

# Chapter One

I had always loved taking care of animals, even when I was a young child.

I was the kid who would always stumble into the house with a frog in his pocket or a lizard in his hands. I once even caught a little mouse, proudly presenting him to my mom as my new best friend, only to accidentally drop him, the little rodent scurrying away.

That did not go over well.

It wasn't that my parents didn't like animals. After all, we had a dog and a cat when I was younger, and both of them practically lived in my shadow, nipping at my heels and following me around the house and the back yard. Even though the cat was supposed to be more of my sister's pet, I was the one who happily fed and took care of it, so it usually preferred spending time with me.

With my love for the animal kingdom, it surprised absolutely no one when I announced I would be going to college to become a veterinarian and would likely pursue further schooling to qualify as an exotic caretaker. I wanted to work in a zoo, or perhaps even as a traveling vet, caring for animals all over the world.

That was the dream anyway.

When my father died suddenly, halfway through my second year, I fell apart. Our family had always been close, and losing my dad so suddenly caught us all off guard. I fell apart, losing track of time, missing classes, and forgetting assignments. The teachers tried to help, but in the end, I flunked out. My mom and my siblings tried to help, but Mom was struggling in her own way, and my siblings all had their own issues.

Eventually, I managed to pull myself out of the deepest parts of my slump, barely, and tried to find a job that I could enjoy. I had already resigned myself to living with my mom, but I wasn't content with freeloading, so I needed something more than just odd jobs. I sent out applications to farms, stables, zoos, and even pet shops. None of them responded. Apparently, people would hire nobodies before they would hire someone who had been kicked out of veterinary school. I tried to clarify that I flunked out due to family circumstances, but it was clear that no one believed me. At the time, it seemed like the last nail in the coffin for my dreams.

Then, I finally got a positive response.

A single letter on thick parchment, [sealed with a golden wax stamp](#), was slipped into our mail box sometime overnight. Inside was an invitation to a farm, a three-hour drive from my parents' home in Sullivan County. It was still in New York, but deep in the rural farm area.

The invitation claimed they had a position open for me, one where I would get to tend to a variety of animals. The lack of information about... well, any aspect of the job, was worrying, but at that point, I had all but given up. My dream was dead, and as far as I was concerned, any chance, even if it was small, was worth the effort. So, using various delusions and rationalizations, I convinced myself it would be fine and committed to driving out to the farm to check it out. Just before noon the following day, I assured my mom I would be fine and jumped into my dad's old [Silverado](#).

The drive was long and nerve-racking, my brain unable to calm down. This could very well be my last chance, and I had no idea what I would do if it failed.

When I arrived, it felt like all my fears had come true.

The long road to the front gate cut through a thick, overgrown forest. The farm was in an already sparsely populated portion of the state, where farms were prevalent, and this seemed even more remote than the rest.

At the end of the road was a gated entrance, rusted, old, but still standing firm. It was simple, connected to a sturdy rock wall on both sides, and clearly well built.

It was also very clear that the [farm or ranch was abandoned](#).

Beyond the gate was a gravel road, overgrown with grass and weeds. It was still drivable, however, and it led to a cluster of buildings deeper into the clearing. A home, barns, a stable, a few sheds, and two silos all stood in the distance. Their metal roofs were rusty, and vines were crawling up their walls, but they seemed intact. From the entrance, it seemed to be the kind of place that needed to be torn down and rebuilt, but you felt kinda bad doing it, because the buildings were classic and built well.

There was really no reason to get out of the truck. The entire trip had clearly been a waste of time. And yet just sitting there, hands on the wheel, felt wrong. I glanced back in the rearview mirror, catching [a look at myself](#) before flicking the truck off and climbing out, making my way to the front gate, my mind not really processing anything. I approached the rusted bars and reached out, maybe to lean on them, maybe to shake them with anger.

The moment I touched the metal, everything changed.

In a split second, between heartbeats, between my neurons firing, the world around me changed. Gone was the forest, the abandoned ranch, and my truck, all replaced by a massive, endless, star-filled void. Beneath my feet was a circular black platform, marked with a white, almost ritualistic design. The edge was marked with a shimmering purple glow, almost like an [aurora](#).

"Welcome, Cody Willow, to the [Hall of Origins](#)."

I spun towards the sudden, loud voice, and when I saw who had spoken, I fell backward as I lost control of my legs.

I'm lucky I didn't lose control of more.

There, standing about twenty feet away, was a four-legged creature, one I certainly didn't recognize. Its body was predominantly white, with a black underbelly that began under its short tail, ran along its torso, and climbed up the front of its neck. Its head almost looked like it was wearing a white helmet with horns, with a long white and black tail extended from it.

Around its torso was a gold brace, a circle of shining metal with four equidistant spikes, curved connectors between each. Along the points of connection were fist-sized green gems.

In total, it was at least ten feet tall, possibly more.

When it spoke, the words entered my head directly, no sound reaching my ears, something subtle enough that I missed it when it first spoke.

"I sense your fear, young one," the being said. "Be not afraid, for I am [Arceus!](#)"

Finally, the first actual sound echoed across the open area, an animal cry that *felt* like a declaration, a statement in the fabric of reality itself. As the creature cried out, it reared back, raising its front legs.

"Who?" I asked, a tiny part of me shocked I had managed to make any noise, never mind a recognizable question.

"I am a creator, a shaper of reality. A god for a realm quite a distance from this one. My reason for existing is to spread the children I create. The world I watch over has been filled... so now, I seek new worlds for my children to spread."

I could hear approval in its voice, whether for my question or for my ability to ask it, I did not know.

"I have come not to harm, Cody, but to present you with a chance. A grand opportunity to finally fulfill your greatest dream."

"My dream?"

