

October 19, 2017, 11:15 AM
Saffron City District Court – 3rd Floor Lobby

Brendan stood next to one of the chairs in the lobby and leaned against the wall, letting out a huge sigh. He watched as the gallery crowd filed out slowly.

“Brendan,” Phoenix moaned, lying flat on the chair next to Brendan, “*please* don't bring me here tomorrow. We're on *vacation*, remember?”

“I'll agree the second you find a trustworthy sitter, Phoenix. I'm not about to leave you alone, not with all the burgers we have at the hotel.”

“Hey! I won't eat them all, I swear! Just half of them.”

“Honestly, Phoenix,” Skye said as she took a seat. “You were the one who asked to join us in the first place, as I recall.”

“Yeah, well ...” Phoenix squawked. “I was hoping it'd be a short trial. I was hoping we'd hear answers! You took this case to help free all those enslaved electric Pokemon, right?”

Blue stepped out of the courtroom. “Is that so, Brendan? How noble of you.”

Brendan looked over at the prosecutor. What in the world was making him behave so differently? He couldn't put his finger on anything, but ever since their meeting last night, something seemed off about the guy – and the feeling was getting stronger each time they met. It was accompanied by a strange feeling that he knew the man – of course he did, Brendan thought, it's *Blue*. Of course he knew him.

“Lost in thought, eh, kiddo? It's a deep case, I know – and I have a surefire feeling that it's only gonna get deeper.”

Brendan looked up at Blue. Up, but only slightly. Brendan was a hair over six feet tall, and he recalled being able to look Blue in the eye without any trouble. Now his eyes looked to be about an inch – maybe two – higher. Weird. Maybe he was overthinking it. He was slouched against the wall, after all, although it was only slightly.

“In any case, I suppose a congrats is in order. Short trial, I'll admit, but hey; a full afternoon to investigate. I plan to utilize every minute, of course.”

“As if we won't do the same!” Skye piped up.

Brendan ignored the last remark. “A congratulations from *you*? That's not the Blue I know.”

“I told you, Brendan,” Skye said with a slight sing-song tone. “What are you hiding, Blue? I'll bet my sleuthing coat it's got something to do with the case.”

“Me?” Blue said innocently. “Hiding something? Acting strange with congratulates? I've already told you my perspective, Brendan. And you did what I hoped you would do – you pointed out something important that the police managed to overlook, and that's a chance to dig deeper in this case. I've got a feeling, that's all. And I'm after the truth.”

“The truth, huh?” said Skye. “As I recall, the last time we met, your 'truth' involved pinning the murder of my friend's *own mother* on me. Granted, we agree that there's more to this case than meets the eye, but the truth isn't always what you want it to be, Blue. I don't think it ever has been.”

“I've learned my lesson, Detective; I will assure you of that much. That case opened my eyes, and I've turned over a new leaf.”

Skye stared at Blue, unsure of how seriously to take his statement. Blue turned his attention back to Brendan, meeting his gaze deliberately.

“Brendan. I feel I must ... apologize ... for any grief I have caused for you and your friends. I

was ... wrong. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an investigation to do – and I trust you'll do the same.”

Blue shuffled out the door rather quickly, Brendan thought.

“Hoo, boy ... that was a close save, huh, sir?”

Brendan's group looked back toward the courtroom doors – Tyler was being escorted by a policeman out into the lobby. Skye quickly put on a grin.

“Huh? ... Oh, yeah. I guess it was,” said Brendan sheepishly.

“What do you think it means, though?” Tyler asked. “The stuff you pointed out, I mean?”

“The shortage of burn marks and absence of holes? I ... can't really say for sure yet.” *I just hope it doesn't mean that some bozo lit a match near the victim's backside – then we'd be back where we started!*

“Well, I know you'll figure it out. You look smarter than any of the lawyers I've seen around this region.”

Oh, that's just wonderful. I'm literally surrounded by idiot attorneys. “I'll ... uh ... well, thank you, Mr. Noll. We'll have this figured out – and you out of the precinct – by tomorrow. No sweat.”

The cop began to take Tyler to the exit. “I owe ya, Mr. Namron. Good luck!” he called through the double doors.

Skye looked a little dumbfounded. “I owe you”? I hope he doesn't mean that in the monetary sense.”

