

Geoffrey Maple...

The glass cup nearly cracked under Armon's tightening grip. Any more pressure and it might break, but the man paid no heed. *Why...?!*

He slammed the cup onto the desk and Rowan, the Growlithe sitting by his side, whimpered. Rowan's master had been so angry and devastated since he returned home from a visit to Icebreak Town, and yet he still didn't understand why. The first thing Armon did upon coming home was downing multiple huge glasses of water, then stomping up to his room (more of an office than a proper bedroom, really), and weeping, first out of grief and then pure agony. It was a miracle he didn't wake Sara up with all of the noise he'd made. Only now, twenty minutes later, did Armon open the door and allow his only Pokemon partner in to see what was wrong.

Armon rubbed his temples and squeezed his red-veined eyes shut before peering down at Rowan. The Growlithe rested his head against his master's leg, his expression and whining asking the same question over and over: *"What's wrong, what's wrong?"*

Armon made a weak, tormented smile and gently stroked the Puppy Pokemon across his fur-tufted head with a free hand, while the other hand held onto the blue gemstone resting on top of his desk. "I-I'm sorry, Rowan. It's just..." He fell silent again, the hand petting his partner falling back to the side. "...Maple is...still out there..."

Rowan tilted his head, his expression becoming one of confusion. *"The human-male called Maple?"* The expression inquired, *"but he's gone isn't he?"*

"I thought he was," said Armon as though he understood the silent question. "We were wrong. The police-the officers-" His words faltered, and he slammed another fist against his desk with bared teeth. *They didn't catch him*, his mind growled the rest of his sentence. *They failed to catch the man who killed Martha!*

His fists started trembling again, and his tired gaze drifted onto the gemstone. Martha's gemstone, his *wife's* gemstone, her family's most precious treasure that she gifted to him shortly before Maple viciously took her life, leaving her husband and their only child alone in the world...

The tears returned, long buried sorrow and disbelief mingling with long-forgotten rage. *Damn it...ARCEUS DAMN IT!* Armon choked on a sob and cracked his fists against the desk again. He thought he had moved on from Martha's sudden passing a long time ago, but the floodgates had opened right back up the moment the police informed him the culprit was still at large. *If the police can't catch the bastard, then who can?*

The broken, bitter man raised his head then, his eyes glazing over. *If only I were a Trainer or at the very least a Ranger. I could find him myself...*

Rowan whimpered again and nudged his master's side. He didn't like where Armon's emotions were taking him. "Rowlth!" The Growlithe barked, *'Stop it, Master!'*

Armon flinched and turned away. "I-I'm sorry, Rowan." He muttered before turning over his thoughts again. *I could find, Maple...I could find him myself, and show him what he did to me...what he did to Sara...*

The man flexed his fingers before tightening them into a fist. Rowan's eyes widened and he went to bite at his master's arm before his imagination took him too far when he saw it. The Growlithe halted in his assault to stare at it, and eventually, Armon pulled out of his dark thoughts to stare at it as well.

Martha's gemstone was hovering above his desk, the center of it shining an eerie, blue-green glow.

"WHAT THE-?!" Armon shot up from his chair. The gemstone moved along with him, the glow within swirling. "Rowan." Armon reached out to his partner, never taking his eyes off the gem. The Growlithe kept to his master's side, transfixed by the light.

Pressure intensified within the room, the very atmosphere blurring and growing heavier. Armon fell to his knees, choking, and Rowan fell alongside him. It was getting harder to breathe, much less stand, yet neither human nor Pokemon ran. Neither of them felt they could, much less *should*. Trembling, and unsure wither to start barking, Rowan glanced towards Armon. The light held him within a trance, as though showing him something the Growlithe could neither see nor sense, before suddenly bursting out of the stone with a brilliant flash. The man recoiled once he was free from the light, only to look right back at it as it broke into separate arrays before churning into separate luminescent tendrils above his head. Armon gasped and fell onto his back as he tried to escape, but it was no use. Even if he managed to flee, there was no running from fate. The tendrils took aim, and Armon cried out as the light drove through his chest.

The man's eyes rolled back as the light spread across his body like thousands of little Spinarak webs, flooding his senses, consuming him both inside and out to the point where he hovered above the floor. Before Rowan could start panicking and barking, the light faded, and Armon collapsed back onto the floor.

