**Same As It Ever Was**

Dusknoir’s arrival in Treasure Town had caused somewhat of a stir. Being a rather famous and capable explorer, he attracted quite a few admirers rather quickly, all eager to assist him with his investigation into the missing Time Gears. And for his part Markus – while largely feeling the same way – mostly tried to stay out of Dusknoir’s way. He was, after all, just a Joltik.

His transformation from human to pokemon had become a somewhat cumbersome reality of his life. A tiny, electric bug, forced to realize that even the most benign things can easily become hazards. If it weren’t for his partner – the one who had convinced him to join Wigglytuff’s Guild – he’d probably have trouble even just getting around. Though it wasn’t as if Markus ended up completely powerless; given enough time, the little bug-type could produce enough static electricity to properly survey a dungeon, even if that sort of thing required rigorous preparation.

But despite the Joltik’s apparent weakness, ever since they had been properly introduced, Dusknoir began showing interest in this supposed ‘human-turned-pokemon’, keeping an eye on him from time to time, getting him out of trouble, helping him train… Markus suspected his visions were partly to blame for that – Dimensional Scream, Dusknoir called it. The noble adventurer had explained that it is a rather rare power, one that manifests in the form of visions from the past and the future alike.

Being of… certain interest to the respected explorer did make Markus a lot more at ease around the big lad. He may have still been a bit nervous about wasting Dusknoir’s time, but not nearly to the same extent – clearly he had *something* to offer if such interest was being shown.

Though tonight was a little special, with Markus’ partner otherwise occupied with some guild business, the usual training session turned into a one-on-one lesson.

“Not bad!” Dusknoir assured, dusting off a slight singe mark from one of Markus’ thunderbolts. “You’ve still got a long way to go, Markus, but for a small one like yourself, that was an… *adequate* performance.”

The final sparks of his remaining electricity dissipating from the fluffy parts of his body, Markus bounced in place, directing his tiny little head up towards Dusknoir. “Thank you, sir! I never would have come this far without your help.”

“Think nothing of it, Markus.” Dusknoir nodded. Slowly, he brought a hand to his chin, pondering as he looked down over the tiny thing. “Are you, by chance, headed home now?”

“Yeah, my partner’s busy, so I’ll be taking the… err… *scenic* route by myself.”

Dusknoir paused, gazing off into the distance, seemingly estimating the time it would take a mere Joltik to make it all the way to the cliffside. “Could I, perhaps, offer you a lift?” He asked, lowering his wide palm towards the ground, inviting the tiny critter to climb aboard.

“I… would hate to trouble you like that, sir.”

“Nonsense!” Dusknoir assured with a hearty laugh. “I’m waiting for officer Magnezone’s report anyhow, so I am not at all busy tonight. It would be my pleasure.”

“O-oh! Uhm…” Shrinking back a little bit, Markus fiddled his tiny legs about. “In that case, I would be grateful!”

“Hah hah! Much better!” Giving the tiny thing a moment to skitter onto his palm, Dusknoir carefully lifted Markus up, beginning a slow, gradual journey towards their destination, away from Treasure Town.

Markus sat atop the hand, crawling along one of Dusknoir’s wide digits to find his way towards the fingertip. Flanked by the larger pokemon’s body on his right, the ex-human sat there, watching the landscape scroll by at incredibly speeds as he clunging to a massive hand, feeling wind sweeping past him in gusts. This was faster than he had gone in some time! Though he was certain Dusknoir was slowing down for his sake.

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A mere ten minutes later, they were near the cliff, Dusknoir letting the puny thing down on the ground and offering somewhat of a smile, as much as he could with just his eye. “There you are, safe and sound!”

“Thank you!” Markus bounced down to the ground and happily smiled back. “And hey, if you’re not really busy, sir. Perhaps, you’d like to stay a while? I’m pretty sure we have some apples left if you wanted one, and the view from up here is…” He turned around, glancing across the sunset-colored sea. “Very soothing…”

Dusknoir gave the smaller pokemon a quick glance. “Ah, I was… actually about to ask if you would mind having a chat with me, just you and I.”

“Oh! By all means!” Markus bounced in place, before crawling his way closer to the edge, motioning with his tiny insectoid head for Dusknoir to take a seat too. “Was it something you couldn’t mention back in town?”

“Quite.” Dusknoir nodded, indeed parking himself beside the tiny pokemon, the wispy ‘tail’ hanging slightly over the edge. “You know, I've been meaning to have this conversation with you for the longest time now…" He trailed of, glancing down over the water below, and then, seemingly, across the horizon. "A human turned pokemon is a fascinating tale, truth be told."