"Indeed. Your affinity for animals, your desire to care for, raise, heal, and train the many creatures of your world, is a fundamental aspect of your soul," The being responded. "A mirror to many I have met in my own world. When I looked toward the many folds of the blind eternities, casting thy net in search of someone I could trust with, your soul called to me across many realities."

Now I was silent, letting the quadruped talk, my brain trying to wrap itself around what was happening. Despite the unbelievable circumstances... I couldn't help but believe what they were saying. Something in their voice spoke of authority. Of certainty.

It took me a moment to realize the creature, Arceus, was waiting for me to respond.

"What... What do you need from me?"

"In the world I watch over, my children are called Pokémon. Hundreds of different forms, of all shapes and sizes, of all sorts of temperaments. They thrive on connection, in friendship and hardship. They exist as wild and tempered, revered and reviled. Their souls run the gamut of variety, with abilities that would shock you. "

As Arceus spoke, dozens of images, floating and semi-transparent, formed a circle around us, slowly rotating with us at the center. In the images were dozens of creatures, some I recognized as caricatures or inspired by animals I knew, and some so alien that my mind struggled to understand what I was looking at. Some were with people, the images showing moments that made them look like family pets, while others showed them fighting, battling in competitions with thousands of people watching. A great many of the images showed them using the abilities Arceus mentioned. They spat fire, spewed water, conjured lightning, summoned earth, and performed feats that I could barely comprehend.

I must have stared for several minutes, unable to look away. The Pokémon looked dangerous... but I couldn't help but be fascinated by them. So many unique creatures, so many friends to make...

"And you... You want these creatures here, on Earth?" I asked, stomping down my growing interest for the sake of practicality. "If the images you just showed me are anything to go by, these... Pokémon are dangerous. Some looked like walking catastrophes!

"Yes, I wish to spread my children to your world," the four-legged god responded with a nod. "But fear not. I understand the difficulty and dangers this poses, both to humans and to my children. Which is why I come to you."

They leaned down, the movement emphasizing their large size. I stared up at them, still sitting where I had fallen before.

"I ask that you serve as their point of entrance, the first steps into your world," they explained, looking into my eyes, into my soul. "To suddenly appear around your globe would instigate chaos. So I leave them in your care, a pair at a time, to slowly spread their influence across the planet. I will direct the chosen pair as best I can, but I will not always be able to control what you get. It would be up to you to care for them."

"That... how could I do that?"

"It is certainly not a simple task," Arceus admitted with a nod, standing back to his full height. "But fear not, it will not be a deluge, but a trickle. The task I ask you to bear will take decades. You will likely need to name a successor, and even they may not see the day when Pokémon live naturally in this world. Until then, you are simply a rancher, a caretaker, a trainer."

"That... Okay, that's more manageable," I admitted, starting to actually parse what the quadruped was trying to say. "But that is still a monumental task!"

"It is, and for that I shall grant you three boons to assist you!" they assured me. "It is all I can manage for now, as the connection between our worlds is faint. Eventually, I will be able to assist you and your successors more."

Arceus waved one of its forward limbs, and a glowing spark appeared between us. It began floating closer to me, and instinctively I reached out, my palms up to catch it. Despite its glow, it was cool to the touch and quickly expanded into a thick rectangle that fit in my hand. When it finished forming, turning red in the process, I could see a blue bulb in the top left corner, along with three dim lights. After a moment, the forward plate popped open, revealing an internal screen, control pad, and a variety of buttons and controls.

"This is a Pokedex, a creation made by the humans of my reality. It contains everything you may need to know about the Pokémon under your care," The powerful being explained. "Food, health requirements, preferred habitats, and more, all available for your perusal. I also offer this..."

Another spark, this time changing into a coiled roll of paper. It dropped into my other hand, and as the glow dulled, the final thing to form was a red ribbon to hold it closed, as well as a golden clip.

"This is the deed to the farm you were invited to visit," the god explained. "It would belong to you, completely and fully. It is a mirror of the world I have created, so do not be surprised if it has more secrets than you might imagine."

"I... Just like that?" I asked. "I own a farm? And it's like your world?"

"If you accept, yes."

"But... Alright... What else?"

"My final boon is to improve your body to the level of the humans from my reality, where they have been exposed to the energies of life fostered by the Pokémon around them," they explained. "This gives them the potential to be stronger, faster, smarter, and far more. Eventually, all humans on your planet will also be this way, but for now, the benefits are unique to you. Note that this does not make you better, it merely makes you more durable, as your life force is reinforced. Instead, it gives you the *potential* to be great. What you make of it is up to you."

For a long moment, I stared up at the larger-than-life, godlike being. I could feel it in my bones that their offer was genuine. Something about his words conveyed his honesty. I needed to make a choice.

On one hand, this was terrifying. Something so incredibly beyond my understanding, beyond what I was capable of. This was more than anything I had ever even conceived of in my wildest dreams. The chances of me failing, of the situation spiraling into something insane, into something horribly world-changing, were so high.

And yet...

One of the images, floating around us, showing off the creatures... the Pokémon Arceus was going to send to me, caught my eye. It was a canine, a dark orange with black stripes and a white belly, tail, and mane. It bounced around excitedly as it ran with its human companion, barking as they went, though I couldn't hear it.

This was a chance. A chance to work with animals so exotic, I would be the only one to have ever seen them. It was a dream come true, to a degree I could hardly fathom. With that in mind, despite everything else, there was only one real thing I could say.

"I'm in."

## Chapter Two

My words seemed to echo across the Hall of Origins, as if it could feel the weight of them.

"Good, very good!" Arceus chuckled, nodding his large head, almost bobbing as I accepted his offer.

As he spoke, he started to glow, golden light pouring off of him before he leaned down to nudge my chest. Warmth spread from where he touched me, the golden glow spreading through my body, the heat following.

"And the deal is sealed!" the large, powerful being said, sounding satisfied with the results of his offer. "I will return you now, so you may explore your new home. The eggs for your first Pokémon are waiting for you!"