“Me neither,” Phoenix chirped. “I'm not missing the Goldenrod Burger Bash over a cheapskate.”

(Δ)

“If you're trying to train your beak and my wallet for that bash, it's working *very* well.”

Brendan and Skye were staring, with equal parts awe and disgust, at Phoenix on a diner table, who was somehow wolfing down his fifth Surge Burger for lunch. Prior to that, however, Skye and Brendan discussed a plan for the day.

“Go. Have. Fun. You work tirelessly as it is, and ... well, this guy's gonna need to walk his meal off,” Brendan said, gesturing to Phoenix.

“Aww, stuff it, will you?” said Phoenix with a muffled chirp.

“C'mon, Brendan,” protested Skye, “we've been through this already. I *love* this stuff. I'd just as soon trade places with you and leave you two to go off to an arcade, or something.”

“But I--” Brendan cut himself off and sighed, smiling. “There's no swaying you, is there. All right, we'll all go.”

Phoenix let out a combined moan and burp.

October 19, 2017, 1:19 PM
Kanto Power Plant - Front Entrance

“... well, what about the Daycare? It wasn't even that far? I could've stayed there! Anything but an investigation on vacation!”

“That *was* an option, Phoenix, until you saw fit to destroy my wallet with your lunch.”

“Then why'd you let me do that?”

“Consequences, junior. Learn 'em -- ahh, we're here.”

The power plant loomed above the group, brilliantly lit by the midday sun. A large, blandly-colored building, it looked a bit like a manufacturing plant with a handful of smokestacks protruding from the roof. For all its grandeur, it seemed to Brendan that most of the space it occupied

was largely unnecessary - but, Brandon told himself, it was only a hunch.

"Where to begin, huh?" Skye said. "I personally think that we should examine the outside first."

"Fair enough," said Brendan. "But what about the inside? Can you tell who's there?"

"Not a thing," Skye said.

"What?!"

"All I see when I try to scan the plant is a black void."

"Great," said Brendan. "A police barrier."

"Yep; I knew there would be one. It's why I've been sticking to speaking aloud. I swear they're trying to make this harder on us."

If only this was the Johto police instead of Kanto's ... "Yeah, well, nothing like a bit of old-fashioned sleuthing once in a while. I guess we'd better not leave any stone unturned. Let's go."

Brendan's group proceeded to examine the perimeter of the building. On the north side, opposite the entrance, they found a black-ish mark on a utility pole close to the building, which led to the inside. Brendan mused the possibility of a stray Noctowl accidentally shorting the transformer; Skye found a bright-yellow feather, confirming the possibility that a bird at least came nearby, but it was definitely no Noctowl.

"So that leaves us with the possibility that the electrical surge was *accidental*?" said Brendan.

"I don't see what else it *could* mean," said Skye remorsefully. "We'll just have to hope ..."

"Lovely. Maybe it's time we went inside; we need to get details on how this all connects."

They made their way towards the plant's front entrance, but a guard stopped the trio cold.

"Sorry, bud," he said to Brendan. "No admittance for psychic Pokemon."

Skye nonchalantly flashed her detective's badge. "Even if they're Johto police?"

"W-What?" the guard said, wide-eyed. "Since when does a Pokemon carry a police badge? This is some kind of joke, right?"

Brendan shook his head. "Hardly, sir. Skye here was reinstated as a full-fledged, 'Top Percent' Goldenrod PD member a few months ago. You would do well to respect that."

"Or you'll have the entire department to answer to," Skye added, with a mischievous grin.

The guard hesitated for a moment, then lifted a walkie-talkie. "Chief, permission to admit a Johto detective and her associates?"

"Names?"

"Skye Namron," she said; and then, pointing, "Brendan Namron, Phoenix Namron."

"Ahh, the second name, I recognize. Prosecutor Oak informed me of your involvement with this case, Mr. Namron. You and your assistants may enter."

"Thank you, sir," said Brendan politely, and the group stepped inside.

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The inside of the plant was mostly operating like normal, but the police were scattered throughout the area in search of loosely-connected clues, and they were questioning the few employees that were free to talk, occasionally jotting down notes.

"Gaaaaahhh," growled Skye, who was holding both hands on her head. "This *thing* is giving me a headache."

