

Escaping the Lumiose Labyrinth: Ivy meets Black Jacques

Snaking shadows danced across white marble walls as long strands of mint green ivy hanging from wrought iron balconies gently swayed in the breeze. The gale carried with it the distant ringing of windchimes and the honey-sweet aroma of warm bread. Lithe-bodied Vivillon clung to the surrounding buildings and slowly fanned their large green wings while they basked in the golden rays of light that pierced through the leafy branches of a nearby birch tree. A Fletchinder perched atop the blue tiles overhead and focused a beady eye on a pink-haired beauty wandering by. It was a beautiful April day in Lumiose City, and Ivy was enjoying the warm spring weather to its fullest. All around her, time meandered at a quiet pace.

There's something magical about the dazzling heart of the Kalos Region— whether it's your first time visiting the city or your twenty-first time, its long boulevards and historic buildings always find a way to feel brand new.

Unfortunately, Ivy was hopelessly lost with no idea where to go. She usually has no issues navigating the twists and turns of the cities back in her home region of Unova, but it seems that Kalosian city planning has gotten the best of her.

The tall crown of Prism Tower looming over the surrounding cityscape seemingly taunted her, always in sight but forever out of reach. Even if she were to try to walk directly towards it, there'd be no guarantee the road wouldn't suddenly veer off in another direction, corralling her into another winding alleyway to pull her deeper into the urban labyrinth as it has done to others so many times before.

A large flyer for Quasartico Incorporated caught Ivy's eye. Its bright blue star-like logo sailed on the wind, distracting her for just a moment as it continued on its journey. Suddenly, a Gogoat dashed through the crossroads ahead of her in an eyeblink.

"Ah-! Wait, excuse me!" she called out.

But it was too late. The Gogoat ferried its passenger out of sight before she could get their attention.

"So that's how it's gonna be?" Ivy huffed to herself.

With no other leads to pursue, she followed after the Mount Pokémon in hopes for the best. The trotting of cloven hooves against stone waxed and waned as she attempted to match the creature's pace and trace its steps through the maze. The trail went cold as she turned down a narrow street, the sound of Gogoat's footfalls fading into silence.

"Ah dammit... I'm so out of my element here." She whined, catching her breath. "I wonder if that thing was faster than Chansey..." Ivy shook her head and slapped her cheeks.

The idea of losing a race to Chansey gave her the second wind she needed to continue and persevere through this maze. She's not one to give up so easily.

And so she went. Under a vine-covered trellis, past rows of carefully-sculpted plane trees, and up to the raised edge of a shallow canal where tiny Surskit skated over the small blue waves rolling on the water's surface, Ivy found herself following the canal's length until it passed into a low tunnel beneath a building and out of sight.

A lanky man with his arms crossed over his chest leaned on one foot against the side of a nearby building. Behind him was a large sign advertising the Lumiose Reconstruction Project along with a map detailing future expansions to the sprawling city. A Venonat slept on the ground next to him, its fluffy purple body shrinking and expanding as it breathed deeply. From beneath the beak of the man's dark hoodie, Ivy could make out a scruffy face and tired eyes. The corners of his mouth curled upward in a slight smirk as his narrow pupils took notice of her.

He was impressively tall, though not by much compared to Ivy's above average height. Although, even if Ivy were wearing the heels she usually does, he would still have some inches over her.

The man waved lazily with a gloved hand. "Ah, 'allo, leetle chum!" His voice was a scratchy baritone, and his words were drenched in a thick Kalosian accent. "I 'ave not seen you around bee-fore. You must be new 'ere, non?"

Ivy was relieved to have finally found another person who could give her directions. His deep voice and cheesy accent tickled her slightly.

"Oh, thank goodness. Hi there! Yes, very new here and very lost." she laughed .

The man chuckled through his pursed lips. "I 'ave an eye for zis beez-i-ness, y'know. Not many people would zink to go swimming down zere."

The man pushed away from the wall to take a step forward. "Not unless you can turn into an eety-beety Finneon." With a hand over his heart, he gestured to the sleeping Venonat. "But! I am a good neighbor, and my leetle buddy here loves helping people. We can guide you back to ze main streets. Taxis, Gogoat, wherever you want to go! I do zis out of ze, 'ow you say, ze kindness of my heart!"

He extended his hand out towards Ivy. The man smelled like he was carrying an ashtray in his back pocket. "What do you say, my leetle chum? I shall be your tour guide for ze day!"

