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Opened Case

October 18, 2017, 3:43 PM
Kanto Power Plant – Generator Room

The main work area was huge, and clean. To Brendan, it looked a little more like some generic futuristic factory than a power plant. There was a recessed area, which bottomed out about fifteen feet below the ground floor; it contained the largest parts of the machinery – as well as a marked outline of someone's dead body.

“Blue?” Brendan said, still following Blue inside. “Question.”

“Shoot.”

“I came here under the presumption that there were problems with the power plant's service and its customer relations. I was *not* aware that there was a murder here.”

“That's not a question.”

“This is: What the heck's going on at this place?”

Blue stopped walking and turned around. He gave Brendan a little grin. “Heh,” he said, “I guess news doesn't travel as fast as it used to around here. Since I'm here, I'll fill you in on everything I know – just this once.”

Brendan nodded in acceptance. “Who was murdered?”

“The 'Manager', as they call him. Roland Hills, the former owner of this power plant, was killed by being pushed into that machinery well during a blackout, at around 11:38 PM last night. He apparently landed headfirst, and broke his neck. It killed him instantly.”

“Were there any witnesses?”

“Three,” Blue said flatly, “although one of them has been taken to the detention center as a suspect. Dan Shames is that one; the others were Tyler Noll and Anthony Hills.

“Did the victim have any fingerprints or markings on him?”

“No fingerprints, I'm afraid. Dan's hands were gloved and a little greasy from helping Tyler fix some of that machinery, according to witnesses. But the case against Dan goes a lot further than missing fingerprints.”

“How so?” Brendan asked curiously.

“There was an electrical burn mark on the back of the victim's clothing – and a search revealed that Dan was carrying a stun gun on the night of the crime. Witnesses also reported a visible spark just before the victim's fall to his death.”

“Oh boy. ... Just one more thing, Blue, and I think I'll be done. Why was there a blackout?”

“Investigators are still looking in to that. The cause is currently thought to be an electrical surge, but the reason is unknown.”

Brendan gave a quick nod. “I see. ... Thank you, Blue,” he said, turning to walk away.

“Where are you off to?”

“The detention center in Lavender. I'm going to question Dan.”

“One thing before you leave, then.”

Brendan whirled back around to hear Blue's message.

“I've already assigned myself as prosecutor against the suspect for this case. But something tells me it's not an open-and-shut one. ... I trust that you'll do what you think is right.”

Brendan gave Blue a quizzical look, but he decided there was no need to ask. He nodded once more, and turned to leave as Blue gave his usual parting phrase. “Smell ya later, sonny!”

“Dan Shames, I presume?”

The suspect Brendan was addressing was sitting rather dejectedly in his chair on the other side of the protective glass. Brendan thought that he looked like a trainer who'd just gotten their butt badly kicked in a gym battle.

“That – that's me,” Dan said meekly. “Can I help you in some way, sir?”

“I think you can,” said Brendan, with a neutral expression. “I'd like to ask you some questions about the power plant.”

“You and seemingly half of the region, sir. I feel like I've talked about that too much today.”

“I'd like you to talk just one more time, Mr. Shames. Please.”

Dan said nothing, but he made no obvious gesture of refusal. Brendan flipped open a notepad he was carrying.

“What can you tell me about the power plant, Mr. Shames?”

“Please, sir. 'Dan' is fine. The power plant ... has seen better fiscal years. If you weren't aware, the plant has been losing customers by the truckload over the last several months. Some of them have turned to generators, but I hear others have resorted to ... less legal solutions.”

“I was aware, actually. Found out the hard way yesterday evening. I'm guessing that this situation has caused a lot of tension among customers and coworkers alike.”

“... Yes, it has, sir. Several employees were laid off due to the necessary budget cuts. A number of them still haven't found work.”

Brendan didn't like where this was headed. He decided to shift gears. “... Tell you what. If I may address my final point, I'll wrap this up quickly.” He waited for a response; he got a small nod. “Did you, at any point in time, want to kill the owner of the power plant?”

Dan became wide-eyed for a second. “W- Well, I've thought about it ... What would happen if he passed away. We all feel like he lost his touch for running a utility business a long time ago. B- But none of us wanted to outright *murder* him! We'd sooner see him pass away naturally after saying his goodbyes to his family! That's the way it should be for anyone. ...”

Brendan's mind briefly flashed back to the murder case from six months ago. His mother didn't get that kind of chance, either ...

He wanted to put it behind him. He tried to cherish the memories he had, and let go of the events he wished had never happened. But no matter what he did, it seemed impossible to truly let it go

...

But what of Dan? Was the man sincere in what he said, or was he trying to put on a front?

He's not lying.

Voice? Brendan said in his head. *Is that you again?*

“Voice”? *Who is this “voice”?* *It's me, Skye!*

Sky- *I thought I told you to go have fun today. Leave this to me.*

And I thought I told you to get on Ptalk at 5 sharp. You haven't, so here I am, just outside the visitor center.

Give me a break, Skye ... How do you know he's not lying, anyway? Isn't there supposed to be an Arena Trap set up to guard against this kind of thing from rogues?

There's supposed to be one. I guess it malfunctioned today.