“Hahah! Tell me about it!” Markus laughed, maintaining a respectful distance but feeling quite… comfortable by Dusknoir’s presence nonetheless.

“But looking at you now…” He held out a long, meaning pause. “I'm somewhat underwhelmed.”

“Huh?”

“I’ve seen your skills firsthand. And while you do certainly make for one… heh… ferocious little battery, once your charge runs out, it really is it for you, isn’t it?” With a deep rumbling chuckle, Dusknoir lowered a singular finger on top of Markus, covering almost his entire body with just the tip of it.

Markus would feel a shower of sparks in his fuzz discharging against the fingertip, absorbing what little electricity remained after their training. “W-well… I can’t say it has been easy. I’m certain I could have done much better as a Riolu or a Pikachu, but I’m…” He shook his head a bit as the giant fingertip lifted off. “I’m not really upset with my lot. My friends have been a huge help and… I’m glad to have found a purpose here.” He nodded with conviction. “Even if I’m stuck like this for a while.”

A quick shadow of surprise ran across Dusknoir’s face as he glanced at Markus. “Is that so? Hmmm…” He sat there for a moment, frowning as he thought about something. “So you really are fine with the way things are then?”

“Yup! No reason to feel down about it, is there?” The little Joltik beamed. “Just gotta do my best with what I’ve got!”

"And that is why you are helping the others in restoring the Time Gears to their rightful places?"

“Yup!”

Dusknoir let off a chuckle, lowering himself beside Markus “Very well. And, do you mind if I take it easy for a short while? I have been… rather busy with the townsfolk recently. Their adoration is appreciated but… *draining*.” Without waiting for a response he leaned back a little, setting one of his arms down on the ground beside Markus, almost trapping him on the edge.

The appendage towered over the little Joltik as a sudden glance from the bigger pokemon made the ex-human hide his tiny insectoid face. Hesitant and nervous, he felt… oddly receptive to this approach. The imposing yet casual gestures, made him feel as though he was seeing a side of Dusknoir that few ever got to see. “I’m… glad, you don’t count me among the exhausting ones, sir! I… hope.” Scuttling a bit closer, he gently bumped himself into Dusknoir’s humongous palm, nuzzling himself into it.

Another, deep chuckle rumbled from Dusknoir’s chest and along the ground. “Oh please, Markus,” he bellowed, “you are far too insignificant to truly exhaust me.” Once more without asking, he closed his palm around the Joltik, catching the tiny thing in a warm embrace of flesh and lifting it up, closer to his eye, inspecting it…

Markus didn’t seem to mind, meeting Dusknoir’s large red eye with a collection of tiny, adoring blues of his own. “I suppose that’s one way to relieve my worries.” He chuckled. “I’m grateful you’re around, Dusknoir, sir.”

“You know, it has been some time since I've had any real company, little thing.” Dusknoir said, moving the tiny bug around in his palm a bit, tilting it side to side, watching the little thing adjust or tumble, time after time.

“H-how do you mean, sir?” Markus asked, trying his best to hold in place but giggling every time the tilt of the bigger pokemon’s hand overpowered him.

“Oh, you know, keeping my face up, keeping my true feelings and intentions hidden… Markus, I feel like you could be the only one I can truly be honest with.” The tilting stopped as Dusknoir instead brought down a finger, smooshing the tiny Joltik into his palm, feeling the tiny, frail body sink a bit into the firm, yet oddly soft flesh.

“W-wow… Uhm… I mean…” Markus stammered as he wiggled against the hand, squirming under the intense but gentle pressure. “Thank you? I’m glad but… why?”

“You’ll understand soon enough.” Dusknoir assured with a nod. “For now though… tell me, little human. Do you expect to return to your original form?” Holding Markus down with his thumb, he leaned back, lying down on the ground, one arm behind his head.

“Y-yeah, I think so! If I managed to transform into a pokemon, surely there’s a way to go back too?”

“I am not certain that is the best course of action for you.” The ghost-type said, gently kneading the tiny thing between his fingers, shifting him back and forth and back and forth, like a thorough, full-body massage.

“Oh? Well… I suppose I do have a life here now, friends, home… I’m sure I’d miss it all. I’ll definitely miss being held by you, sir! You have uhm… rather fantastic hands.” The tiny head would press itself into one of the fingers, nuzzling into it. “I… honestly feel safer in your grasp than… well… *anywhere* since my transformation.” A few more tiny sparks – the most recently generated electricity – gently crackled, once against absorbed by the massive fingers. “Would you... mind if we stayed like this just a while longer?”

Bringing his other hand out into the open, Dusknoir would allow himself another chuckle, a slightly sinister-sounding one. He snapped his fingers together and suddenly a portal yawned open behind him – a dark vortex, seemingly *absorbing* light. “You see, little thing,” he began, “I'd be happy if we could do just that.”