Brendan supposed she was complaining about the police barrier. Was this a normal thing in Kanto, to put one up around crime scenes? He wondered if it was simply for the sake of security, or something else ...

"Want to get in the ball? It would bother you less there, don't you think?"

"No, thanks," replied Skye. "I came to help investigate, and I'm not going to let a stupid mental

wall stop me here. Besides," she grinned, "better to have four eyes than two on him."

"Would you quit teasing me already?" Phoenix chirped, from upon Brendan's shoulder. "Why the heck would I wander around *here* anyway? It doesn't have food."

Brendan was trying to ignore them before the bickering became worse. He was looking around for a place - or person - to start with. Someone like --

"Oh, hello there Silver!" said Skye. "What brings you here?"

Silver was talking to someone who Brendan thought might be the chief of police. He looked over at Skye when she called, then quickly told the chief something before strolling over casually, Feraligatr right behind him.

"Well, if it isn't the Namron trio," he said as he approached. "Got a case on your hands, huh?"

"Long time, Silver. That's exactly what we have, I'm afraid. My first big one since the day we met, from the looks of it."

Silver nodded knowingly. "It's been a while since then, hasn't it. I'm glad to see that things are going well. But how did you get wrapped up in a case outside your home region?"

"I could ask the same to you, actually," said Brendan. "But let's just say we made an ... interesting discovery on our first day of vacation,"

"Yeah, and I wish we hadn't," muttered Phoenix.

"Don't sound so glum over it, would you? It's distressing me, really." Skye turned to Silver. "We stumbled upon an electric Pokémon in a residential area - and he was hooked up to a house like a *generator*."

"And from the sound of what he told us, that's *exactly* what he's there for - and many of the neighbors are doing the same thing with their Pokémon."

"Right. And later, I found out about the KPP's ... problems, as of late. So we - or Brendan, at least, since he *erhem* insisted we stay behind - trekked here to get some answers."

Brendan eyed Skye for a moment before continuing. "But, of course, I met Blue as soon as I got here, and it's been all about the murder investigation ever since - although we assume that we'll find out enough about our original mystery in the process."

Silver appeared to be pondering the information he had just heard for a few seconds before speaking up. "You've put a lot on your plate, haven't you? A dark cloud looming over Kanto's biggest commodity, and the loss of the man in charge of managing it ... I wonder how closely the two are related."

"We wouldn't need to be waxing poetic if they'd remove this darned barrier," Skye muttered. "Have you collected any information of your own, Silver?"

"What, me? A common civilian on a crime scene, with information? ... Yes, actually - but not much."

"Then I'd like to start *our* investigation with yours, if you don't mind. We'll get to the police in a bit."

"Certainly," Silver said, nodding. "Let's see ... ah, let's start with the victim's office."

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The owner's office was fairly rough in appearance and tidiness. Papers about nothing in particular were skewed about a medium-sized wooden desk. A bookshelf, thinly lined with dusty tomes on financial advice, covered most of the far wall. A laptop (and a pretty recent model, noted Brandon) sat open on the edge of the desk, power light softly blinking.

"Nothing feels particularly off, Silver," Skye said. "What did you ... ?"

"I found a Pokéball in the desk's drawer. It seems to have been used, but ... there's nothing

inside."

"You found it?" Brendan said. "Don't tell me you tampered with the crime scene -"

"I did not," interjected Silver. "It was slightly open when I arrived."

"Fair enough," said Skye, as she crossed her arms. "Tell me: what do you think that Pokéball was there for?"

"I can only guess, Detective. If you want my wholly-unprofessional opinion, it means that Mr. Hills recently released a Pokémon. When that happened, though, is anyone's guess."

"Hardly," said Skye. "Pokéballs do keep a record of events on their storage chips. I believe they're only meant for tech support purposes, but ..."

Brendan gave a little nod. "We can jury-rig a transfer cable and take a look on someone's computer."

"And considering the circumstances, I think we should," said Skye. "I'd rather not leave an unturned stone here."

"Great," said Phoenix. "We'll be here all night."

Brendan set to work on preparing a connection to the Pokéball with a cable he found in the same drawer. He set up the other end to attach to his Pokégear, and within twenty minutes ...

