

Riot in Johto

Randaleeee!

Von MiniMeani

Kapitel 9: Approx. one week later

Time Jumping around! Enjoy!

It was a busy week. As soon as J had left her room some time late in the afternoon the next day, they had found themselves a clearing in the woods surrounding the Brass Tower. A secluded, wide space.

There, J tried to destroy Dawn's team - and, after a rocky start, Dawn did her best to return the favour.

"Hyperbeam! And Drapion, cross poison!"

"Dodge!" Dawn yelled - and jumped to the side herself as a black beam whipped past her. The impact with the ground showered Dawn with a cascade of dirt. She barely paid it any mind, though and yelled a set of orders.

Mamoswine unleashed its blizzard at the airborne Salamence, while Piplup and Absol occupied Drapion. Somewhere in the bushes to Dawn's left, her Spinda and Ariados were rustling about. As for Whimsicott... she *hoped* it was behind J, ready to act as a distraction.

More dust rose, as Salamence swooped down and ripped the ground open just a mere feet before Dawn. She barely had time to fall backwards, before a hot flame shot over her.

"Restraint, restraint!" She murmured, agitated. "How hard can it be -" As she turned around, she saw that one of the trees was ablaze. "J! You're causing *another* forest fire!"

"Didn't we come here, so we wouldn't have to worry about destroying something?"

"Yes, but that doesn't mean you can just torch anything you want!" Dawn looked over to her water type. "Piplup, take care of it please?"

Piplup saluted and ran off to fulfill its duty.

After a few moments, J spoke up again. "Aren't you just overreacting because your Whimsicott is on fire?"

Dawn had just pulled herself up, before she spun around, aghast. However her grass type had ended up in the patch of tall grass opposite of the direction it was supposed to go, she didn't know. But as it zoomed around in the air, frantically looking for a way to extinguish its burning fluff, Dawn couldn't help but hang her head in shame.

... *There was irony...*

Dawn was just feeding Pichu a poffin, when she came to the crucial question. "So, you have all this information on my pokemon... How did you... I mean... Did you by any chance hack into my storage system for it?"

"No. I used legal methods to gather that information." J didn't seem to mind that Dawn was around - or rather she wasn't overly annoyed. "Are you familiar with a page called 'Conway's Archive'?"

"Con-" Dawn repeated. "You're using *Conway's* page? Great. Means you're an expert, aren't you?"

J seemed highly amused by the revelation. "You know each other," she stated.

Dawn snorted. "Yes, well. If he didn't, he might be of, stalking another poor girl." *Why do I get the feeling he and J would get along perfectly?*

As if to underline her guess, J said, "He isn't by any chance bonded with Uxie? It would be fitting and maybe we could persuade it to swap you for him. A researcher and strategist would be an actual relieve of my job. Not some coordinator, whose family must have had a history with Gardevoir."

Dawn almost tripped over a loose stone. "Excuse me?"

"Why not? It's humanoid and its evolution line is able to sense emotions. If there is one pokemon people like to mess around with -"

"*Stop* putting pictures in my head!"

... *There was the issue of close combat...*

Ever since her time as a temporary member of Dewford Gym, Dawn had known hits. There were the occasional misjudged low sweeps and karate chops and even Mienshao's jump kicks that would knock all winds out of her.

It still didn't soften J's blows, when the huntress took her drilling too far.

That particular moment, Dawn was rubbing her throbbing jaw.

"Stop whining," J complained.

Dawn only grumbled as a response.

"I didn't hit you that hard. I barely felt any contact."

Now Dawn glared at the huntress. "Since when do you feel *anything*? I remember how you burned down a whole forest and you didn't seem like you felt even a bit remorse about it!"

J sighed. "Are you going to hold my past actions against me again?"

"Does it bother you?"

"I'm more concerned about the time you're wasting."

Dawn wanted to argue, but J was right. There was no point in telling J the mistakes she made, if she wasn't going to regret them anyway. "You didn't listen when I told you to stop! You've been kicking me around for an hour now! I'm still a beginner at fighting!"

"That's why I went easy on you. You don't have any broken bones, that should be enough."

"It's not!" Dawn jumped up from the rock she was sitting on. "I am not one of your minions; you can't just punch me around when you feel like it!"

She began stomping of the clearing, back the way they came from. Piplup chirped

once, then hopped next to its trainer.

"Where are you going?" J demanded to know.

"Back to the temple, *before* you get to the point when you actually break my bones!" J grabbed the collar of her shirt, effectively stopping her tracks. "And you are just assuming I would let you run off like that?"

Dawn spun around and swatted her hand away. "Of course! What can you do to stop me? *You're* the one that's supposed to make sure I'm well and unharmed, so you can't force me to do anything I don't want. In fact, I should be the one deciding, when - or *if* we do anything! And right now, it's enough!"

Fury was building up in the huntress; Dawn could clearly make out a twitch in her muscles, but J restrained herself. They scowled at each other, neither willing to lose that fight.

It was J that eventually relented. "Suit yourself." With a flash Salamence was released and the two disappeared in the hazy afternoon sky. Dawn was happy to ignore the ache that built up in the back of her head.

... There was stuff from horror movies that Dawn would have been glad to forget...

Darkness spun around her in a pulsing vortex. Though without light, Dawn knew her skin was unnaturally pale. She knew the cold that dug deeply right into her bones. She knew the sensation of her mind crawling too slow to grasp the world around her.

But suddenly, it was all sucked away, leaving her drained and with new visions to pain her. Friends turning to stone, then to dust. A splitting headache. Flames twisting around her.

And then there was a vision of her mum and Dawn feared for the worst -

"DAWN!" a voice boomed next to her ear.