Before I could say goodbye, the purple shimmering surrounding the Hall of Origins began to brighten, slowly at first, before the light overtook my vision. In a flash, the strange domain I had been in was gone, and I was standing back at the entrance to the farm.

For a long while, I stood there, my brain processing what had just happened. I knew in my *soul* that what I had just witnessed had been real, and that a whole new chapter of my life had just exploded into being around me. As if to confirm what I already knew, I could feel a weight in my pockets. Reaching into them, I could feel my phone on one side, but on the other was the red Pokedex.

"Fucking hell," I muttered to myself as I pulled the red device out of my pocket, turning it over in my hand. "What the hell did I sign myself up for?"

I looked up, my eyes following the road's trail to the cluster of buildings deeper into the farm, past the gate. Somewhere in there were a pair of eggs, carrying creatures unlike anything else that ever existed on Earth.

"Can't just leave them here," I said with a frown, knowing just how sensitive and fragile eggs could be.

I pushed against the front gate, only to find that it was locked. I frowned and looked around, wondering how I would get inside, when I spotted a bit of color stuck to the rock wall by the gate. A quick look revealed the deed Arceus had handed to me, carefully tucked up along a moss-covered rock. Hooked around the bundle of paper was a simple keychain, with Arceus's symbol connected by a ring.

Unsurprisingly, the key unlocked the chain wrapped around the front gate, and after I pulled it loose. I coiled the heavy, rusted chain up along the side of the gravel road before pushing the gate open. When the way was clear, I climbed back into my truck and started her up, pulling through the gate and driving slowly down the road.

The path was rough, with water damage and more making the ride bumpy. The worst spot was a collapsed bridge that had fallen into a mostly dried riverbed. The bed was ten, maybe fifteen feet across, and if it had been full, I wouldn't have been able to cross. Luckily, my truck could handle the small stream that still ran down through it, and could just barely handle making it over the banks.

When I finally arrived at the old house, I stepped out, gravel crunching under my feet. I couldn't imagine that Arceus had hidden the Pokémon somewhere difficult to find, so I carefully made my way into the house, assuming they would be inside.

The front door to the house was locked, but when I tried to use the same key I used to open the gate to open the door, it just collapsed inward. It kicked up a plume of dust, forcing me to step back and let out a sigh. I couldn't help but wonder just how I was going to afford to fix all of this up.

I stepped in over the door, looking around at the interior. The first floor was remarkably open, with a dining room, kitchen, living room, and mud room all with no dividing walls. I could see a hallway that led into the back area, which was more walled off and private.

To the right was the kitchen, which was homely and simple, with an island and knocked-over barstools. The dining space was to my left, while the living room was past that at the end of the house, with old dusty couches in front of a natural stone fireplace. Everything was old, covered in dust and ramshackled, with nothing truly modern beyond a newer-looking stove and an old refrigerator.

I resisted the urge to flick the nearby light switch, because if it somehow still had power, it was more likely to burn the place down than it was to turn on actual lights.

While the house was interesting, my real attention was brought back to the kitchen island. There, sitting on two stabilizing cushions, were two giant eggs.

"Holy crap," I muttered, carefully walking along the dusty, dirty floor.

The eggs were huge, as big around as basketballs and maybe one and a half times as tall. The shells were mostly orange, with black stripes around the sides and two pale yellow, almost cream colored spots, one streak on top and one soft oval facing "forward."

Immediately, my mind went to the orange and black caninae that had caught my eye during my... meeting with Arceus. But that was impossible, there was no way a dog would be born from an egg.

Right?

In desperation for answers, I pulled out my Pokedex and flicked it open, clicking a button on its side with my thumb to activate it. The screen flashed white, and a subtle scanning beam was projected from a lens on the back, before the blue bulb began blinking. I nearly dropped the device when a robotic voice came from within.

*Unhatched Pokémon egg. All Pokémon are born from eggs, though no one has ever witnessed an egg being created. Recognizing what Pokémon is inside an egg by its exterior design is considered a talent, though some are more obvious than others.*

When the voice was finished, I used the Pokedex's controls to scroll through more information that appeared on the device's screen. There was quite a bit of data to go through, but I skipped through it to the egg care section to make sure the eggs didn't need anything right away. I was surprised to find that eggs needed surprisingly little. They should be kept near their guardians as much as possible, whether that was their parents or their trainer, and they should be kept reasonably warm, though being cold would simply slow down the hatching process rather than be actually dangerous.

I also learned that there was some proof to the idea that the Pokémon could *hear and see* out of the egg. They even enjoyed being carried, and were tough enough that dropping them wasn't really a concern, though they were far from indestructible.

I glanced up at the eggs, sliding the Pokedex into my pocket before carefully reaching out to place my hands on them. I let out a long breath, shaking off any incredulity I felt. This was all uncharted, new, apparently nonsensical waters, so being embarrassed to talk to two eggs was the least of my worries.

"Alright... It says I need to keep you warm and close," I said, patting both of the eggs gently. "I want to poke around a few of the buildings and see what's going on, but..."

I trailed off, pulling my hands back and looking around the room. The interior of the house was... not a loss, but it was definitely in need of a lot of care. It was old enough that I was concerned about the building's structure, especially if I started heating it with the fireplace. The

structure *looked* like it was in better condition than I had first assumed, especially after the door collapsed, but looks could be deceiving.

"I'm going to move you both to the truck, so you can stay warm in there," I said, focusing back on the eggs. "Then I'm going to inspect this building from top to bottom, make sure it's not going to collapse around us. Then... then we should settle in for the night, I think. I'll give mom a call when I'm walking around... God, what have I gotten myself into?"

I ran my hands through my hair, letting out a long breath, before shaking my head to clear my thoughts. Getting bogged down with panicking or overthinking would only make getting things done harder. I could freak out later, right now I needed to get to work.