Dan was staring quizzically at Brendan's distantly-focused expression. “Sir? You okay?”

All right, fine. You can help. But you're only defeating the purpose of coming on this vacation.

A vacation is meant to be fun and relaxing, right? Well, I find this fun! And if it were me, I'd

take his case, considering this is a pretty solid ticket toward getting to the bottom of two mysteries!

“Sir? Hello?”

“What? Oh, sorry,” Brendan said, with a nervous grin. “I was ... just thinking things over. Here,” he said, pulling out his attorney's badge from a pocket.

“Y- you're a lawyer, sir?”

“I sure am, Dan. Brendan Namron, at your service. I'm still fairly new to the field, but I haven't lost a case yet.”

“... it's tomorrow, sir.”

“What?”

“My trial. Over the charge of murder. And to tell the truth, I'm scared. I'm scared they'll convict me of something I didn't do and take me from my family forever, while whoever did this goes scot-free. P-Please, sir. Help me.”

So that's what he was getting at a minute ago ... “I'll do everything I can, Dan. We'll uncover the truth in no time.” ... I hope.

Everyone has departed from the power plant, save a few guards. I doubt we'll be getting in any more investigation tonight.

“I don't think we'll need it. Not yet. Blue's probably got enough witnesses to reveal most of the things we didn't cover.”

Brendan and Skye were walking toward the west exit of Lavender Town, enjoying the sunset view.

Speaking of Blue, Skye said, a little sternly, did it not occur to you at all that he's acting weird?! This is either an alien clone of Blue, or something really fishy is up. Take your pick.

“We haven't seen the guy in almost half a year, Skye, and he was already acting a little differently toward the end of your trial. Maybe the whole thing sobered him up.”

Or maybe that's what he wants you to think. I don't trust him yet, either way.

“You'd have me trust a murder suspect, but not the prosecutor that will be acting against him?”

Well, for one thing, he's practically never around when I'm actually able to read his mind. That's already suspicious, if you ask me. And the one time I could, most of his mind seemed blocked off, as though he's trained himself in mental defenses.

“... That is pretty strange,” Brendan said. “But is there really any use in worrying about it right now? If he wants to be friendly, I'm not about to do anything to antagonize him and make things harder for us.”

Alright, alright. I'll lay off. But don't expect me to act all buddy-buddy with him the way you're doing.

“I'm not making friends with him *that* easily, Skye.”

October 19, 2017, 9:07 AM
Saffron City District Court – 3rd Floor Lobby

The morning of the trial had almost snuck up on Brendan. Almost – Phoenix managed to interrupt another strange dream, involving a looming Judge with a singsong sort of voice. Brendan assumed that either he was going crazy, or that Skye had accidentally inhaled one of the good drugs during an investigation and somehow still had traces. He considered both plausible.

Hastily, he gathered the notes he had fallen asleep on, threw on his suit, and had Skye teleport the group to the front of the courthouse in Saffron City – the closest courthouse to the crime scene. In the lobby, he found his client waiting with a police escort, who gave Brendan a greeting, verified his

identity, and left.

“Well, um ... how do you do this morning, Mr. Shames?”

Dan didn't look terribly enthusiastic. “Not looking forward to it, Mr. Namron. The prosecutor came in a little while ago, looking ... proud, somehow. Made me think that he believes he has this case in the bag.”

“Blue?” Skye asked. “Proud? I'd wager it was more along the lines of ... smugness. That suits him better, wouldn't you say?”

Interesting, Brendan thought. Skye's speaking out loud, using my Pokegear translator to produce English sentences. I know that the Arena Trap is supposed to lock down psychic abilities, but in Goldenrod, they always set it up so that she can at least speak to me telepathically ...

“I ... I wouldn't know,” Dan said. “I saw him briefly at the precinct yesterday, when he came in for questioning, and he didn't smile once. He looked deadly serious, if anything.”

Skye gave Brendan a knowing look.

“M-maybe some evidence came in this morning?” Phoenix suggested. “I know you'd look pretty upbeat, if it helped your case.”

“Don't even think like that, Phoenix,” groaned Brendan. “If Blue's gotten new evidence overnight, this trial is going to be full of all kinds of pain.”

Dan gulped loudly. Brendan noticed.

“B-but!” he exclaimed. “If you're innocent, Mr. Shames, there will always be something we can use to get out of a jam. I'm sure of it.”

Dan gave a weak grin. “I hope so ...”

Skye suddenly looked alarmed, for a moment. “Speaking of evidence, what do we have?”

“My notes, mostly,” Brendan replied. “We're counting on Blue's evidence to show up a rapid-fire as possible, and then use it to bust any lies his witnesses may tell. I don't think it's likely that we'll get a win today; my aim here is to point toward the possibility of another suspect.”

“That's ... not a very strong goal, is it?” chirped Phoenix.

“Don't make me put you in the Pokeball.”

October 19, 2017, 10:00 AM
Saffron City District Court – 3rd Floor Lobby

The crowd in the courtroom gallery was definitely the biggest Brendan had ever seen. Makes sense, he thought, considering what this case relates to, and the size of this city. I'll bet there are a lot of upset citizens who are only here in search of answers to their power plant's woes.