Dawn's eyes snapped open and the first thing she saw was a grim looking face.

Instinctively, her arm darted forward to swat away the threat, her heart thumping rapidly in her chest. It wasn't until she heard a few hissed curses that she recognized J crouching next to her, rubbing her forehead.

"Now you hit seriously? Why not at *any other appropriate time*?"

"J! What are you - *Why*!?" Dawn stuttered.

"It seems the ghosts from the Tin Tower came back for revenge. They tried to suck out all of your energy, just like with your Piplup."

There was a muffled thump and chirp, when the sleep walking penguin stumbled over some obstacle. Dawn was too shaken, though, to pay it too much mind.

"I noticed that! But *why* were you looming right over my head? You almost gave me a heart attack!" Dawn hissed quietly, noticing that it was still night time.

"I was waking you," J stated.

"Next time I'd rather stick to my nightmares than wake up to your -"

A tad too late, Dawn slapped her hands over her mouth. J's eye brow twitched.

"You what?"

"Uh, y'know. I'd rather... not... wake up and see your..." Dawn cleared her throat. "J... If you keep frowning like that, you'll get wrinkles."

"One more word and I'll throw you back into the basement."

... There were harsh reminders of who the villains were...

"How many are there?" Dawn asked, wringing her hands in front of her chest.

"About three to four Mamoswine, a dozen Piloswine and a lot of Swinub." J pressed the headset closer to her ear, so she could understand the distress call one of the pokemon rangers in charge sent out. She hissed. "If this report is right, then there is a nest with a few eggs. They won't be able to just move the herd, unless they get access to that. They're trapped."

Dawn couldn't take it any longer. She jumped up, ready to sprint off. "We have to do something! There *has* to be a way!"

"There is none!" J snapped. "The only thing you can do is stay low - better yet, you can go back to the temple and wait there. Play with your pokemon or something."

Dawn replied the scowl J shot her. "They need help!" she insisted.

"I agree, but not from us. They're at the Ice Path. How do you suppose we should get there? Fly? Even if that mountain wasn't plagued by a snowstorm, we would never make it there in time! I am not going to waste Salamence's energy just so you can pat your shoulder later and say you *tried*."

"You're just fine sitting here, aren't you?" Dawn gestured at the clearing, the soft wind that rustled through the leaves, no threat in sight. J knelt next to her laptop, protected by the shade of nearby trees.

"As a matter of fact, yes I am," J exclaimed, her eyes betraying that she only said so in regard of Dawn.

Why did Dawn even bother? "How did the guardians ever think *you* would be able to *protect* a pokemon? Or any living being? You don't even care!"

"I do care."

"But only because it would mean more work for you if Team Rocket caught them, too!"

"So you want me to care for their *feelings*? How would that improve this situation?" J demanded to know.

Dawn gritted her teeth. "It wouldn't," she admitted. "But then I could pretend that you're really no longer a pokemon hunter."

... *There were resolves...*

Dawn knocked the doorframe of J's room. At first, she was met with silence, though she was sure she heard the huntress working on her laptop. She knocked once more, just to be sure J noticed her. Then she waited patiently until J was ready.

"What is it?" J asked eventually.

"I just... wanted to talk to you." Dawn shifted her weight from one leg to the other.

"We already did. You can leave now."

Dawn bit her lip at the rejection. She really wanted to do as J told her, yet she stayed.

"But I've got something that will interest you! Can I just come in for a few minutes? It's not like Team Rocket will do something devastating in so little time!"

There was a heavy sigh and J called her in. Dawn took it as an indicator, just *how* fed up the huntress was with their arguing that day. If she let Dawn in after so little discussion, she must have been exhausted.

Gently, Dawn slid the door open and slipped in. J sat at the low table, her laptop right in front of her. Dawn couldn't make out what J had been working on just seconds ago,

but she saw Porygon Z stretched over the whole screen. Next to it sat Pichu that seemed to be absorbed in a sparkling discussion. They noticed the girl and waved at her. Especially, the virtual pokemon put up a lot of effort in that gesture as it moved its flippers frantically.

"Uh... Hi Pichu... and Porygon-Z," she replied. It was weird to see such an upbeat attitude in relation to J. Then again, the pokedex itself mentioned that something went wrong with that pokemon.

Dawn cleared her throat and presented a paper cup. "I thought you might want some fresh coffee?"

"That's actually quite good thinking," J admitted and motioned for Dawn to come over. Once the girl had settled on a cushion and handed over the cup, J cut to the point. "So, what is it you want this time?"

Dawn took a deep breath to brace herself. "I... wanted to apologize... for all the trouble I'm making you."

J rose her brow, but didn't reply. She radiated mild surprise.

"You're just always so harsh and-" Dawn stopped herself, shaking her head. "I still have a hard time accepting that I'm supposed to work with you. You used to be the bad guy we always had to stop, after all! And now you're helping me, so that I'll be ready for the next time I'm up against other bad guys?"

"I always imagine that you do all of this just so you could get back at me. That's much easier than to think something you do would benefit me."

"Sounds to me as if you're looking for excuses to hate me," J stated levelheadedly.

At first, Dawn wanted to deny the idea, but quickly realized that J was probably right. She sighed. "I don't really hate you... but I'd love to have a reason *not* to be stuck in this mess."

"I see." J took another sip of her coffee. "That's a nice story, but I don't see any way to change that. I won't start pampering you, just so you might feel better."

"I'm not asking for anything like that. I do think that we might have to find some balance in our training, but..." Dawn couldn't help the wry smile spreading on her lips. She remembered how the police officer had accused her being J's assistant; how vehemently she had denied that statement. Her current idea felt silly beyond compare.