I carefully lifted the eggs and moved them to the truck, placing them carefully on the seats, strapping them in to keep them from rolling, before rolling up a jacket and a blanket I had in the back to help stabilize them. Then I started the truck and turned up the heat a bit. It was late in the summer, meaning it was starting to get a bit cold out at night, so I needed to make sure they stayed warm.

"You two hang tight, I'll be back in a few minutes, hopefully to move you both back in and maybe start a fire in that fireplace," I said with a frown.

I closed the door gently, before turning around and looking back at the porch, before walking around it to look at the foundation. While I was *far* from an expert, my father had been a contractor, and I managed to pick up a few things from him, including some basic ways to check a home for structural issues. The first step was to check the foundation for cracks, which was easier said than done, since there was quite a bit of grass and weeds growing up around it. Still, I pushed through, using a fallen branch to help force the weeds down to clear the foundation. As far as I could tell, it was intact, which was good news.

As I made my way back inside to check the interior, I pulled out my [cellphone](#) and dialed my mom. I had warned her before I left that I might be staying late, but she had all but demanded I call to check in. The phone dialed as I stepped inside, and a moment later it connected.

*"Cody, how's it going? Is everything alrighty?"* My mother's insistent voice asked, her voice distorted by the speaker.

"Everything is fine, Mom," I assured her, starting to walk around the house, feeling for any sagging or flexing in the floors and looking for cracks in the walls from shifting foundations. "I got here a little while ago. Talked to... to the guy in charge."

*"Did you get the job?"* she asked, her voice sounding complicated.

I winced, resisting the urge to sigh. While I could only think about finally getting the chance to work with animals for a living, my mom realized that if the offer was genuine, I would likely be moving very far from the rest of the family. Unsurprisingly, after Dad passed, the idea of someone moving further away, even if it was to achieve their dream, was a sensitive subject.

"I got... A job," I admitted. "It's not exactly what I anticipated, but... it might be a whole lot more."

*"That sounds ominous, Cody," she responded, voice now filled with concern. "What's going on?"*

"Everything is fine, I promise," I said, still walking around the first floor, looking around as I moved. "It's just not at all what I expected. In a good way. In a big way. I know that's vague, but... I'll explain more tomorrow when I get home."

*"Honey..." she started, trailing off. "You promise everything is okay?"*

"I promise," I responded. "I'll call you if anything comes up, but I'll probably be home tomorrow, early afternoon."

*"Okay, I will be at work," she pointed out. "But if I get home and you're not there, I'm calling the cops to go looking for you!"*

I bite back a chuckle at her worried statement, before finally ending the call. In truth, my mom's overly protective streak, which was present before my father passed but not as pronounced, used to drive me crazy. Thankfully, as I got older, I learned that it was her way of showing that she cared and was thinking about those she loves.

I continued walking around the first floor, checking the walls, floors, and windows for any cracks, weak spots, or jams in the case of the windows. All of those would have been signs of unnatural settling in the foundation or major water damage. As I did, I found the first-floor bathroom and an office in the walled-off section of the first floor. The office was empty save for an old, dust-covered desk and some bookshelves, while the bathroom was in surprisingly good condition, though just as choked with dust as the rest of the house.

When I was done inspecting the first floor, I carefully made my way up the stairs to the second floor. There I found two bedrooms, one of which appeared to be the master bedroom, as well as a full bathroom. There was barely any furniture, which was good, because I did not want to deal with the hell that a mattress would be after a few decades of rot and exposure.

Dust was one thing, mold was another.

When I was finally satisfied that the house wasn't going to come down around my ears if I slept in it, I headed back downstairs, dragging what little broken furniture was inside the rooms as I went.

I made a small pile of broken and unwanted furniture by the chimney, before checking that it was stable and clear.

When I confirmed nothing was blocking the chimney, I quickly started a fire, keeping it small and feeding it broken chunks of furniture, just enough to keep the cold at bay through the night. When it was going properly, the wood cracking and the smoke flowing up and out of the chimney, I headed back out to the truck.

It took a few trips, but soon I had the eggs, my car blanket, my jacket, and a few other things inside. I then set up a little place for us to sit in front of the fire, in front of the couches, as they were in no condition to be sat on. I folded up my jacket and truck blanket to cushion the ground somewhat before plopping down, both of the eggs sitting beside me.

By the time I was done, the sun was just starting to set. I munched on a granola bar, occasionally looking over at the eggs and pushing new chunks of furniture into the fire. After about fifteen minutes of just waiting for time to pass, I let out a sigh and turned to the eggs.

"Alright, well, if you are supposed to be able to hear me and understand me, then I guess I could introduce myself. My name is Cody Willow, and I guess I'm going to be taking care of you guys."

For the next few hours, until I fell asleep in front of the fire, I talked to the eggs about myself, about my life, about my dream, and about what we would be doing in the morning.

## Chapter Three

Waking up the next morning, sitting on the floor in front of the now smoldering fireplace, I was shocked to find that I wasn't nearly as sore as I anticipated. My body wasn't exactly happy about having slept like that, sitting on the floor with next to nothing for a cushion, but I expected to spend the first half of the morning hobbling around as I stretched out my joints and muscles. Instead, I shook it off, stretching for a moment before standing up straight, my body feeling fine. The only explanation I could think of was Arceus unlocking my body's potential to what the humans on his world enjoyed.

"Holy crap," I muttered, shaking my head in disbelief. "That alone makes the whole deal worth it."

After taking a quick walk to relieve the call of nature, I stopped by my truck to grab something. When I returned, I quickly sat down beside the eggs again.

"Alright, so the Pokedex said keeping you close will help you hatch, especially as I walk around," I said, talking to the two eggs, the process feeling a bit more natural now. "This should help with that."