“I really, *really* hate not knowing what you're thinking right now,” Skye said. She was standing to the right of Brendan, behind the defense bench, as his assistant; and was eying his pondering posture.

“So they *do* have a high-powered Arena Trap?”

“Yep. I feel like I've got a *really* thick helmet covering my entire head. Gaah ... I'm afraid I won't be much help today ...”

“Don't worry about it. We'll make this work.”

The gallery, which was in a dull roar of chatter, began to quiet down. Brendan looked toward the judge's chair – the judge was ascending a staircase toward his spot. He took his seat and pounded his gavel at once.

“Court is now in session for the trial of Mr. Dan Shames.”

Brendan looked up with his most professional posture, careful to make a good impression for this new judge. “The defense is ready, Your Honor.”

Across the floor, Blue stood behind the prosecution bench, looking very much ready for action.

“The prosecution has been ready for some time, Your Honor.”

The judge, as bald-headed and bushy-bearded as the one in Goldenrod City, nodded. “Your opening statements, please.”

“Certainly, Your Honor,” said Blue. “The prosecution has been hard at work gathering data about what took place at the crime scene, and the environment surrounding it. It believes that, while this case may appear to be open-and-shut at first glance, there are some details that can only be made clear after a little digging. I have, of course, done that digging, and stand ready to present my excavation.”

You're a lawyer, not an archaeologist! Brendan thought.

“Excellent, Mr. Oak. Mr. Namron, your statement?”

“It is as Blue says, Your Honor,” said Brendan. “This case is not as open-and-shut as it may appear to be – but I believe that, in time, the truth – the whole truth – will be made known, as will my client's innocence!” And to himself, he remarked, *That ... was far too dramatic for my confidence level.*

The judge nodded, taking things in. “I see. Let us proceed, then. I see that the defendant is currently under suspicion of a murder at the power plant. Mr. Oak?”

“That is correct, Your Honor – the defendant, Dan Shames, gave an electric shock to the victim and pushed him over a safety railing, where the victim fell to his death. I have an autopsy report with me, which I will submit as evidence.”

A bailiff took a manilla envelope from Blue and brought it to the judge, who helped himself to a look. “Fractured neck and cracked skull? Sounds painful ...”

“I've no doubt it was, Your Honor. Fortunately, the victim most likely lost consciousness at once, then died a few minutes later from his snapped spinal cord, and internal bleeding.”

“I see,” the Judge murmured.

“Unfortunately, there are a few problems with the victim – or, rather, the victim's back, where he was pushed. Take a look at this photograph, Your Honor.”

A bailiff took the photo and showed it to Brendan, then brought it to the judge.

“This is a photo of the victim's back, taken shortly after the police arrived on the crime scene. As you can see, he is wearing a dark-colored suit – and squarely in the middle of his back, there are scorch mark on that suit.”

“Fascinating ...” said the judge. “So this is how you knew that the victim was electrocuted.”

“That, and the fact that many of his muscles were tensed up, in a way that is commonly seen among people who have just been 'TASERed', Your Honor. Coupled with the fact that a TASER was found with the defendant on the night of the crime ... well, it doesn't bode well for him. Wouldn't you agree, Brendan?”

Brendan was feeling sweaty already. *W-Why is he asking me? The answer to that is obvious!* “I ... do agree, Blue. But I believe that my client is innocent with every ounce of my being. There *is* an explanation for all this!”

Brendan planted his hands on the bench, hunched over somewhat, in an attempt to demonstrate his will to Blue – something he had done before in trials when things became tense. “Your Honor.”

The judge nodded towards Brendan. “Mr. Namron, I believe I already know where you are heading, but I will ask for formality's sake. How do you and your client plead?”

“Not Guilty', Your Honor.”

“I thought as much, Brendan,” Blue said, unflinchingly. “Your Honor, I am prepared to call my first witness, in order to elaborate on the crime scene and give this trial some direction to follow.”

“Very well, then, Mr. Oak. You may proceed.”

“The prosecution calls Mr. Tyler Noll to the witness stand.”

Tyler was quite a presence in the middle of the courtroom. He was a bit on the burly side, and was already balding despite his age being in the early thirties.

“Witness, please state your name and occupation for the court record.”

“The name is Tyler Noll, sir! I am currently employed as a technician at the Kanto region's power plant.”

He sounds like he has a military history, Brendan noted. He certainly looks the part ...

“I really don't need telepathy to know what you're thinking this time,” said Skye in a hushed voice. “Mr. Noll there is apparently stationed with the U.S. Army Reserve; I understand that he's well-acquainted with Lt. Surge, of Vermilion City.”

“Lovely. We get a tough nut as our first witness to crack.”

“Mr. Noll,” stated Blue. “I understand that you had just repaired a crucial component of the plant's machinery shortly before the crime occurred. Would you care to elaborate on the details?”

“Certainly, sir! I'll disclose anything the court needs to know.”

Witness Testimony

Tyler Noll - The Night of the Crime

“It was getting close to midnight by the time I completed repairs on the main generator.

“Dan Shames was with me, helping to manage the tools.