"What... what if we... actually tried to get along?"

J didn't reject her suggestion right away. She lowered her cup, a questioning frown on her face. "You want us to get along?"

"Well, yeah! I'm much better when I work with my friends. I know that I can trust them my back and they know they can rely on me, too."

Though it didn't seem possible, J's expression became even more sceptical. "You don't actually propose we develop some kind of friendship, do you?"

"No!" Dawn denied, throwing her arms up. "No, no, no! There is no way I could manage that! But still... it would make things much easier."

J crossed her arms. "It's still not enough for you that I don't have any other choice, but to protect you."

"Of course not! I actually *don't* want you to be forced into this. It's not right. But if we could somehow try to trust and to understand each other..." Dawn shrugged. "I don't want to be constantly reminded that I work with Pokemon Hunter J."

"So, no matter how crazy this sounds... I'd like to give it a shot, at least."

J shook her head, but Dawn got the impression that she mulled it over. After some moments passed, J finally relented. "How do you suppose this should work out?"

At that question, Dawn smiled sheepishly. "... Dunno yet. Got any good ideas?"

"Of course not," J exclaimed. "I don't *get along* with people. That's what contracts are for!"

"I'm really dragging you out of your comfortzone, aren't I?"

"If you are going to joke about it, I'll stop even considering to listen to you any more."

"Sorry!" Dawn winced slightly. She glanced at J. "Are you really okay with trying?"

J rubbed her left eye and shrugged. "I suppose. As long as this 'getting along' won't take up too much time."

Inwardly, Dawn breathed a huge sigh of relief. If J agreed - even though that was just the result of the huntress working herself into exhaustion - it meant that the idea wasn't a complete catastrophe.

"I doubt you'll let me tear you away from your precious work. What are you doing here all day anyway?"

"Watching enemy movements, keep a close track to possible targets..."

"In other words you stalk people all day long."

"You could put it that way, yes."

Though neither wanted to admit, the exchange cleared some of the awkward air around them. Dawn could swear she even saw a smirk tugging at J's lips. The development was strange enough to make her look for a distraction. Her gaze fell on the laptop.

"You said you were a member of Conway's page... and that you could look into their dicussions..."

"You want to mess around a bit?" J asked, but was already calling up the page.

Dawn looked between J and the screen for a few times, before answering, "Yeah kinda."

... *There were surprises...*

"What are you talking about?"

"Team Rocket," Dawn repeated slightly annoyed. "Back when I was traveling with Ash, they used to blast off *so* easily. I kinda have troubles believing that the ones we're up against are actually -"

"Stop right there," J interrupted her, waving her chopsticks at Dawn. "You... used to battle them - in *Sinnoh*?"

"Well, *yes*!" Dawn restrained the urge to roll her eyes. "I'm pretty sure you met them!"

"I would have known if someone from Team Rocket set foot on Sinnoh."

Dawn halted her hand halfway from the bowl to her mouth and rose an eyebrow at the huntress. "But I'm sure you know them! They were always around to try and steal Pikachu, so you must have met at some point."

"I'm sure I didn't - unless..." J shook her head. "No. I am certain. Team Rocket wasn't in Sinnoh, at least not before I was blown up."

Dawn frowned at the huntress. "Come on, you have to remember something. Jessie, James and Meowth? The trio that always followed us around? Their motto? The Meowth could talk?"

Dawn had to admit; J was a master at disguising her emotions. Without her empathy, she wouldn't have guessed how disturbed the huntress actually was at those news. Slowly, she placed the chopsticks on the table. Then she looked insistently at Dawn.

"You mean to tell me that those morons were part of Team Rocket? *The* Team Rocket?"

"Yes! They had a habit to call themselves that. They had huge 'R's on their uniform - you can't make me believe you missed *that*."

"I noticed, but... I thought they were imposters or overenthusiastic fans or -"

"Cosplayers?"

"Exactly."

Dawn paused to mull it over. "No, they are real. Ash and Brock had plenty of time to figure that out. I'd even say Ash is somewhat of an expert on Team Rocket."

"I see," J exclaimed and crossed her arms. "They... were more desperate for new members than I thought."

Dawn glanced at her. "You sound like I just destroyed part of your world view."

Judging from the look on J's face, she really had.

...There were times things got out of hand...

Thunder clashed with poisonous claws. A huge whirlpool raged around with the intensity of a razor wind. The ground shook, as Mamoswine stormed over the ground towards its foe.

And suddenly, Dawn called out with a teasing voice "Pichu! Show your mum your new move! She really wants a hug!"

Overjoyed, the mouse did as it was told - and, with its body covered in an electrical current, it leaped right into J's back.

J seemed too confused to react. She blinked, her eye brows furrowed and her lips slightly parted. Then, the volt tackle hit in an explosion of squealing and crackling electricity. The impact was strong enough to jerk her forward, drawing a low grunt from the huntress.

Salamence and Drapion both halted their attacks, obviously stunned by the development. That moment was enough. Mamoswine's ice fang crashed into Drapion, while the whirlpool swept over the airborne dragon. The attacks pushed the two back, far enough to cross the line J's party had to defend.

"Yes!" Dawn cried out triumphantly. "We did it! *Finally!*"

Piplup, Mamoswine and even Absol shared her enthusiasm.

Before suddenly, the world turned upside down. Again.

Though that time, Dawn didn't have the freedom of a net she was sticking to. Tied in a cocoon, she dangled from a branch that didn't seem like the sturdiest choice. Her eye was twitching, as she scowled at Ariados. It beamed at her, overflowing with pride for its work.

"I'm impressed," J said, while she walked over to the coordinator. "That's the dirtiest technique you have ever used."