"... there we go. I think I can read it. ... The log ends on October 16th."

Silver's eyes grew wide. "That's ... the day before the murder, isn't it? What does it say?"

"15:59:30 - 025 sent out from ball. 16:23:09 - 025 permanently released. 16:23:21 - Shutdown signal initiated."

"Oh-two-five?" Phoenix asked. "What does that tell --"

"Twenty-five is the National Pokédex number for Pikachu; ditto for the Kanto Regional 'Dex. I think we need to keep an eye open for one, don't you?"

Brendan nodded to Skye. "You think it was a witness to something important? Maybe an argument between Mr. Hills and the murderer?"

"Without a doubt," Skye replied with a nod. "The time frame certainly allows for it - nearly twenty-four minutes out of the ball before he or she was ... let go."

Silver pondered for a moment. "That would suggest that the victim suspected he was in danger, wouldn't it?"

"... an interesting thought," said Skye. "I wouldn't rule it out, but ..." She trailed off, not finishing the thought."

"But what, Skye?" Brendan asked.

"Well ... I paid the Saffron police station a quick visit yesterday, during your walk to here. They weren't the most cooperative bunch, but they did divulge to me that the KPP *and* all of its staff haven't called the cops all month - until right after the murder."

"What's that supposed to tell us?" Phoenix asked impatiently.

"It means," said Silver, "that if the victim really felt threatened on the day before the murder, he never called the police about it."

"He's a rich entrepreneur, isn't he?" chirped Phoenix. "I think I'd feel embarrassed if I was some high-class boss calling the cops."

"Besides that," said Brendan, "if we assume that he and whoever he may have argued with were in this office at the time, wouldn't an employee have seen or heard *something* and become suspicious?"

"Not with these walls, Brendan. Did you notice how thick they are?"

Brendan took a look at the office doorjamb. It was fairly thick-looking, and the steel door looked like it made a nice seal on the doorway when closed. Brendan noted as well that there weren't any windows into the office, despite its position as a protrusion from the building's main walls into the working area.

"For some reason," continued Skye, "this room appears to be nearly soundproof - and we can remove the "nearly" if we account for the sheer amount of noise that normally echoes through the building, what with all the machinery. Mr. Hills may have wanted this room to offer him some peace and quiet from that."

Phoenix looked downtrodden. "Well, what about my theory, then?"

"If my research is right, Mr. Hills wasn't the sort to get a big head. If he seriously thought he was in trouble, I think he would have called the police - unless, of course, he was threatened to do otherwise."

"Fine, whatever," grumbled Phoenix. "Can we just move on?"

"Yes, let's," said Silver. "I'm afraid I haven't seen any other potential clues in here, anyway."

"Then what about elsewhere?" asked Brendan.

"I think," said Skye, "that we should go ahead and get some leads from the police proper. You're a big help, Silver, but the team here has undoubtedly performed forensics on most of the evidence."

"I see," Silver said. "Do you mind if I tag along for a bit?"

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Brendan and company made their way to the lower level, where the body was found after the murder. Two investigators were talking to someone else when they arrived.

"Oh, hey!" said one of them. "If it isn't Ms. Skye Namron!"

Skye looked a bit bewildered. "Oh? Erm ... hello. Who ... are you, again?"

The investigator looked confused as well for a moment, before realizing something. "Oh, the security barrier, that's right! ... A-anyway, I'm Dee Bates, east Kanto CSI. I've heard a lot about you on the news lately; they say you're as top-notch as any old hand on the force!"

Skye appeared to consider this statement for a moment. "It's a job I love, ma'am. But it's great to hear that my work is respected even from afar. But I'm not here to talk about anything like that. I was going to ask about the investigation ... but now, I'd like to talk to *him*."

Skye pointed to the "someone else" among the investigators - a familiar-looking man with a scruffy beard, dressed in a black uniform.

"Oh, you mean Mister Russ?" asked Dee. "Suit yourself. Maybe you can get more out of him than my brother and I."

The man replied with an uneasy grin. Phoenix let out a quiet, uneasy squawk.

"Don't even think about reaching for a Pokéball this time," Skye said firmly to Russ. "Why are you here?"