“Right as I closed 'er up, the owner of the power plant showed up.

“Dan and I climbed up to meet him, and we started up the generator, but the power went out almost immediately!

“The backup generator took a few seconds to kick in, so there was total darkness for a few seconds.

“Just before the backup lights came on, we saw a spark, and heard the manager cry out.

“When we at last had light again, we saw the manager on the floor of the generator well, dead,

“and Dan, I'm sorry to say, was hunched over the safety railing with guilt all over his face.”

“A succinct summary, witness,” Blue said. “Thank you.”

“Confident today, are we?” Brendan mused. “I should think you'll have no problems with me cross-examining Mr. Noll, then.”

“Take all the time you need, kid.”

Cross-Examination: The Night of the Crime

“So what type of generator were you working on, exactly?” asked Brendan. “The entire power plant doesn't really resemble anything I've ever pictured.”

“It's a custom-built diesel generator, sir! It's designed for high-efficiency output in 24-hour 'bursts'. We use it to keep things running smoothly for our customers while we replenish our main turbines' energy source.”

“I see. But you were fixing it up just before the murder occurred, correct? What caused it to need repairs?”

“It's old, sir! To tell the truth, it's nearing the point where it will become beyond any sort of good standing in mechanical reliability. But, it was the owner's pride-and-joy of the plant. He refused to let it be removed.”

Skye eyed Brendan with a look of keen interest. “The **owner's pride-and-joy**? Sounds like ...”

“... a clue,” said Brendan. “Maybe. Your Honor, I'd like to submit the generator as evidence, just in case.”

"Very well, Mr. Namron. The court accepts the generator and its background. Continue."

"Thank you, Your Honor. Mr. Noll, you said that my client was assisting you with the tools, while you carried out the actual repairs. What else does he do at the plant?"

"The same thing many of the employees do, sir! Dan's main job is to monitor the turbines and their fuel, and refuel if it runs low."

"And what is their fuel?"

"I ... I don't know. Sir."

He doesn't know? Thought Brendan. That's strange ... if it's a turbine-based power plant, wouldn't those turbines be powered by steam, generated by burning coals or trash to heat water?

"I can only guess what you're thinking," Skye said, quietly, "but ... well, maybe he just never went near the turbines? One could guess that his job doesn't require him to know, at any rate ..."

"... Skye, you're psychic even when you can't be. But maybe you're right ... I'll let it go."

"Moving on, witness," Brendan continued, "you said the victim 'showed up' right as you finished your work on the generator. Does he often visit so close to midnight?"

"No, sir! As I recall, that was the first time he had ever stopped by during the late-night shift. But then, I believe that was the first time he'd ever brought his son out, as well."

"His son?"

"Anthony Hills, sir! A good man, I'm told. His father often mentioned an intention to pass the plant down to him when it was his time."

The wheels in Brendan's head were turning quite fast. This-this is almost too cliché to consider, but that sounds like Anthony Hills could have had a motive for murder. Hmmm ...

"I don't think it's likely," Skye whispered.

"Gaaah!" Brendan choked. "How can you know what I'm thinking without knowing what I'm thinking?!"

Skye grinned mischievously. "Detective's intuition, I suppose. That, and you're as easy to read as a kid's book."

Remind me to never play poker against her ... "A-Anyway, witness. I take it his purpose there was an inspection of sorts?"

"No, sir. He had gotten word that the generator was down again, and wanted to come check on it. He apparently brought Anthony along because his son 'wanted to see Dan again'."

"Again"? Do you mean to say that my client and Anthony Hills have met before? ..."

"I don't know, sir. I was only quoting the owner."

"... I see," Brendan said, unsure of what to make of this information. "Well, let's move on. You testified that the power went out just seconds after the generator was powered on, correct?"

"Yes, sir! But I don't believe it's likely that the two incidents are related, sir."

"N-not related? Why is that, Mr. Noll?"

Across the courtroom, Blue spoke up at last. "A power surge, Brendan; didn't I tell you about this last night?"

The judge looked down at Blue, perplexed. "A ... power surge? In a power plant?"

"Yes, Your Honor. With the witness's assistance, the police determined that the plant's own electrical circuitry received an unexpected surge of electricity from an unknown, outside source, presumably coincidentally just after the generator was powered on."

Phoenix gave a disgruntled moan. "Meaning ... ?"

Skye rolled her eyes. "Is your brain on today, Phoenix? It means that something zapped the plant from outside and overloaded their own wires. A safety mechanism was probably tripped, cutting off all power."

Phoenix huffed. "It was one question. It's not like I wanted to come to court during a vacation,

anyway. Jeez ...”

Brendan tried to ignore the bickering. “I have a question, Blue. Did the police look into whether --”

“-- there was an electrical storm on the night of the crime?”

“Gaaah!” Brendan yelled. *Am I really so easy to read?!*

“There was no such thing,” continued Blue. “The skies were crystal clear over Kanto that night, according to weather reports.

“An unknown outside source, huh ...?” Brendan murmured.

Something clicked in Skye's mind. “B-Brendan. I think that testimony just now was *incredibly* important!”

“How do you mean?” Brendan wondered.