I held a backpack out so they could see it, assuming they could actually see out from the eggs. It was left over from my college courses, and a bit dirty from sitting on the floor of the truck, kicked under a seat, but the stitching was still strong. It took a few minutes of experimenting and adjusting, but I finally got one of the eggs to sit comfortably and securely inside it.

"Alright, I will switch you guys back and forth after a while," I assured the eggs, carefully putting the pack on while carrying the other egg in my arms. "Seems like that's the best way to be fair."

Now equipped to carry both eggs at once, I stepped out into the early morning sun. It was a bit nippy, but nothing that would keep me from doing a little exploring before I had to leave to head home.

I stepped down the stairs and looked around at the gravel driveway. It came down from the entrance gate and opened up in front of the house, with enough space for three or four cars to park. A few gravel paths split off from the area, three only big enough to walk, or maybe for an ATV, but one was just another gravel road, curving around the house.

I talked to both of the eggs as I followed the road offshoot. After about a hundred feet back or so, it ended with another large parking area, this [one in front of the larger](#) of the barns around the house. The barn had an L-shaped open section that ran along two sides of the gravel patch, with a few gravel paths branching off it. The paths were completely choked and overgrown, so I made my way back to the barn, peaking into the open area.

The interior of the barn was open and spacious, with thick wooden posts holding it up. I'm not sure what the original purpose was, but at the moment, it was empty, with the gravel outside continuing into the inside as the floor. That made me think it was some sort of tool or equipment storage, since you wouldn't have a gravel floor if you were storing livestock. The interior was open frame, and from what I could see, it was all in decent condition. A few boards had fallen loose, and I would likely reinforce them with some new lumber, but as a temporary space, it would work.

The openings along the L-shaped part of the structure were large enough to drive a decent-sized vehicle through, another clue that the space was for equipment storage

"I hate to trust the old architecture since it's been unchecked for so long... but so far it seems to be well built," I admitted, pushing on one of the barn walls with my shoulder. "I wouldn't put any animals in here, not unless they don't mind gravel, I suppose, but for outdoor storage, it should do fine."

I left the barn behind, heading back to the parking area in front of the house. I grabbed a bottle of water from my truck, as well as my second and last granola bar, before picking one of the relatively clear paths and following it. It led directly to the storage shed, which was only about fifteen feet from the house.

This structure had a finished floor and a foundation, and its interior was much in the same shape as the interior of the house. Unlike the house, however, the shed was at least partially filled with tools. There were strewn along the walls and the floor, a little rusty but seemingly fully functional.

It took me a minute to get the door open, as it had been sealed shut by time and disuse, but once I did, I stepped inside, looking around. There was no sign of mold, and shockingly, no signs of animals, either.

"Not bad," I said, kicking a shovel. "That should save some money, assuming they don't just immediately break."

After putting the eggs down carefully, I poked and sorted the tools a bit before eventually giving up for the time being. There were a few useful bits, an axe, a few shovels, but I would likely need to buy a few more. I brushed my hands off on my pants before making my way out of the shed. I needed to start the drive home, and while I could have pushed it for a bit longer, I was getting hungry, and the small cafe back through the nearest town was calling my name.

I carefully loaded the eggs into the truck, strapping them in before covering them in a blanket. I would be driving through town, and while any sane person would just assume I had two large, fake eggs in my front seat, I would rather not catch any attention, especially not before I had even moved in. I apologized to both of them for covering them up before climbing into the driver's seat and pulling away from the home.

It somehow seemed even more bumpy leaving than it had been coming in, but I had to assume that was because I was nervous about the eggs rolling free and falling off the seat. When I finally pulled out past the gate, I stopped, relocking it with the chain and padlock, before climbing back into the truck and pulling away. As I drove, I glanced down at the covered eggs before looking back towards the road.

"You know... I've been running on the assumption that you both are the small canines I saw in those images," I said as I drove. "The color scheme matches pretty well, but I suppose you could be anything. Arceus said you guys come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, but having to hide some sort of crazy dragon or an insect the size of a large dog is going to be an interesting experience."

I sat in the silence for a moment before shaking my head.

"Let's just focus on making it through to when you hatch. " We can figure out the rest later," I said. "Rolling with the punches."

The farm was a good distance from the nearest small town, first on the long dirt road to the front gate, then on a paved road that had seen better days. I drove relatively slowly, wincing at the bumps and glancing at the directions I had printed out the previous day, though I was following them in reverse now.

I could navigate well enough once I got to the highway, but the confusing back roads indicative of small-town planning required step-by-step directions.

The town center was small, no more than thirty or forty buildings in total, most of those along a single long street. It honestly looked like the quintessential small town, complete with a mom-and-pop coffee shop between a butcher's and a bookstore. As I pulled into one of the

parking spaces along the front, I looked over at the covered eggs, reaching out to tug at the blanket, making sure it was secure and covering everything.

"I'll be right back, I just need to grab some breakfast and a coffee," I explained, patting them gently. "Five minutes, ten tops."

After double-checking they were covered again, I opened my door and stepped out. As I made my way inside, I noticed [a couple](#) approaching the cafe as well. They were walking side by side, with the woman carrying a [little girl](#) on her hip, and the man leading a slightly [older boy](#) by his hand. I picked up the pace and opened the door for them.

"Thanks, man," the father said with a smile.

I nodded, following them in as they made their way to the front counter. The older woman behind the counter smiled as they spot the family.

"Clint, Laura, good morning. The usual?" she asked, which is when I tuned out, looking at the mural painted along the wall of the shop.

Eventually, it was my turn, so I stepped up and ordered a bagel sandwich and a coffee. When I went to pay, I realized I was a dollar short. I let out a sigh and was about to tell the woman at the counter to cancel the bagel, since there was no way I was making it home without coffee, when the father from just a few moments ago, Clint, approached the counter to grab their food.