Night Russ ... Brendan thought. The first criminal we ever brought down in court. I remember him well - he tried to sic two Pokémon on me from the witness stand, after we figured out his crime. Skye and Phoenix gave their all to protect me then, and he was later arrested for murder.

"It's called parole, kid, and it came with a string attached: manual labor. Not that you'd know how that is--"

"We're not starting any petty arguments," Skye interjected. "Nor am I believing any hogwash stories. Parole? Please. You were arrested in *Johto*. For *murder*, which guarantees life *at minimum*."

Dee hesitantly piped up. "Ms. Namron ... Mr. Russ was offered parole because of a shortage of workers at the plant; most of them were let go due to budget cuts. And since this plant also affects a few services in Johto - the Magnet Train, in particular - police were willing to reach an agreement if it meant a chance to keep this building afloat."

Skye was silent once more for a few seconds, giving Russ a cold stare the entire time, and crossed her arms. "Nnnngh. Fine, but I won't say I like it. Mr. Russ. We need you to tell us anything

you know that might have to do with the recent murder. Brendan is defending a client who we believe to be innocent in this case."

"... you mean Tyler? Lively fellow, if a bit shy around strangers. He barely hurts flies, much less people."

Brendan finally spoke up. "Do you believe his hands are clean, then?"

"More or less. Couldn't tell you who *did* do it, though. Most of the paid employees are clean as whistles, I'd say."

"Regardless," said Skye, "someone here is likely a murder. If you can't help us pin down a suspect, I'll be inclined to suspect *you*. Be thorough and honest."

Russ's expression seemed sincere. "I gotcha. I'll spill everything I know."

"Then let me start with this:" said Brendan. "Do you know anything about what happened in the victim's office on October 16th?"

"Not much, I'm afraid. All I know for sure is that only the boss and his Pikachu went inside around 4 P.M.; and that they left the office at about 4:30."

"Nobody else entered or exited all day?"

"Nobody that I know of, I swear. That office actually stays locked most of the time, but as far as I know, nobody has actually used the key to it since the murder."

"That would mean," said Skye, "that the office has been unlocked since then. Hmmmm."

"It probably just means that he forgot to lock it the night before," said Russ. "He was a little stressed, I hear, over the last few weeks."

"Over the cancer, no doubt," said Silver. "That, or the implications - what he'd leave behind, for his family and his customers."

"That's still not much to go on ..." murmured Brendan. "You haven't seen *anything* else? Maybe some sign of a worker sneaking about? Or what happened to his Pikachu?"

Russ simply pointed to a cramped spot behind Brendan. The group turned to look -

"Agk, no Rus-- Ahm, er, hey there! Can I, ah, help you? ..."

The Pikachu, small, yellow, and mouse-like, was hunched low against the base of the walls, and looked a lot like he was trying to make a stealthy escape.

"Please, do," said Brendan. "We're trying to get to the bottom of this case, and if anyone would be a big help, I think it's you."

"I really don't think --"

"Of course you'll help, eh, Sparks?" Russ said, a bit loudly. "Sparky there would definitely know about the day before, if not the day of, the murder. He's your man. Or Pokéman."

Sparky looked clearly distraught. "Eheh. Yup. I'm your man, but ... can we talk it over tomorrow? In court?"

"Why not now?" Brendan asked.

"It- I just can't now. I promise. I'll tell you. Now please just --"

"Miss Bates," said Silver. "Please make sure this Pikachu keeps his promise. Have him brought in for questioning."

"I will, sir. Sparky? I'm sorry, but if you please ..."

Sparky somehow lowered his posture to the point of dragging his chin across the floor. "Fine. Anywhere but here's good. Just make sure your translator works ..."

"Brendan. I will have a talk with Blue and ensure that this Pikachu is treated gently. I think your investigation won't get much further until tomorrow."

"What makes you so sure?" Skye asked. "We still have a lot of ground to cover."

Silver was silent for a moment, and he looked away from the group. "I'm afraid that this is a dead end for you, whether it looks that way or not. The truth ... lies entirely in what this Pikachu

knows. I'm sure of that."

"But--"

"I believe you three have everything you need. Don't tire yourselves out."

Brendan sighed. "You sound just like Blue, Silver. Don't tell me you're on his side?"

"I'm on the side of what's right, Brendan. You just haven't seen it yet."

Brendan stared at Silver, silently.