“Well, if the surge came from outside, and there was no lightning in the area, that can only mean that somebody deliberately delivered an electric shock!”

Brendan went pale. “W-Whaaat?!”

“Skye is correct, Brendan,” said Blue. “It's the only conclusion we can draw right now – and from that, we can draw two possibilities: either the killer had an accomplice, or ... the surge was generated by a planted device. And in either case, that means ...”

Skye finished the sentence. “... that would mean this crime is a **premeditated murder!**”

“Correct again, Skye,” Blue said with a thin smile.

Brendan finally recovered enough to speak. “H-hold it! Blue, if you are insinuating that my client plotted to kill Mr. Shames in advance, I can assure you that that isn't true!”

Blue stared at Brendan quizzically. “Is that so, Brendan?”

Brendan could feel sweat all over his pale face. “Y-yep! And I can back it up, too. Like you said, a courtroom accepts only evidence, right?”

Blue's blank look persisted. “I said what ...?” he muttered, quietly enough that nobody behind the defense bench noticed.

“Brendan,” Skye whispered, “please don't tell me you're bluffing.”

“I-I'm not! Or ... well, I don't think I am. I'm pretty sure I have the right idea ...”

Skye's face was full of anything but confidence. “Oh, boy ...”

“Well, Mr. Namron,” the judge spoke up, “let's hear it. Why do you believe your client can't have planned this out?”

“It's ... it's simple, Your Honor,” Brendan said, trying to regain composure. “If this *was* planned out, why on Earth would Mr. Shames have used his TASER?”

“That's ... a good point, Mr. Namron!” the judge said. “It certainly doesn't seem to add up ...”

“Objection! Your Honor, it's simple, really,” said Blue, all traces of nervousness gone. “It's possible that the TASER was part of the plan; the defendant was fearful that his victim would resist, and decided to paralyze him before going for the kill!”

“Objection! Why would my client believe that to be necessary? Blue, what are the ages of my client and the victim?”

“28 and 61, respectively,” said Blue flatly. “Why do you ... ask ...”

“As I thought; the victim is roughly double my client's age, and was most likely over-the-hill. And as anyone in this courtroom can see, my client is more than reasonably fit for a man his age. So tell me this, Blue: why would my client have any doubts about his ability to keep the victim in check?!”

Blue had uncertainty written all over his face. “I ... I don't know.”

The sound of gallery chatter was music to Brendan's ears.

“There's the lawyer we know and love,” Skye said. “I'd say we're really getting somewhere now!”

“Sirs! If I may interrupt for a few seconds, sirs!”

Brendan and Blue both looked toward the witness stand, startled. Brendan had nearly forgotten about Tyler Noll.

“The 'Manager' may have been getting old, sirs, but he still had a spring chicken in him. He reportedly did athletic training with his son every day, and he looked like it was doing him a lot of good.”

Brendan's stride was stopped in its tracks. “Nnnnghoooh!”

Blue slammed his bench. “Witness! I asked you last night what you knew about the victim's background, did I not? Why didn't you mention this?”

Tyler shrugged. “I didn't believe it had any bearing on the case, sir! One can't tell from the crime scene photo or the attire he was wearing that night – but for a man just entering his sixties, Mr. Hills was almost as fit as a fiddle.”

Blue looked cross as he began pondering what to do.

The gallery was alive with chatter as the judge triple-slammed his gavel. “Order! Order in the court, I say! Mr. Namron! It seems you have inadvertently walked right into a brick wall for your case. Thus far, I remain unconvinced that there is anyone besides the defendant who could have committed the crime.”

“Indeed,” Skye said to Brendan, “we are in hot water. But I think there are still quite a few holes we can poke into, don't you think?”

“Without a doubt,” Brendan said. “I know there's more evidence to this case, and we need to draw it out *fast*.” He looked up at the judge. “Your Honor, I'd like to contin-”

“Witness,” Blue spoke up. “You may step down for now. The prosecution needs to call a new witness, Your Honor.”

“Objection, Blue! I haven't finished cross-examining *this* witness just yet!”

“The defense is correct, Mr. Oak. Unless you have an *extremely* good reason to terminate this cross-examination early, I will sustain Mr. Namron's objection.”

“I do, Your Honor. The prosecution will give Mr. Namron the chance to cross-examine Mr. Noll again, but since we're on the track of whether the victim was capable of fighting back ... I think it's only appropriate that we resolve that question sooner than later.”

“... I see. Mr. Namron, I'm sorry, but your objection is overruled. I will hold Mr. Oak accountable to his promise.”

Brendan was running a few things through his head as the judge spoke. *Blue's got a point ... This matter of whether the killer feared Mr. Hill's ability to fight back is a pretty important one. I suppose that I should go along with him for now ...* “Understood, Your Honor.”

“Very good. Mr. Oak, who is it that you wish to bring into the courtroom?”

“Who else, Your Honor? The very son of the victim in this case ... Mr. Anthony Hills!”

Anthony had the appearance of an aspiring entrepreneur who was more than raring to go in the business world. He looked at the top of his game in every respect – the training he apparently had done with his father was clearly doing him good. He was well-groomed, wearing a sharp suit, and had the bold face of someone successful.

