

Benny held his breath as the massive shadow Pokemon fell. When the creature had appeared from The Nothing, he thought everything was over. He never would have expected his puny Pokemon team to be able to fight off such a massive Pokemon.

Yet, against all odds, the Garchomp was down. A roar rumbled in its throat before it withdrew into the fog, its body seemingly dissolving into particles that scattered about the ground.

In that moment, those particles didn't matter to Benny. Instead, he scrambled and ran towards Piri-Piri who, somehow, had managed to stand up to that massive Pokemon. "Piriri!" he yelled through the mask as he saw the Pokemon lose his balance and fall.

Cookie couldn't fight, and Bop had been too scared to even try. Only Piri-Piri had stood his ground against that shadow Garchomp, retaliating with blow after blow, even as the huge Dragon type continued to keep him down. He had persevered despite serious injuries.

When Benny reached his Pokemon, he dropped down to his knees so he could pick up the Impidimp in his arms. The sight of blood and injuries didn't faze Benny, but there was something about seeing Piri-Piri like this that made his heart hammer in his chest.

Piri-Piri looked dazed, staring listlessly up at the sky, limp as a bag of flour in Benny's arms. His body was covered in bruises and lacerations, some worse than others, blood dripping from the cuts. The most significant injury was Piri-Piri's ear, which had visibly been ripped almost completely.

Benny could see the Pokemon breathe, but that glazed look in his eyes made his anxiety spike. "Say something," he whispered, his voice cracking. "Are you okay?"

Piri-Piri took a deep breath and blinked slowly, turning his head to look up at Benny. He managed a tiny, cocky grin and a little nod.

But Benny didn't relax just yet. He had to get Piri-Piri to a Pokemon Center, or just, *anywhere*. And to do so, he would need to help stop that bleeding, especially with his ear. Thinking quickly, he put the Impidimp down on the ground; he then removed his leather jacket and his tank top. He ripped the mangled shirt so he could use one part of it to cover Piri-Piri's ear, and used the rest to wrap him up in it, slowing the bleeding of the other cuts. He put his leather jacket back on before picking up Piri-Piri again. "We have to go back to town," he said out loud so Cookie and Bop could hear him and follow. "He...he's hurt."

He was about to leave when he noticed Bop hovering over something. "Bop!" His call had been more curt than he had expected, but there was no time to waste. "What are you doing? We have to hurry!"

But the Torchic seemingly refused to move. Instead, he turned to Benny and called out to him, as if urging him to come on over. Benny groaned and sighed, short, but he complied. "What?" he snapped as he reached the Pokemon.

Bop motioned to the bunch of strange particles on the ground. Frustrated — and most importantly, scared for Piri-Piri — Benny couldn't figure out what Bop was trying to tell him. "What about these? I don't care!"

But then, he saw Cookie staring at the particles. And even Piri-Piri, weak as he was, tapped Benny on the chest; although Benny had barely felt it. "Wh...why do you care?" he asked his

team, but the Pokemon, obviously, couldn't answer him in a way he would understand. All they could do was continue to chirp, coo and insist that Benny not leave without taking some of these particles with him.

They had come from...where? What were those particles, anyway? In the distance, he thought he could hear some other trainers scream about them and the Shadow Pokemon. "Grab the particles! New info from professor Blackthorn says they're important!" That was the gist of what he could hear. All around him, the other trainers continued to fight off against those Shadow Pokemon, The Nothing seemingly recoiling away from them the more Shadow Pokemon were attacked and defeated.

Could there be something valuable in those particles? Something that could help them understand what those horrible Pokemon were?

"Ugh, fine, fine!" He got on his knees again and let Piri-Piri down. He had some empty pill bottles in his pockets: useful to store some small tools, or sometimes just to gather up some liquids in a pinch. They weren't very big, but he figured Blackthorn could figure something out.

He filled up all the little bottles he had on him and carefully stored them into his pockets. Some particles from the Garchomp remained, but Benny didn't have anything else to carry them in. "Okay, I got 'em. Now we have to go!" he insisted as he picked up his Impidimp again. Not only did he need to get Piri-Piri patched up, he would be in deep, deep trouble if more Shadow Pokemon emerged from The Nothing right now.

Leaving the thick smog and the few particles behind, Benny ran off towards Brookfell, Cookie and Bop running behind him.