zoey, dizzy and a bit bruised from being carried on a wild ride by 2B-Expressway, took a few moments longer to assess the situation. Once she did, she pursed her lips as she saw one of the Ranger's Donphan get slammed out of her battle, obviously unconscious. Seeing that, she took a different approach than 2B.

"Purugly! Take out that Alpha Dugtrio! Aerial Ace into Water Pulse!"

Purugly, despite being primarily a Contest pokémon, was by *far* and away Zoey's strongest partner. Two Contest circuits and a serious attempt at the Johto Gyms meant he was legitimately on par with the sort of pokémon you might find on an Ace Trainer's team. Not an Ace Trainer's ace pokémon, maybe, but still in the same legitimate ballpark as a Division 2 battler. He was also, owing to the countless hours of finesse training for Contests, *extremely* precise.

He reacted to Zoey's commands on an almost unconscious level, reading her aura as much as her words, using Aerial Ace not as an attack but as a move to position himself high up above the Alpha Dugtrio. The Dugtrio who, still distracted with the Ranger's two remaining pokémon, didn't have a chance to react before it was hammered by an extremely potent and tightly focused Water Pulse. Without even needing to be told, knowing what his partner wanted, Purugly followed through with a powerful Night Slash, a move she'd taught him to upgrade his combat potential during their Johto Gym challenge attempt.

The Dugtrio had already been hurt when Purugly had entered the fray, even if it was clearly winning the fight with the Ranger. Getting hammered out of nowhere with a Super Effective attack, followed up by a high-level Dark move, staggered it badly. It didn't *quite* go down from the combination, but it *had* been left wide open, and the Ranger didn't miss the chance provided. Her remaining Donphan hit the staggered Alpha pokémon hard with a Slam, then faded away just in time for her Sandslash to hammer it with an Earthquake.

The Earthquake was finally too much for the tough Dugtrio, the pokémon slumping into unconsciousness. The Ranger cheered, but didn't hesitate to shift targets, with Zoey doing the same almost as quickly. 2B and her little monsters had already hit the free-for-all like a wrecking ball, knocking out a powerful looking Onix and the trio of Digletts it had been fighting. Now, with their Alpha out of the fight, the rest of the Ground Types were clearly hesitating, and the Ranger and Zoey both took advantage of that fact to hit two of the remaining three Dugtrios. They went down fast, as did two more Onix. One to a pair of the defending Trainers and the other two to 2B and Jigglypuff respectively. Vulpix hammered the last Dugtrio, with an unknown Trainer's pokémon following up to finish it off, leaving none of the fully evolved Ground-types conscious.

That was too much for both sides. There was just one Onix left, already battered, and it retreated with a frustrated sounding cry, even as the Digletts all scattered, diving underground and heading back to their caves. A cheer went up from the defending Trainers, followed by another cheer as the Steelix was finally brought down by the unknown man whose team had been fighting it. Unlike the Dugtrio, the Steelix was hit with a pokéball quickly, easily captured in its unconscious state. The man landed and dismounted his Fearow to grab the ball...which oddly didn't vanish despite his pokéballs belt being full. He

looked around for a moment before hesitating for a moment and heading toward the Ranger.

2B and Zoey shared a look before carefully angling to back the Ranger up. Whoever this guy was, he might have helped...but he looked more than a little disreputable. He'd also caught the Steelix, which could be either a good or bad idea sign. Doubly so with the ball not instantly teleporting off. Thankfully, he'd recalled his pokémon and, as he got closed to the Ranger, presented both his Trainer ID and the Steelix's new ball. She glanced at it, did a double take, then sighed and relaxed. She took the belt and fiddled with it, before placing it with her own balls. The explanation for that was forthcoming as the man grinned and introduced himself.

"Howdy folks! My name is Ace Trainer Frank. I saw the trouble brewing here in Viridian Forest and moved to lend a hand. That particular ball is one certain Trainers are authorized to use for relocating pokémon. Usually, those are rangers, but..."

The Ranger, a woman in her mid-twenties, had still been examining his ID. More accurately, she'd been verifying it, and seemed surprised at what she found.

"Wait, you're one of the League Troubleshooters! What on earth were you doing *here*?"

The man looked sheepish and waved toward Zoey and 2B.

"Uh...this might sound bad...but I was technically following those two?"

The Ranger blinked, looking at them. 2B cocked her head in curiosity, while Zoey looked a little unhappy. The scruffy looking man rubbed the back of his neck.

"Look, I promise it's not as bad as it sounds! It's just the League, well...there can only be so many lab-sponsored pokédex holders that get into massive trouble before sanity says to keep an eye on the new ones each year, right? It's *not* a formal thing, and I wasn't specifically looking for miss 2B there. But when she triggered like, *all* the flags for 'oh, no, another one of *them*' back in Viridian..."

Zoey snorted at that, seeming to relax slightly as her lips twitched into a grin.

"Wait, so it's not just Ketchum? Between him and 2B I was starting to think maybe it was a Kanto thing, or maybe a Professor Oak thing..."

The man grinned, the expression making him look far more like a boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar than a threat.

“No ma’am, it’s sort of a running gag in the Ace Trainer communities. Not just here in Kanto, but other regions too, from what I’ve heard. Mind you, it isn’t their fault, and it makes proper sense if you stop and consider the *whys*. Lab-sponsored trainers are *lab-sponsored*. As in, they get their high-stipend precisely because they go poke around places and things that normal people *don’t*, on behalf of the regional Professors. So, if *anyone* is going to run into trouble...?”

Zoey and the Ranger both made ‘ah-ha’ noises as the man trailed off, the dots connected for them. It was the Ranger who, voice full of good cheer now that the trouble was over for the moment, spoke their mutual thought.

“Obviously, the people poking weird obscure places and pokémon had strange things happen to them! That totally explains a few things I’ve heard from some of the other Rangers, about lab-sponsored trainers accidentally waking up Legendries or stumbling over poachers and criminal or terrorist Teams!”

Frank laughed and nodded.

“Yep. Like I said, not really their fault. But keeping an eye on them is sort of a ‘best practice’ thing for the League, especially for the Trouble Shooters like me. Even if we generally don’t normally *follow* them. I was only doing so to try and find out if she was going to be another case like that. Even then, it was only because she made a bit of a splash in Viridian that made me take notice.”

Zoey sighed and reached over to pat 2B on the head. 2B didn’t hate it, even if she wasn’t quite sure she understood why they were all making a big deal out of this. Wasn’t running into Legendries on Journey’s normal? Professor Oak, Mr. Ketchum, and even Daisy had told a few stories about that happening...

“Well, from what I’ve seen in the three days I’ve known her for, I think it’s likely she is ‘one of those’ types, Mr. Frank. But I’ll do my best to keep her out of trouble.”

The Ace Trainer snorted, even as 2B felt like maybe she was supposed to be offended? Honestly, it just sounded like Zoey wasn’t put off by her technically carrying her into danger, which 2B might not have full thought through, come to think of it. Her new travelling companion not being put off by that was a good result as far as 2B was concerned! Best not to question their odd point of view that she was somehow going to be trouble...

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