“Witness,” said Blue as Anthony took the stand. “Please state your name and occupation.”

“Anthony Hills, age 26. I currently work in public relations at Silph Co., although it seems I'll be stepping in for my father at KPP very soon ...”

“There is no need to elaborate, witness,” Blue said sternly. “I have called you to the stand in order to ask about activities with your father over the last few months.”

“Certainly, sir. I will testify whatever you need.”

“Then please, do so now.”

Witness Testimony

Anthony Hills – Things I Did With Dad

“About seven months ago, Dad asked me if he could join in with my training routine.

“I usually train at the crack of dawn, before going to work, so I was hesitant at first ...

“... but Dad persisted, so I let him jog with me.

“It was rough going for him, at first, but he kept at it and started to show improvement.

“Heh ... he would often brag about his training to guests, once it started becoming visibly effective.

“He even brought me out to the power plant a few times to brag to the workers.”

“Very interesting testimony, witness,” Blue said.

“So his dad's 'athletic training' consisted of jogging?” Brendan murmured. “Sounds reasonable enough ...”

“Except that it hammers the nail deeper into our coffin, Brendan!” said Skye. “We can't take this lying down! Hmmm ... wait. I think there was something peculiar about the testimony ...”

“Like what?”

“Think back to the earlier testimony, and it should become clear.”

Cross-Examination: Things I Did With Dad

“Mr. Hills,” began Brendan, “you said you let your father jog with you. Did either of you do other activities for training?”

“My dad didn't,” Anthony said, “but I use our swimming pool to do laps in the evenings. My dad would just use it to relax after a long day.”

“... So, your father only did that one exercise, then?”

“Correct.”

Brendan pondered this for a moment. *Jogging is a lower-body exercise, right? If that's the case, then his upper-body strength shouldn't be anything to write home about ...*

“Brendan,” Skye whispered. “I know you want to focus on finding that plausible deniability, but the witness said something a little odd that I'll bet could point to something deeper. If you can, take advantage of it while there's an opening!”

Brendan mulled over the testimony. Most of what Anthony had said seemed pretty unexceptional. *What was Skye trying to refer to – ooohhhhhhhhhh. I get it!*

“Mr. Hills. Your testimony ... is pretty simple, covering only the basic facts about the victim's exercise history. But there's one thing that I just realized seems ... off.”

Anthony looked at Brendan blankly. “What might you be talking about, Mr. Namron?”

Brendan grinned. “It's simple. You said that your father had brought you along to his workplace 'a few times' in order to brag about how you were helping him train. But, before you even entered the courtroom, a worker testified something completely different: he said that the night of the crime was the first time you'd ever been there!”

Anthony's eyes became noticeably wide. “W-Wait a minute!”

The gallery was somehow already fired up with busy chatter. The judge pounded his gavel.

“Order! Order, I say!”

“Mr. Hills, what is the meaning of this?” Blue said. “If you're lying under oath ...”

“Calm down, Blue Man. I'm sure it's a misunderstanding, that's all. My father only brought me

by a few times, and those were very brief visits – I needed to get back to my own job, after all! Who's this oaf that said otherwise? I'll be sure to take a good, long look at his salary ...”

“Hmph,” Blue grunted. “It was a Mr. Tyler Noll. I'm sure you know him ...”

Anthony was once again bug-eyed. “M-my father's best worker?! He slandered me?!”

“Slander, Mr Hills, or being factual?” Brendan pressed. “Mr. Noll was working the night shift the night of the crime; I don't think it's much of a stretch to say that he does that on a regular basis, do you?”

“He works that shift every night except weekends, up through 6 AM.”

“And you work during what hours?”

“8 AM through 7 PM ... ahhh, I see what you're getting at.”

“What he's getting at is a waste of our time,” Blue said, sharply. “Kid, this is a pointless line of questioning.”

Brendan smiled confidently. “It's not entirely pointless, Blue. I learned something interesting ... Tyler Noll is the victim's 'best worker'. Which indicates that the victim and Mr. Noll had deep respect for each other. Ergo! If Mr. Noll said this witness was out there only once, I think we can trust that he *really* meant 'once!'”

Anthony Hills let out a surprised growl.

“And if *that's* true, then that implies that the witness is lying about his visitation record. Which --”

“Which means *what*, Brendan?” said Blue, sternly. “All of this seems like baseless guesswork, if you ask me. The only reason I haven't raised an objection is because I'm curious where this silly 'explanation' is going.”

“I agree with Mr. Oak, Mr. Namron. Your theory thus far is based on no clear facts, and we are continually getting off-track. So, I'm going to ask you to be direct: what do you think the witness's response to your questioning means?”

“It's mostly a hunch, Your Honor,” said Brendan, “but ... I think that the witness is trying to present modified facts in order to make his father look proud; maybe even respectable, in his own way.” *Something*, Brendan thought, *that I would never consider doing ...*

“Witness!” Blue barked. “Is this the truth, or not? If you commit perjury now, so help me ...”

For a few moments, the courtroom was silent. Anthony finally answered, “Yes. It's true. You're quite the guesser, Mr. Namron.”