"Of course you'd compliment that," Dawn mumbled, her voice sounding muffled from the threads that crossed her lips. "But if so, why am I still hanging here?"

"Revenge." J smirked. Something about it felt different. Almost, as if for once Dawn had acted just the way J wanted her too. As if she really earned a fraction of respect from the huntress. In all her life, Dawn wouldn't have been able to imagine that once, she would be able to welcome such a situation. Even if it meant that she cheated.

"It's your turn again to come back at me."

"Great!" Dawn spat out a few threads that stuck to her teeth. "Does that mean you'll get me out of here?"

J tilted her head to the side, a funny looking gesture from Dawn's point of view. "I might consider it."

Dawn sighed. "I'll never get down this tree, will I?"

Just then, the branch cracked.

... *There was research...*

J scrolled up the profile one final time. "What a waste of potential." She sighed.

"Well, if you hadn't tried to capture his Pikachu..."

"I know, I know." J waved her off. "How could I've guessed I might end up at the mercy of the Lake Guardians and that the brat - I mean *Ketchum* - would be a possible candidate?"

A click and another profile popped up. "The other one is Brock?"

"Yeah." Dawn nodded, though she knit her brows slightly. "He's a pokemon doctor-in-training. I think his final exams are set sometime this year..." She glanced at J. "You already have a doctor."

"Yes and I'd love to get rid of her," J chuckled. "He would have been very convenient for that." She scrolled down, taking in the information. "Pewter's former gym leader. I think I could work with that."

Dawn felt more delighted to burst J's bubble than she should have. "I'm sure you could. Until Brock happens to stumble over your Joy. He has this nasty habit of falling in love with every woman he meets, *especially* Nurse Joys. I don't know why, but I can't help but picture a catastrophe, if they met. He'd jump at her. Croagunk always had to immobilize him, when he got into someone."

"That does sound troublesome," J admitted. "But still... Azelf is willpower, Uxie knowledge. I'm stuck with Mesprit's emotions."

"That doesn't mean that I'm good for nothing else..." Dawn muttered.

J wasn't done with her sporadic research of Dawn's friends, though. She randomly clicked at some other names, closely related to the coordinator. "Oh, you traveled with quite a few people that have already become Top-Coordinator. You're still limping behind, aren't you?"

Dawn didn't like the direction J went.

"What is that 'Synchronized Victory' supposed to mean?" J asked, pointing at a certain part in May's profile.

Still frowning, Dawn explained "May and Drew - that's her boyfriend - they won in the final round of the same Grand Festival. They kinda juggled with their points, so they'd finish with the same amount."

"I see." J nodded to herself. "Bribing. Now that's a refreshing skill."

"No no." Dawn chuckled. "They didn't cheat. I wouldn't be friends with people like that. No, they synchronized their attacks, so the judges would rate them similarly. It took them weeks to practice and tons of research. Conway had waaay too much fun helping them."

"... Are you serious?" J rose an eyebrow at the coordinator, who only nodded as a reply. She suppressed a shiver. "Disgusting. But strangely efficient." Another click. "Ah. That Garchomp user you're friends with." J smirked. "I suppose even if you'd

made it past the first round, you wouldn't have stood a chance against her."

"It was just bad luck I lost there..." Dawn mumbled, involuntarily thinking back to the day of her last Grand Festival. It had felt worse than any jab to her stomach, when her pokemon's moves had failed. She hadn't been able to concentrate properly - that and the training they had done had felt too insufficient. From that day on, Dawn had put much more effort and thought into her training, until it was too much.

"*The Johanna* is your mother?" J asked, sounding geniuely surprised. Dawn could sense that she was not.

"You know her?" The scepticism in her voice couldn't have been heavier. If J knew her mother - Dawn didn't even want to imagine what that would mean.

"I never got to meet her in my line of work - or even acknowledged her existence, to be honest - but I read enough." She pointed at the screen. "Seems to me that she was very successful. Winner of three Grand Festival, countless other awards... and she earned her title of Top-Coordinator on her very first try. You're still struggling after half a dozen attempts."

"So?" Dawn mumbled. "It doesn't mean anything..."

"No wonder you have no confidence. If you've grown up with such a role model, the tension must have gotten to you eventually. You've failed every possible goal."

Dawn winced and wanted to protest, but J had already found another link. "This seems interesting. Your redheaded friend will compete against Wall-"

"Why are you doing this?" Dawn interrupted her.

J raised a brow. "You need to be a little more specific."

"Why are you showing me all of this and act as if all this is news to you, when you clearly read everything, every reference there is about me on this page?"

"I'm doing what you wanted me to do," J responded non-chalantly, though she did relent and closed the window. "You wanted me to understand you, so I'm trying to figure out what made you so miserable. I guess it can't be helped, seeing how competitive you are."

Dawn clenched her fists. "I'm not competitive!"

"Fine then, you're just envious of your friends' success -"

"I don't envy them, either!" Her voice rose and she almost forgot how late it was.

"If so, then you can't bear being left behind. Whatever the reason, we can't risk that your inferiority complex might -"

"*That's it!*" Dawn cried out, too loud for her taste. She leaped from her cushion, eyes boring into J's surprised expression. "We're going out, now!"

"Now?" J echoed and glanced at the digital clock on the laptop. "It's well past midnight. You said it was getting too late for -"

"Change of plans! I'm going to kick your butt and if it'll take me 'til sunrise!"

J still seemed a bit taken aback by Dawn's change of demeanor, but her perplexity quickly shifted into recognition. A smirk tugged at her lips and she rose as well.

"You're lucky I'm here," she said as they left for a long night ahead. "Otherwise you would suffocate in badly written puns."