His mind reeled as he slowly came back into focus, and he coughed a few times before standing up on shaky legs. What in the world just happened? Where did that light come from? What did it *do* to him?

Sharp, rigid pain suddenly stabbed through his torso, and Armon cried out. Rowan leapt to his side, whining in alarm. *'Are you alright, master?'*

Armon turned to his friend, panting. "I-I don't know Rowan..." He clutched his chest, digging his fingers into his sweater as the pain slowly dwindled away, replacing itself with...something else. A void lingering within his torso, heavy, harrowing, and it wasn't there before the gemstone glowed. *What-what is this...?* Armon tried to focus, his mind racing. *Is it a heart attack? No, the symptoms are all wrong, aren't they? That light-* He staggered. *What did it do to me...?*

The man slowly turned back towards the now dormant gemstone on his desk. However, before either he or Rowan could make any sense of the insanity that just occurred...

Knock-knock-knock!

"D-dad?"

The man stiffened, his mind easing at the sound of his daughter's voice. "S-sara?" Armon adjusted himself, trying to mask the pain and unease as much as possible. "Wh-what is it? Is something wrong?"

The bedroom door slowly opened, revealing a tiny brown-haired girl of six years on the other side. "I-I had a bad dream, Dad..." Sara rubbed her eyes with a spare hand while the other held a large Piplup plush. "I...I don't wanna go back to sleep..."

Armon's expression softened, his predicament forgotten. "Oh, Sara..." The man approached his daughter and knelt in front of her. "Everyone has bad dreams at some point. They usually don't mean anything in the end, it's alright."

He gently ruffled Sara's hair, making her giggle, before carefully lifting her up into his arms. "Come on, I know a way to help you sleep." He glanced at Rowan back in his room, and gestured for him to follow. Rowan frowned, still unsure what exactly just occurred, before following in suit. "What was your dream about?" Armon asked, trying not to grip his chest again.

"Uhm..." Sara itched her head, and then shuddered. "A big scary Pokemon was coming...."

"A big, scary Pokemon..." Armon narrowed his eyes and glanced outside. "Well, there is a New Moon tonight, so it makes sense..."

A New Moon tonight? The man suddenly thought. *How did I know that? Why is that suddenly important...?*

"...Though it was true Masato and Jirachi would never see each other again-" Armon read, "-they would always be together, no matter how far apart they were. As Jirachi told Masato before he left Faunz, he will always watch over him, even through his thousand-year sleep. So they say..."

Armon closed the storybook, and glanced over at Sara. She was fast asleep, curled up on her bed, surrounded by a number of her plushes with a content smile on her face. Armon smiled in turn. Sara's favorite bedtime story always managed to put her to sleep, no matter how troubled she seemed. The girl's father placed the storybook on the table nearby, and slowly sat up from the bed. "Goodnight, my little Rowlet..." He gently kissed her on the forehead and tucked her in. Once he was sure she was comfortable, he made his way towards the door.

Snap!

Armon almost fell over, biting his tongue to keep from crying out. Rowan, who had been lying down eyeing his master carefully, leapt to his feet. "Rowlth?" *'Is it back?'*

"I-I think so..." Sweat soaked into Armon's hair as he gripped his chest again. The void had morphed back into the sharp, agonizing pain from before, and it was escalating. The man pressed his hand against the wall to stay steady, panting as he forced his way towards the door. He glanced back at Sara. She was still asleep, thank Arceus! *Please stay asleep...* He stumbled out of his daughter's room, nearly gasping now. *Pl-please...*

He glanced down. Rowan was right behind him; ready to follow his master wherever he went. "R-rowan please." Armon tightened his grip, the pain intensifying with each heartbeat. "St-stay with Sara. Make sure she-she stays asleep."

Rowan blinked and whimpered. *'But why? You're in trouble!'*

"I can't...She can't..." Armon struggled to find the right words. "I don't want her to see me like this..." He reached out for his partner, only to falter. "Rowan, please...N-no matter what happens...Stay with her."

The Growlithe whined, and when he refused to move, Armon gestured with an outstretched arm. "St-stay with Sara...I'm begging you, Rowan..."