“Uhm… Sir?” Markus hesitated, looking over the massive wormhole just a short distance away. “What… is that exactly?”

Grunting in amusement, Dusknoir gave off some semblance of a smirk. “You have been a thorn in my side, little human.” He whispered. “For the longest time.” The pressure around the little Joltik intensified, no longer content to just gently knead the little bug, but squishing him now, feeling the tiny body strain under the weight. “Returning the Time Gears, revitalizing the forests, reversing my work...” His head leaned closer to the tiny pokemon in his grip.

"What are you talking about, s-sir?" Markus was confused. suddenly feeling frail, tiny and helpless.

“Dialga is in a bit of a… *mood*. He has become primal, I should say.” Dusknoir elaborated, causing the little ex-human nothing but further confusion. “You may be a far cry from the human I recall, but you are still… *incessantly* driven. And we can’t have that, can we?” He was squeezing the little Joltik like a stress ball now, mercilessly kneading him into the hand to his satisfaction. “So Dialga wants you dealt with, I am merely carrying out his will.”

“D-Dialga?” Markus just about managed to gasp, only to be smothered deep into Dusknoir’s palm once more, practically cutting off his air supply as the giant ghost-type toyed around with him.

"You know all this, Markus, you’ve merely forgotten. Whatever that pesky onion did to send you back in time, clearly didn’t work as intended.” He laughed a deep, self-satisfied laugh. “Lucky for me, you didn’t remember anything. It gave me all the time I needed to… figure you out. And as my opposition you’re… Well, like I said, I’m not impressed.”

Markus felt the finger finally relent, allowing him to roll out into the middle of the palm, exhausted and winded under Dusknoir’s watchful gaze. The ghost-type didn’t waste much time though, bringing his second hand closer, he pressed Markus between the two, rolling the little thing around between them.

“Dialga wants you dealt with, but he’s never specified *how*. The finer details, you see, are up to me. Again, I don’t expect you to remember, but the future you and I come from is… a rather dark and lonely place. I by no means loathe it; it is what shaped us both, after all. But still I think I would appreciate some company there.”

Markus was struggling to break free now, he still wasn’t sure what any of this meant or what it had to do with him. Was he from the future? Did he really lose his memory of that? But in any event, it was clear that whatever Dusknoir was up to, wasn’t good. "What are you doing?!” He shouted. “Stop! Let me go!"

But the ghost-type paid him no heed. “Portal transportation is an interesting phenomenon. It is by far the most efficient way to travel but it is… prone to certain side effects. Like turning a human into a pokemon, for instance.” He chuckled again, parting his palms only to clap them right back together, knowing full well that Markus enjoyed this too, at least on some level. “I am sure you must have thought that if you just did what you were brought here to do, you’d change right back, but I am afraid the world isn’t that accommodating. Trust me, Markus. This is for the better. The future you come from, if you change it, you’ll simply cease to be. You, me and everyone else who came from that time would… simply never have existed in the first place.”

“So enough’s enough. You had your go at playing hero, but it’s time to go back home, Markus. As my direct opposition and the one standing in the way of my mission, I simply can’t let you run wild so… you’ll be coming with me.” Getting himself up off the ground, Dusknoir approached the swirling portal, chuckling as he once again pinched the tiny Joltik between his fingers, bringing him up in front of his eye. “Dialga agreed to spare you if I vouched for you. And thus, he helped me set up this special portal. Normally, you’d have your chance to revert back to your true form, or at least evolve at some point in the future, but… Tell me, are you familiar with Chronostasis?”

Waiting patiently, Dusknoir relaxed his grip on the little thing to see if it would respond. And to his surprise, Markus did. A simple “no” instead of a string of protests or curses, like he had come to expect from most – It was quite refreshing.

“Hmm hmm… I know I had a good feeling about you. But yes, as I was saying… The moment you enter this portal, you will forever remain a Joltik – no going back, no evolving, no changing, nothing. In fact, I doubt you’d even be able to age! So we will have plenty of time to get along properly, you and I.”

“I’m sure by now you realize I’m taking a certain... joy in this. Much like you are, I’m sure.“ He smirked, prodding at the tiny body once more. “Having someone utterly miniscule to play around with… It excites me in ways you likely can't even imagine.” He cleared his throat. “But alas, you've heard enough… For a human turned pokemon – like the ancient pokemon would say – is but a fairy tale - a myth. Since, after all…"

*“You’ve only ever been a Joltik.”*

And with that, Dusknoir stepped through the portal, leaving it swirling for a few second longer before the darkness dissipated, leaving no trace of the human-turned-pokemon behind.