... There was conflict of - WITH another force of nature...

Dawn and Piplup shared a glance. The penguin nodded, its eyes determined, though it did shuffle on its feet. Eventually, Dawn sighed. "I've got an idea."

J rose an eyebrow at her, a clear sign that Dawn could continue. Joy, on the other hand, didn't look up from J's head wound. They were at the nurse's house for their regular check-up's on their conditions. Even though Joy didn't bother to acknowledge Dawn's presence anymore.

"The idea actually involves..." The coordinator tried, but stopped herself. She still wasn't quite sure how she should call Joy. Neither 'Nurse Joy' nor plain 'Joy' felt appropriate. She cleared her throat. "You could tell your sisters in Sinnoh about J's clients, so that they can-"

Joy's glare darted at her. "... they can, y'know... ask a pokemon ranger for help?" She looked at J. "It would be great if they could rescue those pokemon - and not only for their sake. You never know if those people might decide to sell them to Team Rocket."

"You are getting good at this," J acknowledged. Joy wasn't as enthusiastic about the idea, though.

"That is out of question," she declared. "Why do you think I am - well, *was* - trying so hard to avoid any connection with this criminal?"

If I only knew, Dawn was tempted to say. *It's not like your reputation would suffer any more, just because you treated one of the most notorious pokemon hunters in Sinnoh.*

"I might not be able to read your thoughts," Joy said and sneaked over to the girl, until Dawn had no other choice but to look right into her dangerously glowering sky blue eyes, "but I know that expression."

Dawn shrank back. "Y-you don't have to tell them you worked with J! How about you squeezed it out of her?"

"There is something else I would love to squeeze into none-existence. Don't you think it might be suspicious if suddenly all of J's clients are attacked? Do you really want *more* hostile adversaries striving for J's life?"

"That doesn't necessarily have to be the case," J responded from her - formerly - save spot behind Joy. "I could find out enough information about other people I've worked for. I can think of about a dozen contract-breakers I'd love to get back at. Besides, you know your sisters and cousins in Sinnoh. I'm sure you can relay the lead until it's untraceable-"

Joy spun around and resumed her work on J's head wound. Apparently, the bandage felt too loose to her. J's eye twitched as the nurse increased the pressure on her injury. "You mean maintain my anonymity. It worked so well before, after all." Another tug on the bandage. "You still haven't paid for the glass door."

"I am *not* going to pay for bullet proof glass."

"Haven't you realized what fragile glass brought us to?"

Dawn let out the breath she had been holding. She turned to Piplup - but Piplup was already off inspecting something as far away from the nurse as possible. Dawn suppressed the urge to pull it back by its cape, when J spoke up again.

"I can understand that a lot of unsatisfied customers would *love* to come by and use their Salamence to destroy your clinic, but I'm *not* paying for a reinforced front door to a public building!"

... *There were insights...*

"J, can I ask you a personal question?" Dawn asked one night, when they were on their

way to the temple, ready to turn in for the night. Salamence was flying overhead, content to be on its own for once.

J was looking at the screen of the little computer in her hand. Her frown seemed to deepen slightly. "You can pose it, but I can't guarantee that I will answer."

"Why did you agree on all of this? From what you've shown me, I'm guessing that Team Rocket will be so hard to stop. It could take you years! Not to mention, you do fight against another criminal organization. What do you get in return?"

J chuckled. "I suppose its still hard for you to grasp that I'm capable of doing something 'good'. I didn't become a pokemon hunter, just so I could break some rules and be evil.

"As for my agreement with the guardians; I get another chance to live, instead of rotting in their hell. That's enough of a motivator for me. That is, until they decided I need supervision."

Dawn shared a look with Piplup hanging to her head. "What do you mean with 'their hell'?"

"Exactly what I said. Their dimation is a direct response to my life style. You could say that I had quite a bit of bad charma I had to work through."

Dawn was almost certain, she didn't want to get to the bottom of that subject, but she asked nonetheless.

"I don't quite remember. Uxie altered my memories, so I wouldn't end up insane from all the... *situations* I went through." She shot Dawn a glance. "I can't entertain you with any details, but I know enough to make sure it doesn't happen again."

When she saw Dawn's shocked expression, she said, "No, your friends are not some wonderful all-loving creatures ripped out of a fairy tale."

"I never thought something like that of them! I saw them summon Dialga and Palkia and then stop them from creating a new world right in front of my eyes. But what you're saying... it sounds horrible," Dawn explained and her expression must have looked really disturbed. J sighed.

"To be fair, it's probably a relic of a time, when pokemon and people were mortal enemies."

They reached the temple and sneaked inside, careful not to wake the monks. In front of their rooms, J asked a final question. "Do you still think I deserve any more pain?"

Dawn felt hot guilt and shame weighting down her stomach. She couldn't help but remember J's injuries and how she had secretly struggled with the pain even days later. "I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry..."

"You're still soft," J noted. Dawn was about to defend herself, but J beat her to it. "I didn't say it's a bad thing. It's not going to help us, but I'm starting to think it won't be harmful, either."

"Good night, J," Dawn threw at the back of J's head, before the huntress could disappear in her room.

"Right." J frowned, but she did raise a hand and replied "Good night," for once. It was a start.

... Eventually, they even went as far as doing an activity J enjoyed...

Not for the first time that week, Dawn was dangling from Ariados' silky thread. The only difference, though, was the fact that the ground was about five stories away.

Braviary was struggling against the string shot just an armslength below her. Further down, on a street at the ground were flashing lights. An electronic voice halled all the way up. The person responsible for that mess hovered above them. Dawn had to flex her neck, just to catch a glimpse of Salamence' belly. She knew, somewhere up there stood J, her intentions yet unknown.

