

The Arcanine Trainer

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by :icondonedonedone:

Empty air whipped around the pokemon trainer, the rocky river at the bottom of the gorge growing nearer and more detailed by the millisecond. The broken rope bridge swung apart above.

With a presence of mind that surprised even himself, the trainer disconnected his belt of pokeballs and cradled it above him. It might've been too late for him, but he could still shelter his party with his body.

Time slowed as the trainer watched the receding, chasm-framed blue sky and mentally prepared for rocks to shred through his back. He hoped more than anything that his partners would be alright.

One of the pokeballs flashed brightly, just barely attracting the trainer's attention out of the corner of his eye. It was the ball for his Arcanine, his first partner and the one pokemon who'd been his constant companion for the past eight years. Tears fell upwards out of his eyes.

Without a second thought the trainer grabbed his Arcanine's pokeball just before he collided with the ground.

I awoke on a riverbank. I stared up at the orange-and-purple evening sky, as I often did with my partners. The nearly-full moon was bright on the right side of my vision and the stars were just beginning to appear.

Echoes of distant, jumbled sensations bounced around in my head, threatening to disturb my calm. Falling, spinning, horror, prayer. My first assumption was that those thoughts were from some half-remembered nightmare, but the more I thought about them the more I realized they were too detailed to be my imagination.

The fall had been *real*. I should have been dead. I sat up, prickling with unease.

The first thing I caught sight of was my legs. They looked mostly human-shaped but far too large, heavily muscled, and covered in the thick orange fur. Those weren't my legs.

"Holy fuck!" I growled. I scrambled backwards on the rocks to escape my own huge, rounded, clawed feet. My legs came with me, looking more unnatural by the second.

"What the fuck?!" I shouted, now in surprise at hearing myself. I could talk! In disbelief I grabbed my throat and made noises. **"Aaa. Grrrr. Uhhh. Aaa. WOOF! AAH! WOOF! WHAT?! WOOF! WOOF! WOOF!"** My experimentation devolved into a fit of panicked barking.

I flipped over onto my front and tried to stand, but couldn't figure out how. The best I could do was get onto my knees and hands. Those hands weren't quite hands, but weren't quite paws either.

I looked away and shut my eyes tight, barking aggressively into the woods. I shook my arms and wrists uselessly, but whatever was covering them didn't come off. I shook my head, ears flapping, then shivered all the way down my fur-covered back to my tail. That felt *weird*.

Unable to come to grips with the external world, I focused inward. I was forgetting something really, *really* important and I didn't have the time to be distracted. Someone I loved was in grave danger! I needed to protect them!

A fire ignited in my chest. Whatever had happened to me was of secondary importance to whatever happened to my partner. I needed to get a grip and *help him!* With a deep growl I stifled my barking and looked around.

There, lying beside me, was my belt. My stomach twisted in knots as I picked it up. The pokeball in the middle wasn't just damaged—it'd *exploded*. The ball's red-and-white exterior was cracked and the metal inside was scorched and melted.

I felt like I was falling again. **"No no no NO!"** I tried to close the ball and instead the bottom half came apart in my hand.

This couldn't be happening. *My partner...* Tears welled up in my eyes.

"AWWOOOOO!" A howl of sorrow burst from my chest. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't stop myself. **"AWWOOOO! AWOOOO! AWOOOOOOOOOO!"** The pale light of the moon filtered through my tear-filled eyes. **"AWOOOOOOOO!"** *My partner... My partner...*

I howled at the moon until my throat was sore and night had fallen. My mane was soaked with tears, but I didn't care. My partner was dead. I'd never get to see him again.

Despite everything, the world continued on anyway. When my sobbing quieted down the river kept babbling and the crickets kept chirping. I whimpered. I just wanted to curl up and die, too. Why couldn't it have been me? Why couldn't it have been me who died and not... and not...

Emotionally numb from what felt like hours of howling, it finally occurred to me that my memories... didn't make much sense. My ear twitched. Who... Who was I mourning? I winced in pain. I knew I should've known his name, but it fuzzed like static when I brought it to mind.

When I thought about it, I couldn't get my brain to conclusively explain how the accident had happened. I remembered watching helplessly as my partner fell, but I also remembered experiencing the wind myself. Neither memory felt completely right. I remembered resolving to shield my partners but also remembered the visceral horror of realizing that my partner intended to use his body to shield me. During the fall... I'd thought accepted my fate, but I'd also made one last desperate play to try and pull my partner into my pokeball with me...

Wait, what happened after that? And how did I end up looking the way I did? What was I supposed to look like...?

Ow. I clutched my head. My brain wasn't meant to think two things at once, but that's what it'd just tried to do when I'd tried to remember what I looked like.