Rowan could have started crying right then and there. His master was clearly in pain, and yet he didn't want his partner near to help when he needed it the most? The Growlithe glanced over at Sara, then back. Armon wanted him to stay with his child for a plausible reason, though. What should he do?

Armon's arm started trembling. "St-stay, please."

The Growlthe groaned and reluctantly backed away into Sara's room, watching his master with great concerned eyes as Armon closed the door on him. When he was sure Rowan won't try to follow or break the door down, the miserable man slowly walked away, trying not to stumble or collapse as he did.

*Hospital...c-call the hospital...*Armon tried to think through the nausea mixing with the pain. He needed help right now, but an obscure instinct told him not to seek it. Something was coming, something beyond the pain, another reason why he wanted neither Sara nor Rowan to see him like this. *But what?*

Snap!

"Argh-!" The man collapsed. The pain it-it came from his back instead of his torso this time! Armon gagged, threatening to vomit all over himself. There was a great black moon in the night sky, something he never noticed until now. *The New Moon?* He guessed. *But-but how?*

Snap!

Armon bared his teeth against the pain as he forced himself back on his feet. It came from his ribcage; the pain was spreading all over now. *M-my room!* He suddenly thought. *Have to-get to my room...!*

He dragged himself to the stairs leading to his room, using every amount of willpower not to scream or vomit. Once there, Armon gripped the railing and struggled his way up, his legs growing heavier with each step he took. When he finally made it to his room and locked the door behind him, the peak of his spine cracked.

The man howled, unable to hold it in anymore, and fell to his knees for the last time. His back had just cracked, out of nowhere, right at the cervical! His neck should be broken; he should paralyzed or dead, why wasn't he either of them? Armon bared his teeth and writhed as the bones of his spinal cord reformed and moved upwards, the seams of his sweater tearing as his back became hunched. It didn't stop there. Armon gripped the floor and nearly vomited as the pain spiraled away from his back, and crawled down to his arms.

Moaning, gasping, the man slowly raised his trembling head, and looked down at his right hand. His eyes bulged, his breathing accelerating. There was a dark spot on his palm that was not there before, and it was growing. Armon scratched weakly at the darkness in vain-part of him noting its soft, silk-like texture-as it spread across his hand, turning it dark gray, almost black. Horrified, Armon could only watch as his wrist shrank, and the hand expanded in size as his index and pinky fingers merged into his palm, while the remaining three fingers bulged and sharpened into thick menacing claws.

WHAT THE HELL-!? Armon grabbed his transformed wrist with his left hand; sheer terror and instinct leading him to believe that holding onto his hand would somehow prevent the change from continuing. The effort proved futile, and the man released his grip as his left hand trembled and morphed the same as his right.

Armon sat up the best he could and stared down at his new hands with tear-filled eyes. Before he could even try to theorize what was happening to him, his ribcage cracked again. He cried out and clung to his chest, groaning as his stomach, intestines, and waist shrank in and his chest expanded outward into a narrow diamond shape. *Don't let Sara or Rowan come in, He silently begged, don't-don't let them see me like this!*

The shadows of Armon's new arms began to spread throughout the rest of his body, working through and changing him like venom through a vulnerable blood stream. He groaned in an ominous, in-human voice as it moved towards his skull, the groans distorting into deep, echoing snarls and growls as the bones within started to break and re-form, slowly but surely re-shaping his head.

S-stop, Armon silently pleaded as his eyes began to change shape, and each thread of his hair started to fuse into thicker, larger strands, *Arceus please make it stop!*

The end of his spine extended and burst out through his pants, forming into a ragged, spectral-like tail. The skin of his shoulders grew and stretched before ripping through his sweater, forming into dark, smoke-like wisps that drifted aimlessly as though wind were blowing onto them. The hair followed shortly after. Once every strand had fused, the hair grew longer in length, paling from dark brown to snow-white, as though Armon had suddenly aged multiple decades, before rising and hovering alongside the shoulder tendrils.

St-stop...please! The man-if he was considered one at this point-continued to beg beyond hope as he lost feeling all feeling in his legs, as though they suddenly ceased to exist. *It-it hurts...IT HURTS!*

As if to respond to his pleas, the bones within his now narrow chest hardened and reformed, and Armon howled and ripped at his shirt as the bones pushed upward, through the skin, forming into a spiked, blood-red collar shielding a portion of his head.