"But," Silver continued, "if you want the truth ... I need you to show me. Show me with all your might that you're not going to let any setback get you down. If you can do that ... you'll get the truth you're looking for, very soon."

Brendan opened his mouth to speak, but the words wouldn't come out. There were too many options; his brain couldn't pick a sentence to start with fast enough.

"Mr. Russ. You should be in court tomorrow as well. Don't be late - in fact, Ms. Bates, please have the precinct *ensure* that he isn't late."

"... I don't know what all the melodrama's about, but I certainly will, sir," said Dee, somewhat cheerfully, as Russ gave her and Silver a concerned look.

"Thank you. Brendan, Skye, Phoenix - best of luck in court tomorrow."

(Δ)

"The more time I spend around those barriers, the more I hate them."

"I think it's a bit of a relief, personally," said Phoenix. "It's like having mental peace and quiet, unlike now."

"Hey, I'm just checking your hunger level so that we can plan better for dinner. And I'm starting to get used to talking aloud, so you can complain less about my usual method."

"Until my Pokégear's battery drains, at least," quipped Brendan.

"Don't they sell a model that supports inductive charging now? You'd effectively have infinite battery life with me around."

"I'll consider it if Mr. Shames actually pays us - and speaking of him, we're going for a quick talk, for the one who was wondering."

"We are?" Phoenix asked. "I thought for sure we were on our way to dinner ..."

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"Evening, Mr. Shames. How are things?"

"Not so good, Mr. Namron. I haven't come up with a single answer to the questions you raised in the trial today ... Please tell me that you've figured out who did it."

"I'm afraid we still don't know-" Dan's expression went from sullen to downtrodden - "but I'm pretty sure *someone* in the force has an idea by now. In any case, I have a few leads as well, and I was hoping you could answer ..."

Dan simply nodded unenthusiastically. Brendan tried to not let it bother him.

"First, on the day before the murder ... did you happen to notice anything unusual around the victim's office?"

"I'm afraid not," said Dan. "Mr. Hills came by for a little while, and he went into the office with his Pikachu in the afternoon. I heard they left not long afterwards, but I didn't see them myself."

"Fair enough," said Brendan. "Another question: does the name 'Night Russ' ring any bells?"

Dan suddenly looked alight. "Like Big Ben on the hour. That fellow can't be trusted, let me tell you. He always looks like he's up to something, although I've never actually caught him in any act."

Although ..." He paused, as if considering a memory.

"... hmm, I didn't notice that. Brendan," Skye said. "There was apparently a trap door of some sort down where the body was. Close to a corner, somewhat out of sight due to the machinery."

"Yup," said Dan, unfazed by Skye's mind reading. "And I thought I saw Russ hanging around that door a little too frequently. I never went through it myself, but I heard that it leads to old catacombs, underground wiring access, and such. I mean, none of the "real" employees ever go down there, so why a convict? And he's barely supervised inside - policy says we can't have too many people close together, as things get a little difficult otherwise. We just have guards at the front doors and the emergency exit - the only ways out."

"... I think," said Brendan, "that something like that is **exactly** what we needed. The plant's closed to the public and police, so we can't go back and check it out ... but maybe, just maybe, this'll be enough to turn the tides in our favor tomorrow."

"Just 'in our favor'?" asked Phoenix. "Can't we *finish* this tomorrow? This case has gone on entirely too long already ..."

"In due time, Phoenix," Skye said. "We're looking for the truth - the whole truth. We need to be sure we're not making any mistakes with this."

"... thank you, Mr. Namron," said Dan. "I'm confident that you'll get it right."

Brendan's mind was racing. Silver definitely knew more than he was letting on. So why wouldn't he just come out and tell them what he knew? Just how much could they expect to happen in tomorrow's trial? What did he mean, exactly, by what he said about "showing him" how diligently he would pursue the truth ...?

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"Only one thing is certain," Brendan said to his friends as they tucked in for the night. "Tomorrow's trial will be our most interesting one yet."

October 20, 2017, 4:09 AM
Shades of Vermillion, Room 7

(Fwip!)

Brendan woke up, feeling groggy. He heard soft footsteps and assumed that Phoenix was up for a midnight snack, then rolled over and adjusted his covers.

Tk tik tk tk tik.