Dawn could only hope J didn't know about her intentions, either.

"Come on girl." J's voice easily carried through the wind and distance. "I thought you wanted to impress me?"

"Oh, I'll show you..."

And just a moment later, Piplup, which had climbed up the thread, created a massive whirlpool right underneath Salamence. The string around Dawn loosened, making her fall a few feet before Braviary caught her. It's wings were still glowing white from the move it had used to cut itself open.

Finally, when Piplup was safely back in Dawn's arms, Braviary brought her up until they were on the same height as Salamence. J was smirking. Not a good sign.

"You had your fun for the day!" Dawn cried over the cool wind. "Let's go back now!"

She winced closer to Braviary's body, when a dragon pulse zoomed right over her head. The gust it created tousled through her hair.

"I don't think Salamence had enough fun, yet," J replied, now from Dawn's right side.

The coordinator scowled at J. "Then your *Salamence* can explain to all those officers down there, *why* we're rampaging in the middle of the night like a bunch of Exploud! Did you even hear them shouting in their megaphones over the explosions? Or see those red flashing lights?"

J flew next to her, her expression thoughtful. "I didn't. Must be a result from ignoring cops for as long as I did."

Dawn wasn't about to argue over that statement.

... It wasn't until the final day that Dawn's strategy satisfied J...

Dawn tried to breath as calmly as she could, despite the sprint she had just endured. The loud scratching of Drapion's claws seemed distant, but it wasn't the sound she paid attention too.

Peaking behind the trunk of the maple tree, Dawn spotted two of her party hiding in the shrubbery. Lopunny nodded at her, while Kirlia had its eyes closed and concentrated on their surroundings.

Finally, there was rustling nearby. Steps that sounded heavy enough for boots, but still lighter than talons. Kirlia's eyes shot open. Trainer and pokemon braced themselves.

Dawn jumped out from her cover, startling J. The huntress recovered quickly and lifted her arms to a defensive stance, but even her remarkable reflexes were futile against that blow.

In a flash, Kirlia teleported right in front J and with it Lopunny. The rabbit was swift to bury its knee in J's belly, drawing a low grunt from her. Despite the direct hit, Dawn didn't hesitate as she sprinted forward. She sidestepped Kirlia and Lopunny and finally kicked J's legs from underneath her, toppling the huntress.

J managed to cushion her fall, by langing on her shoulder blades. She wasn't quite dazzled enough to stay down. Not that Dawn hadn't counted on that.

"Piplup, your turn!"

In a splash, Piplup launched itself from the hole of a nearby tree. Blue energy glowed in its beak, before it unleashed an ice beam attack that froze most of J's body.

The huntress was finally stuck.

Dawn, Piplup, Kirlia and Lopunny cheered, their trainer's cry the loudest. "We did it! We *did* it!" Dawn plopped down next to J's head, beaming. "We did it."

Although J was nowhere near a match to Dawn's excitement, she bore a little, self-satisfied smirk. "What happened to Ariados?"

"I have no clue, *what* it did, but Venonat took care of it." Dawn grinned.

"Salamence is probably still busy with Altaria and Drapion..?"

The coordinator chuckled. Not even J had noticed, what pokemon had been bugging the scorpion. "It's probably still chasing Pachirisu. I gave it my special coffee poffin."

J blinked. "You doped your... Never mind." She cleared her throat. "Congratulations. You did it. How about you unfreeze me now?"

Dawn didn't even have to think about that question. "No," she said. "There is no way I'm going to let you free now. Who knows what kind of revenge stunt you'll pull on me *this* time."

"What am I supposed to do, thaw on my own?"

"Yeah!"

"It's night time!"

"It's not my fault you insist on sleeping in!"

... It was weird, when they said their goodbyes after little more than a week...

The monks were out and bowed at them as Dawn and J exited the temple for the last time. While Dawn stopped and thanked them for their hospitality, J was already on her way. It was times like that, she wanted to whack J's head.

"It wouldn't have hurt your pride, if you had taken a minute of your life and thanked them. They did quite some effort to care for us, you know..." Dawn chided her, once she had caught up.

"I never asked them to feed me." J rolled her eyes. "Besides, I knew you would probably show enough gratitude for both of us."

Dawn shot her a sceptical look, but that moment, she was content not to start another discussion with the huntress. She moved on to another topic. "So, Olivine City. What's Team Rocket up to this time?"

"Nothing I couldn't handle by myself. You just go on to your contest. And make sure you win; I don't need you moping around the next time we meet."

When they were out of sight from the temple, J released Salamence. The dragon growled and knelt down, waiting for J to hop onto it. The huntress turned around to Dawn. "You don't seem convinced."

"Well... no." Dawn shifted her weight from one leg to the other. "I'm supposed to help you, aren't I?"

"There is no need for that. This time, there will be plenty of pokemon rangers around. And I believe the police was informed, too, but they're rarely good for anything," J said. "You have your own priorities and you should take care of them."

"But I can't turn my back on pokemon that need my help." Dawn felt slightly torn between her consciousness and her desire to go to the next contest.

"There will be enough people around that care more about the safety of said pokémon, rather than bringing down the organization responsible," J assured her.

"That was convenient for you, huh?"

"Very."

Dawn couldn't share the smirk J wore, but she didn't say anything further. If police had caught J years before, a lot of pokémon could have been saved. At the same time though, she wondered how her current situation would have played out. J's help *had* saved a few lives.

She didn't think she would ever be able to accept with J's former profession. For the time being, however, Dawn was willing to look past it. "You'll be careful, right?"