Ivy blushed slightly, clearly getting swept up in his flowery language. She cupped her face with one hand as she looked downward and sheepishly placed her hand in his. "That would be nice." She smiled.

"A very good decision," the man grinned. "Yes, very good, you will see. My friends, zey call me Black Jacques," here he really rolled the J for emphasis, Zzzzha-, Jqcques.

With a sharp whistle, Venonat leapt to its feet and shook itself awake. "And zis is my buddy, Venonat." The Insect Pokémon wiggled its long antennae towards Ivy and bounced on the tips of its feet.

Black Jacques thumbed his pockets. With a raised eyebrow, he patiently waited for Ivy to introduce herself as she stood there taking in the man's gruff features.

"Oh-! I'm Ivy, nice to meet you two!" She crouched down to Venonat's level. "I haven't seen one of you furballs since back in my college days." She smiled at it.

At its Trainer's command, Venonat raised its antennae high into the air and began hopping down the road. Ivy and Black Jacques followed after it at a comfortable pace. As they navigated through the city, Black Jacques began to probe Ivy with questions.

"So what brings a beautiful lady such as yourself to ze city today? Seeing ze sights? You are a Trainer, non? Are you on your way to challenge ze Gym Leader? What about ze Battle Institute? Tell me! Beneath zis hood, I am all ears."

"There's a Battle Institute here?" Ivy almost jumped with joy. "That sounds like so much fun! I wonder how different it is from the one back home. I bet there's a bunch of strong Trainers and their Pokémon there, right? Oh, but I'm actually here to find a new way to become stronger with my Pokémon..." she raised her finger to her lips and looked up to exaggerate her thinking process, "but I'm sure my team and I wouldn't mind raising some hell over there." She giggled.

Black Jacques sucked air through his teeth. "You won't find fiercer battles anywhere else in ze city. I do not bother with zat place, ze, uh, atmosphere, it just doesn't agree with me. Your best is never good enough for ze judges and slackers like me weren't meant to zink, really. Ah! But don't let that discourage you! I'm sure you will do just fine, leetle chum! You must be part of ze big leagues if you intend to go zere. How lucky for me to be friends with a big shot." He grinned widely. "Yes, how very... very lucky. You must have ze million-dollar strategy, non?"

"Oh Jacques!" Ivy, letting all the complements get to her head, punched Jacques in the arm. He grunted, surprised at the strength behind the hit. "You're too kind!" She laughed, her face flushed. "My Pokémon and I like to go all out in battle, it's not really a strategy per se, but it's how we like to do things."

Jacques rubbed his stinging arm and laughed awkwardly. "Is zat so?"

"I guess I might not look it since I'm technically off duty, but I'm actually a Pokémon Nurse." She pointed to the red cross on her jacket. "You don't have to worry about holding back when I'm around." She put a hand over her chest and smiled proudly. "What about you

Jacques?” Ivy batted her eyelashes at him and lowered her voice. In a hushed and almost sultry tone, almost as if she were asking a question one would only dare to ask a lover, she continued, “Do you like to battle?”

“Ah, me? I am just a simple jardinier. I water ze feesh and feed ze plants,” he waved her off dismissively, “I’m nobody, really. My buddy Venonat? Far too sensitive for me to be a proper Trainer, no. Oh, how poor little Venonat hates getting in fights. We are not so different, my Pokémon and I. I like to keep things friendly, always.”

Ivy quickly deflated at his answer. “Oh.” she said flatly.

Soon after, the trio found themselves passing by a small park. As they walked under the shade of a pear tree, a small Swirlx tumbled out of the branches with a bronze skinned fruit in its mouth and scampered away on its stubby hindlegs. Three more Swirlx pursued the first, their lightweight cottony bodies gliding through the air on a stiff breeze.

“Ah, so cute!” Ivy exclaimed at the sight of them.

Jacques watched them with a sly smirk. “Some Pokémon have big eyes and small stomachs,” he said, “and zen we have zese leetle creatures who have big stomachs and tiny brains! Zat is why I like my dear Venonat—big eyes, big brain, tiny stomach!”

He turned to face Ivy. “Tell me, of all your Pokémon, which one do you like ze most? I do not mean which one runs ze fastest or punches hardest, no! Which one really speaks to you?”

“Hmm, I don’t know. I like all my Pokémon.”

“Ahh come on, I am sure zere is one you like a leetle bit more zen ze rest?”

After a moment of thinking she decided. “My Chansey and I have been through a lot together.” Ivy considered sending Chansey out of her Pokéball to introduce her to Jacques and Venonant, but she didn’t want to risk Chansey’s competitive nature ruining the mood.