Huh. That didn't exactly sound like the kid's beak pecking at a cookie. It was the clicking of a keyboard, wasn't it ... ?

"I knew it." A whisper. Skye's voice, unmistakably, translated by his Pokegear. Which sounded much further away than it was supposed to --

Great timing, Brendan. C'mere, check this out.

Brendan didn't really want to. He was happy with snoozing in his comfortable hotel bed for a change --

I'm serious - this is big. It has to do with the case.

Couldn't it wait until their pretrial discussion? It wasn't like there was anything new to --

Feh, whatever, lazybones. What if I told you that the power's out?

What would that have to do with anything? Their alarm clocks were battery powered, and ... nope, he had no ideas.

... really, Brendan? C'mon, you're the lawyer here, put two-and-two together. It means that the police barrier at the crime scene isn't working. I just got back from it - and what I found changes a LOT about this case.

Brendan racked his brain. What else might Skye have -- the trap door.

Exactly. There's old catacombs down there, all right, but there's a hidden part of the building as well. The catacombs are the only way in, from the looks of it; the door is sealed tightly, too. But what's interesting about it is what's inside: two men, likely criminals; an Abra, who was reluctant to speak with me; and an army of Voltorb and Pikachu.

That got Brendan's attention. "An army?" he asked aloud. "Like a milit--"

I meant it as a metaphor. There are a lot, that's all. And they were all attached to wires that led directly up to the main building.

"Don't tell me ..."

Yep. They're delivering electricity to the plant. When I was there, it looked like they were charging a device hidden in that old generator.

As if on cue, a night light near the bed suddenly switched on.

Seems like they finished, Skye said. Brendan could see that she was sitting by the coffee table, likely using his laptop for notes or research. The Pokegear was attached to it with a USB cable.

"Finished ...?" Brendan wondered, clueless.

The device they're charging ... is likely a battery of some sort. Whether it's a backup for the main power source or a ... substitute for some other equipment, I can't say for sure.

"Had trouble figuring out the machinery?"

M-maybe. There was so much to analyze, and I assumed that I didn't have much time. ... In any case, I think I found it.

Brendan was clueless once more. "It?"

All those Pokemon we saw, attached to those houses in Vermillion. ... I think ... that they weren't converted into slaves due to the power crisis. They were probably sold - from the poor group in the Power Plant!

"WHAT?!" Phoenix's voice suddenly sirened out from the Pokegear's speaker, crackling a little; from the foot of Brendan's bed came an equally loud squawk. "Those no-good Pidove-liver'd jackals! I'll roast their hands off if I have to! Let me at--"

Brendan sat up and pinched Phoenix's beak.

Thank you.

"I appreciate the fighting spirit, Phoenix, but not so loud, okay? How much did you hear, anyway?"

The whole thing, Skye said flatly. *Although pretending to be asleep was a bit pointless, you realize.*

Phoenix let out muffled squawks. "Nevermind that. Who's responsible? Who *did* this, and why?!"

... I didn't want to scan the minds of those men. Just their appearance, from what I saw, was ... ough. But they were dressed in all-black uniforms, same as Night Russ ... and the real plant workers wore dark-blue jumpsuits ... She turned the laptop to give the boys a full view of the screen. *And then there's this.*

Brendan squinted at the bright screen. "... an web page for ordering electric Pokemon?"

Laced with some interesting hints, no less. Their payment system seems to route through an underground network, the page itself is tricky to find without knowing about them beforehand, and they promise "swift delivery by Abra". They claim to have sold thousands to the Kanto region ...

"That's just messed up!" chirped Phoenix. "That's all the evidence we need to send in the police

right now, isn't it?! Or should we just go in and seize the place ourselves?"

"It's four in the morning, Phoenix. And we don't even know how large the operation really is - if we act before we know everything about the swindlers, whoever they are, we could botch a good chance to stop them."

"Then what about Mr. Russ?" asked Phoenix. "He's *got* to be involved, what with wearing a similar uniform and being an ex-Rocket --"

The night light shut off, throwing the room into darkness once more. Skye sighed, and closed the laptop. *He'll be in tomorrow's trial; that will be our first chance to pry the answer out of him. For now, Phoenix ... let's get some sleep.*

To be continued ...