"Actually, I thought I would narrow my chances of survival with a few tons of dynamite as my baggage," J retorted as she strapped a bag on Salamence. Dawn's frown made her sigh. "Fine. I'll be careful. You won't have to worry about Joy threatening you again."

"That's not the issue!" Dawn chuckled. It made her realize, how tight her chest felt.

"I'm not worried about Joy. I want you to be unharmed, because I'm a caring person!"

"I see..." J looked sceptical and was quick to change the subject. "If you're still unsure, then this might help."

She tossed a little object to Dawn. The form resembled her poketch, though without the wristband and in a plain grey colour. It had a little display and a speaker.

"It's a communication device," J explained. "If there is something concerning you, I can contact you."

"And how do I contact *you*?"

J waved the question off. "I will know, if you're in trouble. Now, unless you need something else, I'll be on my way."

"Actually, there is," Dawn carefully began, when J was standing on Salamence and ready to take off. "We still have to figure out Pichu. It can wait until you're done with your stuff in Olivine City, but still..." She shrugged. "It really likes you. And Porygon-Z, too."

"We should really leave it until then."

J nodded at Dawn, Salamence growled and they ascended to the sky. On Dawn's head, Piplup let out an overdramatic sigh of relief.

One day later, on the stage of Mahogany Town's contest hall, Dawn tossed a pokéball that erupted in a burst of stars. Inside the storm was Kirlia, twirling gracefully in the golden light.

Many performances had already taken place that day and the audience was craving to be entertained until the very last minute. Dawn was as confident as she hadn't been in months and she planned to deliver.

"Let's start with grass knot," she said.

Kirlia's eyes glowed green and little blades of grass sprouted from the ground. Barely visible at first, they surrounded the psychic type and tied their ends together. Already, pink energy built up in its two horns.

"Heal pulse."

Twirling in another pirouette, Kirlia released a soothing wave that struck both the plants and the crowd. A collective, pleasant sigh went through the audience. Then, the grass started to grow. The blades thickened, became longer, much longer and interweaved into spirals.

Kirlia was a shining white dot in the middle of the sea of green. When it stepped to the

side, the grass bent. When it twirled, the plants followed. The audience was captivated by the dance of pokemon and nature.

As a grand final, Kirlia spun around and enveloped itself in a turquoise safeguard. As the shield touched the plants, the energy moved on, giving the grass an even more vivid shine.

The cheers Kirlia and Dawn received were not nearly as deafening as any other participant had gotten. It only reinforced Dawn's confidence. It was a proof, how extensive Kirlia's heal pulse had been.

"And the Bubble Queen is back with an incredibly relaxing performance!" Marina announced. Dawn slightly winced at the title. Glancing to the side, she met Kirlia's eyes and they shrugged at each other, smiling wryly.

"Did you see that?" Dawn asked a smiling Sakura and an even happier Piplup, when they were back at the waiting room for the coordinators.

"It was hard not to!" The Kimono Sister laughed. She had decided she needed a break from her training and had tagged along with Dawn to the Mahogany Contest. "I'm glad to see your *instructor* gave you enough free time to polish your skills."

Dawn didn't even try to explain that the training battles she had with J had actually proven to be beneficial. Instead, she spun around and grabbed her partner. "You were amazing Kirlia! I'm *so* proud of you!" She pressed the psychic type close to her. If it hadn't been for the dress - and quite a few people staring at her, Dawn would have started to jump around in joy.

"It's great to see you so enthusiastic! But unfortunately, it won't be enough to win," Sakura said.

"Oh?" Dawn cocked her head. "How so?"

"Well, you might reach the finals, but then you'll have to face Espeon and me. I don't think that my partner will let you take our ribbon."

"Your ribbon, huh? We'll see about that!"

Suddenly, thunder roared. When the girls turned to look out of the window, there was a grey curtain of rain.

"That's some storm. It was nice just an hour ago and now that," Sakura noted.

"I can't complain about it. It was so hot the last few days, I really thought I would overheat before J could get to me."

As a water type, Piplup couldn't agree more.

"Are you still sore?" The Kimono Sister asked with concern in her voice. Beyond that, Dawn could sense disapproval.

"No, no! I'm fine, really. I asked J to hold back, since I'm on stage today." What Dawn didn't say, is that instead of their usual close combat training, J made her jog for her life.

"Good. I'm kind of glad you get to take a break from her. You sounded really frustrated."

"I'm fine, no need to worry!" Dawn smirked and when the announcer called out the next performer, she gently pushed Sakura towards the entrance. "It's your turn! Try to get at least half as many points as I did!"

"You mean *twice as many*!"

Dawn flew through the next two battle rounds, a feat Sakura managed to match. Before the semi-finals started, they could enjoy a brief break.

They sat on a bench nearest to the window. Piplup and Kirlia nibbled at their poffins, Sakura brushed Espeon's fur and Dawn stretched her back. There was the usual buzz of people chatting, celebrating and sighing. It felt great being able to enjoy the

atmosphere, with her worries being at the back of her head. Though not all of her concerns had to do with her next performance.

Part of Dawn felt guilty for letting J go on her own. Some kind of pokemon was in danger. Team Rocket caused trouble. Yet Dawn sat there and leisurely waited for her next round to start, drinking cooled juice.

"I wonder how the situation is over at Olivine City..." Dawn thought outloud.

"At Olivine..? Ah." Sakura nodded. "I'm sure it's alright. If something catastrophic happened, we would have found out. Besides, even Morty said there would probably be enough rangers around to Team Rocket!"

"Yeah." Dawn wasn't sure if she should welcome that kind of information or worry that J might end up in jail. It was weird. Why should she be concerned about the huntress?

Another flash of lightning cracked through the sky behind them. "And this storm is bothering me, too!"