“I'm just going where the case leads me, Mr. Hills. And if you don't mind, I'd like to hear an explanation as to why you just lied on the stand.”

“Fine, fine ... Your Honor, here. I have a medical report on my father, from four months ago.”

Why on Earth does he have that today? thought Brendan. *Did he ... expect to show it?*

The judge took a small folder from the bailiff, and flipped through it. “My, my, what an interesting and detailed report ... I ... don't understand even half of what all these scribbles say ...”

“My father sprained his ankle during a jog in June ...” explained Anthony. “He hadn't had a physical in a while, so while his doctor had the injury treated, he conducted one. And ... they found cancer.”

Everyone around the witness stand was rendered speechless. Brendan tensed up.

“My father asked that I keep quiet about the whole thing. Said he knew some people would become 'falsely sympathetic' if they knew.”

“... 'Falsely sympathetic'?” Blue echoed. “And what about people who would be sincerely sympathetic? Didn't he think they would want to know the truth?”

“He knew a few people,” Anthony said, sadly. “Said he didn't want it to weigh on them, to become a burden on their hearts.”

Brendan barely recovered enough to speak. "... So what became of him?"

"Aside from the obvious? He took a week off to let his ankle heal and arranged for treatment – chemotherapy, the works. He made every effort to make sure nobody knew the truth – it was his problem, he said, and he would cope with it with no one, save me. In addition ... he quit training."

Skye was the only one able to ask anything relevant to the case at this point; everyone else was too choked up to get coherent speech out. "So ... you mean ...?"

"Yes, Detective Namron. My father's fruits of his training ... disappeared."

"So he was no longer 'fit as a fiddle' by the time autumn arrived ..." Skye said quietly. "Did anyone at the plant know?"

"Probably most of the staff. He couldn't hide it forever."

"I see ... Your Honor?"

"Y-yes?" the judge answered – also nearing the tipping point.

Skye looked like she was straining to keep her composure neutral. "The defense requests a short recess for everyone to regain composure, and to sort out a plan."

"A-absolutely. The court shall recess for a ten-minute break ..."

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Phoenix's wailing filled the lobby. Nobody complained; Brendan could hear a spectator or two who had stepped out to blow their nose. Brendan himself was still shaken from the details that everyone had just heard.

"W-why is it that our cases a-always have some s-second tragedy?" sputtered Phoenix.

"We never do seem to get the good ones ..." Skye mused. "We're not even halfway through the trial and the atmosphere feels so heavy already ..."

"I don't know how you held it together, Skye," said Brendan. "Not even Blue was able to speak up."

"I had to. Now isn't the time for us to break down and weep. You felt the same way just a few months ago, remember?"

"... Yeah, I remember. I had to prove you innocent – and get revenge for Mom – no matter what."

"It's the same way here. There's a client in there that's depending on us to show the world that he didn't do what they all say he did. He needs a valiant lawyer to reassure him that he's in good hands – that the true killer *will* be found and *will* be brought to justice. We can't afford to lose that image or our client's faith – and thus, our own – will falter."

"Pretty dramatic, Skye," said Brendan. "But why is 'our faith' at risk? Didn't you say that you knew he wasn't lying? That he was definitely innoc-"

"I said that to *you*, privately. But that's all I know for sure – it's up to us to figure out *why* he's not guilty, and *who* really did the deed. I can't go snooping around in people's heads as I please, even without this stupid Arena Trap. Too many thoughts have scarred me for life, for one thing." She shuddered, making a small noise of disgust.

"So you're saying we should get information out of someone willingly, and trust that?"

"... Close. Kind of. I think you'll figure it out, eventually."

"... All right, then," shrugged Brendan. "Speaking of figuring things out, though – at the cost of several boxes of tissues, we discovered the answer to our theory from a while ago."

"Yup – it's plausible that the killer knew that their victim was not in good enough shape to fight back. So where does that leave us?"

"Only a little bit ahead of where we started, actually," replied Brendan, with a groan. "But it's something to cling to – and if we push, maybe we'll make some serious -"

The entrance doors to the lobby flew open, and someone from the police department, dressed with a huge white lab coat, rushed over to Brendan. "Excuse me, sir, have you seen Mr. Blue Oak anywhere? It's urgent!"

Brendan was puzzled. "I think I saw him walk back into the courtroom a minute ago."

"Ah, thank you!" And the lab tech scurried off.

"... I guess it's about time we went back in, too," Skye said.

The gallery was once again alive with chatter, right up until the judge brought down his gavel for some silence.

"Court will now reconvene. Mr. Oak, Mr. Namron, are you prepared to continue?"

"We are, Your Honor," Brendan said. Blue didn't respond – he was preoccupied with a document he was holding.

What in the world is up with Blue today? Wondered Brendan. He's like a completely different prosecutor.

"Mr. Oak," the judge repeated. "Are you prepared to continue?"

Blue heard the judge this time, and looked up at him with a look of concern on his face. "Y-Yes, Your Honor."

"Very well, then. Pray tell, Mr. Oak, is that new evidence in your hand? Even from here, I can tell it's a very different report."

"Y-Yes it is, Your Honor. I am loathe to submit it, but ..."

This is definitely not the Blue I know, thought Brendan.