I could remember looking down at myself a few days back during a hike and seeing my usual jacket, arms, pants, and shoes. In a separate, equally unremarkable memory, I remembered sitting down and licking my fur to groom myself. Neither memory was bad, but I did find both of them odd. It was almost like...

My heart leapt. I didn't know where the certainty came from but I swore I could *feel* my partner! He was there, in my head! Was he alive?! I closed my eyes and tried to focus on him, desperate to receive confirmation that he was ok.

I didn't hear my partner, but I still started crying again, this time with relief. I didn't fully understand how, but we were still together! My tear ducts hurt from crying so much. I wanted to pounce on him and hug him and pet him and lick his face for hours and never let him out of my sight again. I just needed to figure out where he was.

I looked down at my clawed hands again and realized something that'd been tickling the back of my brain: my hands reminded me of my partner. My whole body did, really. What could that mean? I hurriedly stood up on two legs and lifted my arms to look myself over.

Yes... although I was certain I didn't always look that way, I was confident that I looked a lot like my partner. The tricky thing was that when I examined any individual part of myself—from my tail, to my upright chest and shoulders, to the way my foot structure left me standing on my "toes"—I couldn't quite sort out whose parts were whose.

What if...

I remembered the flashing pokeball. My final attempt to pull my partner into my ball with me. That had been a silly hope. I knew pokeballs relied on advanced science but surely I'd know if a human could occupy one, let alone share one with a pokemon.

And yet... all the evidence was there, including the fact that I'd survived. I looked back at the exploded pokeball. Almost like it'd been too full...

I considered the implications. My poor friend had done something incredibly dangerous by abusing technology that we didn't understand. I felt terrible that he would do such a thing, but at the same time I knew I would do it again in a heartbeat. I would never *not* try to sacrifice myself for him if he needed it. *That* I knew for sure.

If I was correct... I ran my paw through my mane. So I was my trainer and I was my Arcanine? That hurt my head to think about. But what had happened to them? I couldn't hear either of their individualities no matter how I tried.

In the end, I sighed and laughed. I was just happy we were together. He was alive. *I* was alive. "I" was both of us? Whatever we were, it was good enough for now. Surely we could find some way to fix things as long as we were together.

I still felt immense guilt for all the ways I'd let my partner down. If I'd just done things a little differently or looked after him a little better maybe we could've avoided the accident altogether. Simultaneously, I wished I could tell my partner I didn't blame him for anything that happened and not to worry. I just wished I could console him in person instead of only experiencing him on the edges of my mind.

It was profoundly strange. I was so certain of how I felt about him, but I couldn't even remember my partner's name.

That's when it occurred to me that my own name was similarly fuzzy. Not having a name unsettled me. I remembered having at least one name that I responded to, but I couldn't for the life of me think of what it was.

I'd finally put together that I looked somewhere between a human and an Arcanine, which made sense given that all my memories were from the perspective of either a human trainer or an Arcanine, but I couldn't remember what my name was in either set of memories. Forgetting my name wasn't a huge deal (names were so much less important than us being together) but it still made me uneasy.

I struggled to wrap my head around the theory that my partner and I shared a body. It's not like I had any qualms about sharing things with him if he needed them, but I found it a bit unsatisfying

that I was left with nowhere to direct the affection I wanted to give him. I just wanted to hold him. Still, if I had to choose, our strange state was infinitely better than one of us being dead, so...

Trying not to think too hard, I picked up my belt and walked into the forest on two legs. I needed somewhere to sit and regroup.

In the moonlight I could see with practically daytime-levels of clarity, which was incredible but also somehow unremarkable. Night vision wasn't unusual. I could see in the dark for as long as I could remember, just like I remembered walking on two legs. What didn't fit with my memories was both being able to see and standing on two legs *at the same time*.

I sat on a stump and hesitantly took to looking myself over. I had conflicting opinions on a few parts of my body but... overall I was surprisingly pleased. I looked at least as strong as I used to be and probably even stronger. **"This... isn't so bad,"** I said aloud, enjoying the way words rolled off my tongue and out of my muzzle.

My ears pricked at the sound of my voice. **"Words... I'm saying words... Blah blah blah. This is so cool. This is so cool..."** Being able to speak human words was amazing! What would it be like to talk to humans? I knew I'd been able to speak for most of my life, but still. It was just so weird to say words with a giant, flat canine tongue like mine. The combination of experiences felt new even if the individual components didn't.

As cool as talking was, I was too tired to focus. The rollercoaster of emotions I'd been through had left me exhausted. After triple-checking the status of the rest of my teammates, I laid back on the stump and put my arms over my chest. I focused on the spark in my chest like a campfire. My partners were safe, and that was what mattered.

Thanks for reading! I appreciate favs or comments if you liked this one. I hope to follow this one up one day...