He clawed at his face, clutching it as his nose and ears dissolved, and his teeth sharpened before his mouth apparently disintegrated. As tears swept down his reformed face, his pupils turning slit and eye color deepening, Armon peered through his claws, his gaze landing on the gemstone that started it all. His wife's gemstone, *Martha's* gemstone. Memories of her flashed before his eyes, memories of happier times, the time she told him the history of her family's treasure. *Did she know? Did she know this would **happen to me?!***

Armon's now deep-blue eyes widened, and as his transformation completed he reared his head back and roared the name of his lost loved one.

"MARTHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAIIIIII!"

The new Pokemon collapsed onto the floor, and all fell silent.

He lay there for a good amount of time, exhausted and weak from losing his human body, before raising a trembling arm. It landed on the floor, claws digging into the wooden texture before pulling its occupant forward.

"R-rai..."

The other arm followed in suit, its occupant groaning as he crawled closer to the walls, specifically the one with the hanging mirror.

"Daaark..."

The dark talons grabbed hold of the wall and clawed their way up, heaving their owner upright until he was able to hover aboveground.

"Rai..."

When he was sure the mirror was in front of him, the man-turned-Pokemon slowly opened his new eyes.

"R-RAI?!" *WH-WHAT?!*

Armon recoiled as though stung. No, no, that reflection couldn't be real! *It couldn't be true!*

Gasping, the transformed human took a risk and slowly looked down at himself. ***It can't be-! NO!***

He tore at his new, dire form, trying to find something, *anything* that resembled his true human self, only to find none. ***No no NO! Please!***

Tears stung his eyes as he frantically examined himself, grabbing at the red collar, the wisp-like shoulder tendrils, the hair, and his tail. *His tail! Why did he have a tail?! Where were his legs!? How could he move without legs?!*

NO! This is wrong! All wrong!

He blinked his mist-filled eyes when he realized his vision had changed. The night was pitch as black, outside and in, and yet he could see perfectly as though it were a sunlit day. He could see the New Moon glittering down on him.

The New Moon...

The answer hit him then. He knew what he was now, he knew what he'd become and he nearly fainted again just by thinking about it.

Darkrai. The vicious embodiment of nightmares, the New Moon incarnate.

A monster.

This-this isn't me!

Armon trembled violently as he tried to deny what he was seeing, what he was *feeling*.

This isn't me! This isn't who I am!

Unable to escape the truth and unable to cope, the new Darkrai drifted down, buried his head into his hands, and started to cry.

I'm not-I'm not a monster...

His new tail wrapped around his waist as if to comfort him, but he didn't notice. It couldn't be true, it was impossible! None of this should be theoretically possible, so why...?

The memories of this night razed through Armon. The police informing him of Maple at large, Martha's gemstone glowing and pouring its light into him, no doubt resulting in this horrid transformation, and Sara-

Sara...!

The Darkrai slowly lifted his head, a sense of calm overcoming him as he remembered comforting Sara from her nightmare, and tucking her in after reading her favorite story. ***My-my daughter...my-my child...***

Armon slowly turned towards the door. Was she hurt? Was she alright? She didn't hear him, did she? If she did...

He rose above the floor, fumbling as he did, and hovered for the door. He had to see her, he thought as he reached for the doorknob. He had to see if she was doing okay...

Wait, what is he doing?!

Armon's outstretched hand trembled, and he backed away. What was he doing?! The way he was now he-she would be scared-no-*terrified* of him! On top of that: ***What if I hurt her?***

His eyes widened. The big scary Pokemon that was coming in Sara's dream....was it him? Was he the monster that was coming for her? ***Am I the one who gave her that dream?***

No he couldn't take this, it was too much. The Darkrai continued backing away from the door, his vision foggy with more tears. He could hurt her. As long as he was a monster he could hurt her even if he wasn't near her! ***N-No...***

Armon pressed himself against the farthest corner of his room and sank down. He wanted to go to Sara to see if she was alright, but he'd hurt her if he did!

Wh-why...Armon shook his head and buried it into his hands again. He couldn't handle this, he couldn't handle any of it! Why did this happen? What did he do to deserve this? Where did he go wrong...?

Martha...why...?