"Come on! Where did that upbeat attitude go to?" Sakura poked her in the side.

Dawn waved her hand off, though smirked. "It's not available right now. Leave a message!"

Right on cue, there was a high-pitched beeping sound coming from Dawn's backpack. She almost dropped her glass in surprise. Quickly, she reached into the side pocket, but as she retrieved the device J had given her, the sound stopped. There was only the notice that J had called and even that vanished after a second.

"Weird?" Dawn tried to push the only two buttons the device had, but nothing happened.

Sakura watched over her shoulder. She shrugged. "Maybe she dialed you accidentally. Doesn't have to mean anything."

Dawn wasn't so sure. An unsettling vibe went through her mind and body. However, she wasn't going to let it come in her way of getting that ribbon once and for all. She had waited for quite a while for that. "You're right, it's probably nothing."

"Contestants! Get ready, you're up in five minutes!" The voice of the announcer called over the microphone.

"That means you!" Sakura cheered. "I'll see you in the finals!"

Dawn nodded, but then Kirlia caught her attention. It focused its energy on her and showed her a picture of a massive storm. Afterwards it pointed outside the window, seemingly further than the rain obscuring their view. It was the direction they had come from. The West.

"Something out there?" Sakura asked.

"No... It's... you mean Olivine City, right?" Dawn leaned over to Kirlia. It nodded. "You mean the place where J is?" Another nod. Dawn didn't like the news. She especially didn't like what it would mean to her. "Are you sure? I mean, we're quite far away. Aren't you just imagining things?"

Another wave of telepathic powers hit her, that time with a clear image of J standing atop of Salamence. They seemed to be caught in an even more ferocious storm than the one that raged over Mahogany Town. Dawn bit her lip.

"Shouldn't we just leave it to her? I mean, even J said I should concentrate on my contest, if only to get rid of me."

That time, Kirlia's psychic thrust bordered on painful.

"Come on!" Dawn snapped. "I know you're worrying, but we can't just rush into this!" She shook her head and pointed to the screen, where the matches of the semi-finals were displayed. "We've come so far, we might as well wait until after we're done!"

Kirlia stood its ground with a stubbornness Dawn didn't know it possessed. A stubbornness it didn't *really* possess.

"Isn't Kirlia able to sense your emotions?" Sakura chimed in.

"You mean, isn't it fond of *amplifying* them?" Dawn mumbled barely loud enough to hear. She felt torn. She had been waiting so long to regain - actually regain, not forcing those feelings of excitement before a contest. J on the other hand, was a part she did *not* welcome in her life at all.

And yet, they were partners against Team Rocket. They had trained together and Dawn still owed her for all those rescues.

When Sakura saw, how Dawn's shoulders slackened in defeat, she asked "You're not really coming to her help? She is so far away and you can't fly in this weather."

Dawn thought back to the herd of Swinub and their evolutions that Team Rocket had tried to capture. The rangers had somehow managed to drive them back. They could succeed again. It didn't make her concerns disappear, though. She knew, it had been pointless trying to help, then. That time, her rescue attempt might be just as pointless.

"We can get there without flying, I think. If we teleport there..."

"Has Kirlia ever been in Olivine City?"

Dawn shook her head. "But I was. And J is there. I'm sure Kirlia will be able to sense her location and bring us right to her. It's just so far away..." She looked at the psychic type. She could see its determined expression, though knew that it was just a facade. In reality, Kirlia was scared.

"Excuse me?" One of the staff members approached Dawn. "The battle is about to begin. If you please follow me-"

"I forfeit," Dawn said behind clenched teeth.

"Excuse me?"

"I said," Dawn hissed, though then relaxed her shoulders. "I forfeit. I'm not going to compete; I can't. I'm sorry."

She rose to her feet and shared a determined look with Kirlia. "We are going to save her. Sorry Sakura." The coordinator turned around to face her friend. "You'll have to win that ribbon, after all. Next time we see each other, we're going to battle over it."

"This is going to be dangerous," Sakura only stated and Dawn remembered that she had her fair share of adventures as well.

"No need to worry. We'll make it."

Dawn took out Kirlia's pokeball and recalled the psychic type. She fumbled with a few settings on the device, then released the psychic type again, but not in the typical red light. It was blue.

"You just set it free... What are you planning..?" Sakura asked hesitantly.

Dawn shrugged. "I need more than five pokemon on my hand that can battle. If I release Kirlia now, I can recatch it and sent it right back to my storage system." She shuddered. "Bebe is going to kill me for glitching her system again. I just hope its worth it. I'm sorry I can't wait for your battle, but I wish you good -"

"Wait. I have a better idea." She sighed. "If you really want to go, then my Kadabra can teleport you until Ecruteak City. My sisters will take care of it and that way, the strain on Kirlia won't be as bad."

Dawn blinked and wanted to argue that they shouldn't have to worry, but it was obvious how relieved Kirlia was at the proposal. She beamed at Sakura. "Thank you. I have to go and put my team together. I'll be back in a minute!"

When Dawn was finally ready, she returned to the waiting room. Sakura and her

Kadabra were already waiting. Outside, the storm raged on. The weather around J was probably no better.

"If I don't hear anything from you after a day, I'll come and get you," Sakura declared. Dawn knew, it was futile to argue, so she only nodded. Kadabra stepped next to her and stretched out its hand. Dawn took it with her right hand, while in her left arm she held Kirlia. Piplup clutched to its usual stop on her head.

"Thank you, Sakura. See you soon."

Sakura nodded and still frowning, told her Kadabra to use teleport. With a flash, they were gone.

Is this considered as another cliffhanger? I dunno. Hope you enjoy it!

Write ya next time!