Jacques smiled. “Ahh, Chansey. Y’know, I am somezing of a traveler myself. Tell me more about zis Chansey of yours. Zat is not a Pokémon native to Kalos so I am curious to know more. If I am remembering correctly, Chansey can be found in a few different regions. You encountered zis Pokémon of yours back in your home region, non?”

Ivy shook her head. “I actually first met Chansey when I was studying abroad in the Kanto region. I’m originally from Unova, you see.”

“Ah yes, studying to be a nurse, non?”

"Mhm," she nodded, "she was a bit of a trouble maker, unlike all the other Chansey at the university. Then again, I guess so was I. I don't know if she was assigned to me for that reason, or maybe it was fate, but it's probably one of the best things that's ever happened to me." Ivy smiled and gripped the Heal Ball at her side.

"Please, tell me more." Jacques pried.

"Well, there's this event called Assignment Day in nursing school. It's where all the nurses get paired up with a partner Pokémon that they'll be working with during their time as a nurse. Think of it like a required textbook for a class, except you use it for every class and it sticks around with you well after graduation." Ivy chuckled. "So we all get our Chanseys and..."

Ivy prattled on telling Jacques all about her time at the Saffron University and the story of how she got her first Pokémon. She told him about how Chansey and her would often fail their lab practicals due to some sort of fight breaking out between the two of them, how the two of them were always butting heads (although this hasn't changed much), and how they grew closer when Ivy brought Chansey to the dojo she frequented. She even told him about the time when the University asked Ivy to surrender her Chansey back to them upon her flunking out, but Chansey refused to leave Ivy's side.

Ivy has a tendency to not shut up at times, but Jacques seemed more than happy to let her keep going on and on.

Before they knew it, they found themselves walking down a wide street lined with ornate black lampposts. On each tall lamp, two wrought iron bars curl outward in the shape of a fleur-de-lis. High above them, dozens of Starly loudly chirped among themselves atop a crisscrossing net of string lights stretching over the street. One of the Starly descended from the hanging lights and perched on the pointed tip of a lamppost cover to get a closer look at the trio as they walked by. After a few moments, the lamp's fleur-de-lis decorations suddenly sprung upward, pinning the Starly in place. The rest of the Starly flock scattered into the air as the lamp flared to life with a dim purple flame. The disguised Lampent opened its beady yellow eyes, preparing to burn the life out of its captured prey.

The captured Starly squawked out in pain as the Lampent tightened its grip around it. Its cries for help caught Ivy's attention and she immediately sprung into action.

"Ugh, a ghost type..." she muttered to herself. Jacques smirked at her remark. "C'mon out, Plusle!" with a toss of one of the Heal Balls attached to her belt, a small yellow and red electric rodent materialized in front of her. Jacques simply looked on and smiled at the appearance of the small Pokémon, he deemed it was rather weak looking.

"You are going to help out?"

"Of course I am! I have a surefire method for dealing with tricky ghost types like this." She smiled at Jacques and gave him a thumbs up.

"Oh?"

"Plusle!" She grabbed Plusle's small body with one hand. A look of worry immediately washed over his face as Ivy gripped him tightly. She raised her left leg up, bringing her knee up to her chest as she balanced on her right leg. She took a big step forward with her left leg and, with all her might, chucked Plusle directly at the antagonizing Lampent. "USE NUZZLE!" she yelled as she threw her Pokémon like a baseball.

Plusle shot through the air like a bullet, screaming all the while. It was a wonder that he managed to store up any electricity at all during the process. He collided head first into the opposing Lamp Pokémon, knocking it off the tall lamppost and allowing the Starly to break free and fly away. Electricity exploded from Plusle's body as it smashed into Lampent and the two of them fell to the ground below.

"Be free!" Ivy called out to the fleeing Starly as she rushed in to catch her now fainted Pokémon out of the sky. Plusle landed softly in Ivy's embrace as the paralyzed Lampent hit the ground with a hard clang. "Good job buddy." she spoke softly as she got to work reviving and healing her Pokémon.

Jacques, who refused to intervene, looked on with a dumbfounded expression. If he wasn't sure before, he now knew Ivy definitely had a screw or two loose.

After treating her Pokémon and returning it to its ball, Ivy turned her attention to the motionless Lampent. She pulled out a Paralyze Heal from her bag and a few potions. "It's ok to fight, but try not to pick on those weaker than you." She scolded as she nursed the Lamp Pokémon back to health, allowing it to regain its strength and perch itself back atop the lamp post.