"Everything all right?" He asked, noticing my minor distress.

"Yeah, just underestimate how much cash I had on hand," I said with a shrug. "No biggy, I'll just get the coffee."

"I'll cover the difference," He said with a smile. "How much do you need?"

I felt a bit awkward, but he insisted, especially when I admitted it was just a dollar. As he passed over the bill, he looked at me with a nod.

"So, what brings you to the area?" he asked casually. "Just cutting through?"

"No, I uh... recently inherited some land," I explained, rubbing the back of my head. "I was just visiting to take a look, see what it was like."

"Whoa, that's exciting," he said, looking a little surprised. "You thinking of moving up here or...?"

"I think so, yeah," I said with a smile. "I've always wanted to raise animals, and this is more or less a dream come true. Not at all how I expected it to happen, but that's life."

"Tell me about it," He said, reaching out to shake my hand. "Clint Barton, nice to meet a new neighbor."

"Cody Willow," I respond, returning his handshake. "Thanks, it's certainly been an experience."

"I'll bet. Well, I gotta get back to the misses before the monkeys escape," He said, nodding back to the table his family had claimed. "I guess we might see you around. Welcome to the area."

"Thanks again," I said, nodding as he left carrying a tray of food.

A minute later, my order was brought out, and I made my way out of the small cafe, giving Clint a wave as I left. I climbed back into my truck and started it up, taking a sip of the coffee after I settled in.

"Well, at least the neighbors are nice," I said, patting the eggs before pulling out of my parking spot.

It took just a bit less time to get home than it took for me to drive to the farm the previous day, thanks to traffic fairing slightly better. During the entire drive, I was talking to the eggs, though most of the conversation revolved around one thing.

"I can't lie to her," I said, repeating the words for the dozenth time. "I've always been bad at lying, and it's not like I can hide what I'm doing from her. I don't *want* to hide it from her, either, or from any of my family. Besides, Mom would see right through me in seconds. Honesty is the best policy."

The eggs, of course, did not respond. I tapped the steering wheel, trying to work out the best way to explain the situation to my mom.

"The problem is, unless I can convince her, she is going to think I had a mental break," I explained, biting the inside of my cheek. "... haven't exactly been in a good place lately, and if Arceus hadn't been so... real, I guess, I would be wondering if this was all me just going nuts."

I glanced out the window, checking the lane next to mine as another truck passed me, the highway populated enough at this point in the day that I needed to pay attention.

"You guys will be pretty good proof, especially when you hatch," I said, shaking my head. "After that, it gets pretty simple. Just need to convince her not to freak out and demand I stay home for my own safety. I guess... all I can do is be honest, and hope for the best."

I let out a long breath, resisting the urge to close my eyes and thump my head against the steering wheel. The mounting worry that mom would react poorly, make a scene, call my sibling, call the doctors, do something to get more attention on me before I was ready for it, was really starting to freak me out. I trusted my mom, she was amazing and always put us first, even when dad died. But she worried, and when she worried... sometimes common sense went out the window.

Which led back to my current cycle, basically just repeating the same things over again, trying to find something reassuring, only to come up empty. There was no real answer to the issue, no silver bullet to make this all easy and smooth.

Eventually, hours later, I pulled off the highway to my hometown. From there, it was a pretty quick drive to our home. Technically, I hadn't actually grown up in this area, as my childhood home was across town. But it was the people and memories that made a house a home, and with my mom and me living there, and the more recent memories of my father, it was still a home to me.

When I finally pulled into our driveway, I activated the garage door remote and slowly pulled inside. My mother was still at work, which meant I had about three hours before she got home. I carefully carried the eggs inside, putting them on the love seat in the living room, before sitting down on the couch perpendicular to them.

For a long moment, I sat there, slowly realizing that just because I was home, it did not mean my spiraling worrying was over. I groaned, flopping back on the couch, running my fingers through my hair.

I had a long three hours ahead of me.

## Chapter Four

Eventually, after sitting around for a few minutes just staring up at the ceiling, I headed to the kitchen to make myself some lunch to distract myself. I wasn't what you would call an amazing chef, but I could make a struggle meal with the best of them. In this case, however, I just needed something to do, so I ended up making something a bit more elaborate, grabbing some chips and whipping up some nachos. Probably way more than I needed, but that was a problem for later.

Cooking, eating, and cleaning up ate up about an hour or so, and when I was done, I still had a lot of time to wait. Looking for more things to do, I showered and brushed my teeth, since I had missed doing that earlier.

It was just after four when my mother returned, and I had spent most of that time pacing. It had occurred to me, as I was planning out all the things I could say, and how I could say them, that the reason I was so nervous was that, however my mother reacted, it would likely set the tone of the rest of this... adventure. She was the first person I was revealing this to, so how she reacted would probably disclose how telling people would go in the future. I wanted so desperately for it to go well because I desperately wanted every other time after this to go well as well.

When my mother came inside, dropping her work back to the corner, she spotted me. She instantly could tell I was nervous, which in turn made her nervous.

"Hey, Mom," I said with a smile and a little, awkward wave.

"Hey sweetie," She said, stepping closer and giving me a big hug. "Are you alright? Have you eaten?"

"I'm fine," I assured her, hugging her back. "I ate earlier."

"Good, that's good," She said, rubbing my back before pushing herself back to look at me with her best stern look. "Now, tell me what happened."

"Okay, okay. But first... You need to promise to keep an open mind," I said. "It's a lot to take in at once, but I swear every word of it is real."

Over the next while, I went over everything that happened, starting with my first pulling up to the rusted old gate, then my conversation with Arceus, exploring the farm a bit, and finally the eggs, which I showed her. By the end of it, I was talking fast, all of it coming out at once. At some point, we had moved to the living room, and my mom kept glancing at the two eggs as I talked.