"Exactly what is it, Mr. Oak?" asked the judge.

"An ... autopsy report, sir. An update, rather. If you and Namron over there would please take a look ..."

Brendan was handed the file first. It was a single sheet of paper with a copious amount of details printed, but one thing stood out.

"Blue, this is ... I don't know whether this is beneficial to my client or not!"

"What does it say?" Skye asked.

"Yes," the judge said, too impatient to have the file handed to him, "what does it say?"

"It says," Blue said hesitantly, "that the victim's heart stopped."

"... Of course it stopped. The victim died, after all," the judge said, condescendingly.

"Naturally, Your Honor. But in this case, his heart stopped before he died. Specifically, it stopped when he was electrocuted!"

The judge grew wide-eyed. "W-WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAT?!"

Skye threw her hands on the bench. "Blue! Is the autopsy team absolutely certain of this?"

"One hundred percent positive, Detective. I dare say that you, of all those here, are the best choice for confirming this – but you are not part of Kanto's investigative team..."

"Did the team happen to find anything about the power of the electricity the victim was hit with?" Brendan asked.

"They found nothing of the sort, Brendan. Look at that piece of paper in your hands – everything they *have* found thus far is on there."

Curses! thought Brendan. *I have a hunch that that kind of info could be crucial to this case!*

"W-Wait just a second!" exclaimed the judge. "I thought TASERS weren't supposed to be able to kill!"

"They aren't, Your Honor. TASERs – or stun guns – are intended to be a non-lethal alternative to, say, shooting someone dangerous with a gun. They fire two electrical probes that latch onto and deliver a shock to the victim, which temporarily renders them completely unable to control their limb muscles. However ... there are a few documented cases where a TASER accidentally gave the victim a heart attack, or even went straight into cardiac arrest – and in most of those cases, the TASER delivered its shock in the chest area!"

The judge nodded. "Oh, I see. So this was an exceptional shock, then?"

"We can only assume so," said Blue.

"Hang on a second," said Brendan. "How many of those cases involved a victim with known heart conditions?"

"A handful," said Blue. "There are recorded cases where even a perfectly healthy individual died of shock. It depends on the placement of the electrodes – and how many shocks are delivered."

This is definitely bad for our case, Brendan thought. It only further cements my client's position as a guilty party – and even if the fall turned out to be circumstantial, he would still be the murder!

"Brendan!" Skye said. "That look on your face ... don't tell me that you think we're cornered!"

"It's obvious we are, isn't it? No matter what route we take, our client has been pinned as the only possible murder!"

"Then think! Keep your head high and see if you can remember something! It's Mr. Shames' only hope! ... What does the autopsy report say? Anything else?"

"I don't see anything we don't already know ... there's a photograph of the victim's burns on here from the sho-" Brendan cut himself off.

"What is it, Brendan?"

"We've already brought up the fact that burn marks were on the victim's jacket, but not that there were any on his skin. And I don't see any ... This is crucial! Your Honor!"

"Yes, Mr. Namron."

"I think I just figured it out – definitive proof that my client did *not* use his TASER!"

"W-What?"

"You heard the man, Your Honor," said Blue. "That's very interesting, Brendan – considering how little evidence you have to work with, what could possibly prove such a thing?"

"It's simple, Blue," said Brendan with a smirk. "Recall how you told how a TASER works to his Honor."

"It shoots probes and delivers an electric shock to the victim."

"Right – almost. It shoots probes which *latch on to* the victim. They are doubtlessly barbed to facilitate this."

"Indeed. And – oh."

"I'd like the court to take a look again at the crime scene photo – and the second autopsy report that we'd just received. As you can see, the victim has burn marks on both his jacket – which we took note of earlier – and on his skin, which we did not mention at all. But, in spite of these marks, they can't have come from a TASER – because there should be *two more* marks!"

"T-two more burn marks?" asked the judge nervously. "You mean the victim was shocked thrice?!"

Brendan shook his head. "Only once, Your Honor – I'm pretty sure of that at this point. The marks I'm looking for are marks where the TASER probes supposedly latched on to the victim's jacket!"

"Y-you're right!" the judge said. "There aren't any signs of holes, or even ripped fabric, around the burn mark!"

Blue slammed his desk, a glint of fear and thrill in his eye. "Objection! T-That's preposterous!"

The only person there with any sort of shock device was the defendant! We checked every witness!”

“Clearly you failed a spot check, Blue! *Something* put that shock there, but it certainly wasn't my client! Unless you're proposing he magically snuck in and out a device with no flying probes, like a stun gun?”

Blue didn't have a good response for this. “Nnnnngh ...!”

“That's quite enough, both of you,” the judge said, with surprising calm. “Although I still have a few shadows of doubt about the defendant, Mr. Namron ... you have made an excellent point. And judging by the prosecution's demeanor, he has no counterarguments to that point.

“Therefore,” the judge continued, voice raised, “I am suspending this trial for one day, so that both sides may gather evidence – and search for another possible suspect in this crime.”

Another possible suspect, huh? thought Brendan. *I wonder ... who else is there that could have pulled this off, anyway?*

“That is all. Court is adjourned!”