Jacques tugged at the loose collar of his undershirt and cleared his throat. "Ze world, she is so vast," he said, "she can be so dangerous. Maybe you have an air of danger too, says I. You must be getting into trouble all ze time, non?"

Ivy smiled sadly, the memory of the day she lost her job crossed her mind. "You could say that. I guess I attract trouble," she giggled, "but trouble attracts stronger opponents, so I don't mind it."

"You have a beautiful laugh, my leetle chum. Please, tell me more." he pressed on.

"Jacques!" Ivy squealed as she hit him in the arm again. Ivy explained to him how she ended up losing her job at the Blueberry Academy which left Jacques looking and feeling quite

unsettled. However, her story was interrupted as they passed by a street performer sitting on an overturned fruit crate in front of an apartment building's oak door entrance.

While the old grey haired musician played "Dors, Mon Amour" on his bulky accordion, a pair of Spinda danced an unsteady waltz together in the road, stumbling up and down the boulevard as they held each other's paws. Despite her efforts, the swaying dance partners stumbled towards Ivy and tripped on a discarded potion bottle. The two Pokémon flailed wildly before grabbing onto her legs for balance. After finding their footing (to the best of their unflattering ability), the Spinda extended their paws towards Ivy and looked up at her expectantly.

Ivy smiled warmly at the pair of dancers and politely declined their offer by pulling out a Persim berry from her bag and handing it to them.

"I love your dancing, but just make sure to look at where you're going."

One of the Spinda held the berry in its mouth as if it were a rose and whisked its partner away in a sloppy tango.

Jacques watched their performance for a while longer and sighed as the wobbly Pokémon careened into the side of a parked motor scooter, sending it crashing to the pavement. Ivy winced at the sight of it, but laughed when the two picked themselves up and continued on their dizzy way. "It reminds me of ze simple joys of love," he said, "do you still remember your first love? Zose new and exciting feelings? Zere is no shame in confessing to your good friend, Black Jacques. We have all loved and lost before, non?"

Ivy blushed again, the thought of a certain muscular beast of a man crossed her mind. "Wh-what are you talking about?"

Unconvinced by Ivy's thinly veiled attempt to play coy, Jacques asked, "Oh come on, you must know what I am talking about, non? Do you zink it is still possible to love like zat again?"

"I'd like to think so." She admitted, looking away in embarrassment. She turned to look at him with uncharacteristically large puppy-dog eyes. She pouted slightly, her expression full of yearning. It was a side of Ivy he had not yet seen, a side she was probably unaware of herself. "What about you, Jacques?" she asked as a warm spring breeze swept between them.

The shady man felt a pang in his chest. Were it not for his deep hood, Ivy might've caught a glimpse of his face turning flush. He coughed to snap himself out of it and turned away with an awkward laugh. "Ah, yes, I zink so too."

The roads and thoroughfares began to bleed together as the sun started to set below the urban horizon. Ivy wasn't sure of where they were or where they've been or if any of the posters and signs advertising Quasartico Incorporated were ones that she's already seen before.

"It's getting kind of late isn't it?" She commented as she looked overhead at the blushing sky.

"Do not worry, leetle chum," Jacques says, "we're almost there now." But it was almost hard to remember what "there" even meant at that point.

"Thanks Jacques, I can't imagine how much longer it would've taken me to navigate my way through this city without your help. And it's been nice talking to you too."

Jacque grinned widely and waved her gratitude away. "No zanks is necessary, I am sure you would have done the very same zing if you were in my shoes."

Finally, the two stumbled back into the familiar sights and sounds of the bustling North Boulevard. Taxis lined the road's curbs, Gogoats rested on its sidewalks, and scattered groups of tourists gathered outside of the Lumiose Art Museum and around the lavish hotels. The familiar red roof of the Pokémon Center taunted Ivy. She hated to admit that she was a bit relieved to see it, and the thought of that made her angry. "Stupid Nurse Joys. Doesn't matter what region you go to, they're all the same." she grumbled to herself.

Whether he had come to see her as a genuine companion or was intimidated by her brutish behavior, Black Jacques slinked back into the alleyways, disappearing from sight.

"Ah- thank you Jacques!" Ivy called out to him, not realizing he had already left. The last she saw of the strange Kalosian man was watching him wave goodbye over his shoulder with his back turned to her, his Venonant hopping alongside him.

"Good luck, leetle buddy!"

Ivy stood there waving back at him. 'Kalosian men are so kind.' she thought to herself .