When I was finally done, the room went quiet enough that I could hear the hand moving on the wall clock. Eventually, my mom recovered enough from my deluge of talking to respond.

"That... sweetie, are you feeling well?" She asked, looking concerned. "Did you eat anything strange?"

"I didn't eat anything strange," I assured her, rubbing my forehead. "That all happened. How else could you explain the eggs?"

I gestured to the silent, orange, black, and tan-yellow eggs. To her credit, Mom looked at them and held back her immediate response.

"It's just... sweetie that is... well, it's a lot," she said, sounding like she was worried she would set me off. "Meeting a god from another reality? Powerful creatures called pokemans?"

"Pokémon," I corrected without thinking.

"Sweetie... I'm worried," She admitted, reaching out to cup my cheek. "You've been struggling so much, and seeing the farm as it was... no one would blame you for..."

"For snapping," I finished, having anticipated the words, but not how much they would hurt. "I know, but mom... this is real."

I looked into her eyes, and I could see the moment she decided she knew better, and that she wasn't going to leave this alone. With no other option, I took my last resort.

Bargaining.

"Okay, you don't believe me," I admitted, standing up from the couch. "I suppose I understand that. So I'm just asking for a chance. According to the Pokedex, these should hatch

within a few days. So give me three. If at the end they haven't hatched, if all of this is me going off the deep end... I'll accept whatever you want. Ship me off to a padded room, get me a shrink, whatever you want. Just... please, give me a chance."

Something about my plea seemed to get through to her, as after a long moment, looking over at the eggs, she finally nodded.

"Okay, fine. But I want you home, and not hiding in your room," she said. "I'm going to be watching you."

"Thank you," I said, sagging in relief. "I promise you, you'll see it's fine."

She had more questions for me, which I answered for a while before I left for my room, carrying my eggs with me. I could feel her watching me go. I knew she was worried she had made the wrong choice, but I knew I would prove her wrong, so I was confident the conversation had gone in my favor.

Now I just needed to wait.

For the next two days, I spent my time planning. I brought my laptop down to the living room, mostly so that Mom could see me and wouldn't panic about me locking myself in my room. I was still a bit hurt that she had assumed I had gone crazy, even if I couldn't necessarily blame her.

Planning my next step involved a lot of looking up things like farm equipment and reading quite a bit on the Pokedex as well. My money situation was... not simple. I had some minor personal savings, just a few thousand dollars I had saved up from short-term jobs and working around the neighborhood. I also had just over twenty thousand dollars sitting in a different account, as my portion of Dad's life insurance. The last time I cut into it was when the truck needed a new exhaust, but... if there was anything my father would be glad I spent that money on, it was making my dream come true.

Twenty grand might seem like a lot, but getting the farm clean and livable would eat through that pretty quickly. One of the first things I would need to do is clean some of the overgrown weeds and grass around the buildings, both to clear room for doing things and to make room for the Pokémon to play. Unfortunately, the machines to do so ran anywhere from three or four hundred dollars, which I didn't quite trust, all the way to four grand. Considering just how much I needed to clear, buying anything on the lower end would likely screw me over majorly.

In the end, I planned to stop at a farm store on the way back to the farm and pick up some tools. There were things like axes, shovels, and a few other tools lying around in the shed I investigated, but if I wanted to clear all that overgrown grass, I would likely need something special.

While I did spend most of my time planning, I also did my best to keep myself from being too specific, beyond a few immediate things. Arceus didn't seem to be able to let me pick what

Pokémon he would be sending next, which meant what I might need would vary greatly. I couldn't spend all my time converting one of the barns into stables, only to get some sort of mole Pokémon.

A day passed, then another, and then it was Sunday. My mom practically followed me everywhere, probably nervous I would run when I realized that the eggs were fake. I was still confident, for obvious reasons, but stray thoughts, filled with doubt, kept poking their way into my head. I did my best to ignore them, but by the afternoon, it was a struggle.

Thankful, the eggs proved those thoughts wrong.

At around three pm, I was going through my dad's tools, trying to figure out which ones I would need to start fixing up the house. My mom was pretending rather studiously that she was cleaning out some of the shelves, despite having been looking through the same one for fifteen minutes. The eggs were carefully placed on a rug, with a heating blanket wrapped around them.

As I was poking at a pile of [nail strips](#), my mom gasped from behind me. I turned to look, finding her pointing out with her eyes wide. It wasn't hard for them to figure out that she was pointing at the eggs. I turned to look, only to find that they had begun to glow slightly, a pale pulsing light that was just noticeable.

I quickly stepped closer, putting my hands on each of them, feeling their temperature. I could feel a slight warmth, a bit more than usual.

"Looks like it's about time," I said with a smile, getting down on my knees. "C'mon, you can do it."

The glow got brighter and brighter, but they didn't crack free of the egg. After about ten minutes of the pulsing glow, I carefully carried them both inside, put them on the couch, and kept them stable with blankets and the heated blanket. My mom followed me, still too stunned to speak.

For another five minutes, we waited before the glow finally shifted. Seemingly at random, the dull pulse intensified, now a constant shining that engulfed the entire egg. Both my mother and I took a step back, both of us caught off guard by the intensity and purity of the light.

Now, when I read through the information on Pokémon eggs on the Pokedex, I was surprised to find that all Pokémon hatched from eggs. It was also strange to learn that *no one* had ever seen an egg coming into existence. Pokémon didn't get pregnant, never carried eggs, never gave birth, as far as anyone from their original universe was concerned. I had learned all of that in my downtime while waiting for the eggs to hatch.

What I *hadn't* learned was that they used the word "hatched" very loosely.

As we both watched, the light seemed to solidify, filling their shells completely. Then, when every inch was shining, any shadows or details lost to the light, their hard edges started to shift, flowing as if the eggs had become moldable, like clay. We could only watch with wide eyes as their forms pulled and stretched, twisted and shifted, growing until they formed a pair of

canines. When their forms seemed complete, the light began to fade, and we could finally see what the eggs had become.

There, sitting on the couch, were a pair of the same [orange, black, and tan dogs](#) I had seen in the images Arceus had shown me.

"Growl, Growlithe!" They both said together, sitting on the couch, looking at me, their tails wagging.

"I... hello," I said, kneeling down in front of them so I could look them in the eye. "My name is Cody. Arceus asked me to help Pokémon like you live in this world. This is all new to me... so I can't promise it's all going to be perfect, but I promise I will always do my best to take care of you, and any Pokémon that come after. Will you work with me?"

Both of the dogs yipped and nuzzled against me, licking at my face. I chuckled and ran my hands through their fur, scratching their heads. After a bit of bonding, I stood back, getting a good look at them both. One of them was a few inches shorter, but both of them were around two feet tall standing up. Their fur was a dirty mix of carrot and burnt orange, and an earthy mix that looked unique but not impossible or strange. Their fur was marked with darker black striped patches along their legs and back, with a beige tail, head tuft, and stomach.

They were unmistakably canine and looked enough like a normal dog that I could convince most people that they were just a new breed. A unique, possibly genetically modified breed, but still just a dog.

I pulled out my Pokedex, flipping it open and letting the scanner run over the dogs, who were both standing still rather nicely. When it was done, the blue bulb blinked as it spoke.

*"Growlithe, the puppy Pokémon. Loyal and gentle with those it sees as its friends or trainer, Growlithe can nonetheless be protective and aggressive to those who put their loved ones in danger."*

I scanned through some of the secondary information, which started with a quick blurb about their basic stats, their abilities, their type, and a bit more. By the time I was done, my mom had stepped closer, standing beside me and looking at the puppies.

"Sweetie... I'm sorry I didn't believe you," she said. "I... it all just sounded so..."

"It's okay," I said, putting my arm around her shoulder. "If I hadn't met Arceus myself... I might not have believed it either."

"Are... are they safe?"

"As safe as any dog... that can likely spit fire," I said, my mom turning her head sharply to look at me. "It's fine, they wouldn't do that in here, right?"

I gave them both a look, and they barked in confirmation. It seemed that their speech consisted of them repeating their names and normal dog sounds, which was an interesting mix.

If I had to make a guess, they were likely named for the consistent sounds they made, while also making "normal" sounds as well.

Encouraged by their clear response to my words, my mom reached out and started petting one of them, specifically the shorter one. According to the Pokedex, the short one was the female.

"See? Harmless," I said, reaching out to pet the other one. "They are probably the best guard dogs you could ever imagine. I'm glad they are the first pair I got. I'm sure they will be a big help around the farm."

Both of the fire Pokémon barked in confirmation, clearly understanding what I had said. It was bizarre to see such clear comprehension in the eyes of what would normally be considered an animal.

"This is unbelievable..." Mom said, trailing off as she scratched at the scruff under the female Growlithe's chin. "What are you going to do now?"

"Now I get ready to head back up to the farm," I responded. "I need to pack some things, do a bit of shopping, and-"

The sound of growling stomachs filled the room, and Mom and I both looked down at the newly born puppies.

"Scratch that, seems like the first thing I will be doing is making some lunch," I said, rubbing the tuft of hair on the male canine's head.

Both of the Pokémon barked happily, jumping off the couch and sniffing around the room, heading into the kitchen as they smelled the food. I couldn't help but chuckle and follow them in.

## Extra Information:

Hello everyone! So, because this story is likely going to be a slow burn and its direction might seem a bit vague after only four chapters, I'm going to include a little bit of information on what you can expect, just so you guys understand the story I'm looking to write. That said, keep in mind that these stories evolve as I write them, so expect a certain amount of shifting.

First off, yes, this is an MCU crossover, but more on that later. Second, please understand that this is *not* a Pokémon trainer story. Cody Wallace isn't going to be a swashbuckling Pokémon adventurer. He will absolutely get dragged into shenanigans and will go on adventures, but he isn't going to be patrolling the streets, trying to be a superhero.

As I see it, my current story plan is 40-50% farm life, which includes the Pokémon, improving the farm, the people on the farm, and the people around the farm. There will also be a fair bit of farm exploration. Arceus said that the farm is a mirror of the Pokémon world, and he wasn't joking, though I haven't decided how deep that goes. It could be just the surface, where the farm is big and has lots of little cool, semi-realistic spots, or it could be like a fey realm, with deserts, tundras, oceans, lakes, underground ruins, mountains, and more.

It will likely be somewhere in between, if I'm honest.

25-30 percent of the story, especially later, once the farm develops further, will be Pokémon as they start to spread among people. These will be interludes that follow important people and their new Pokémon companions, people like Steve Rogers and Natasha Romanoff. Some of these interludes will be short, some of them will be multi-chapter arcs. This is where a lot of the action is going to be.

The last 20-25 percent of the story will be about Cody leaving the farm. Remember when I mentioned him getting pulled into things? This is where that goes. There is a whole lot of shenanigans to be had in the MCU, and he will get involved in plenty of them.

And finally, the MCU crossover. Even more than the Conceptual Deck, this story is going to be flexible/AU. The fact that the Barton farm is in rural New York is the perfect example. Anything after the endgame is generally not applicable, so the Earth isn't a giant egg, and the TV isn't going to send anyone to the phantom zone.

Along with the flexibility, I also plan on adding more Marvel characters, but don't read too far into them. Just because I added [Illyana Rasputina](#) does not mean I'm going to write a twenty-chapter Limbo arc.

Beyond that, the story has a strong slice of life vibe in my head, so keep that in mind.

I hope this helped people wrap their heads around this story, I will probably be doing this for my other snippets going forward. Hope you enjoyed!