

Chapter One: A Redhead's Scandal

12:25 p.m. October 16th, Friday, 106 PH (Post Hoopa Event). Day 129.

Events: Rhea and the girls have had an eventful 60 days of hardcore training! What's changed? What new things have the squad uncovered? Let's find out! Our girl started her journey on the 9th of June, and the end of registration for the Winter Indigo Cup is December 5th (49 days away).

Waking up early in the morning to catch the flight to Cerulean City, Rhea was somewhat intimidated when Amira guided them not to the Pokemon landing strip but to the *literal small* airplane boarding facility to the north of Apple City.

Lori giggled at her reluctance upon seeing the small passenger planes that would be the fastest and most cost-effective way to get to their destination. Amira and Lori had traveled on planes extensively throughout their lives, but this would be Rhea's first. It kind of felt like the roles were reversed as the Unovan girl coaxed her onboard, reassuring her that it would be fine.

She felt a little better that the pilot and co-pilot had Flying Pokemon in case anything went wrong, but there were a million other things that could go wrong. At least Lori held her hand most of the way, and she even found the courage to peek over with Lulu to see a few sights on their journey over Clefairy Valley, Rifure Village, and Blue Forest.

The constant buzz of the plane, the rattling that met her quivers, and the whirring blades made her stomach sick throughout their five-hour flight.

Amira pointed out the Misty Mountains to the north of Mt. Moon, where a vast area was totally veiled by the milky soup. Legend had it that it was all an illusion and the Forest of Origin lay within and that if the barrier was down, then you could see the [Tree of Beginning](#), but it was fiercely guarded by all the Pokemon in the region, who didn't welcome any outsiders.

Rhea recalled her brother and Kate had been in that area exploring the [Pokémopolis](#) ruins, to the southwest of the Misty Mountains. Rhea had to admit that the calming, classical music that Lori fed into the headphones she'd given her helped to soothe her turbulent belly.

Once passing over Blue Forest, Amira pointed in the far distance, claiming that there was a valley where people still lived without any technology called Origin Town. Apparently, they still venerated and held great respect for the Tree of Beginning, and the whole area was zoned off as a religious area, closed off to tourists.

She started to feel better upon spotting the skyscrapers and vast cityscape of Cerulean as their plane lowered, coming into the southwestern airfield. The trip reminded her of how far they'd traveled on foot, or mostly on foot, from when they'd first started her journey in June.

Exiting the vehicle, Rhea released Nova to walk beside her, taking turns with the rest of their team to comply with the city's more restrictive laws after Lori sparked the flash festival. Evidently, it had caused an enormous boom in the local economy, and things were only just now starting to calm down after the initial hype started to settle.

Still feeling slightly squeamish, Rhea was a little disgruntled when Amira suddenly broke away to pursue her own objectives, leaving her to offer to tag along.

Amira needed to check on a few deliveries she'd placed, make a few calls regarding her own products being sold, and pick up the jewelry pieces she'd made out of their badges that were supposed to arrive the previous night. Plus, there was some art piece from local muralist legend Painter [Celina](#) that had sparked her curiosity.

Rhea wasn't all that interested in artwork, and sitting around waiting for her to go through a ton of delivery orders or whatever else the redhead had planned didn't sound too appealing. It would be fine just to hang out with Amira, but the redhead mysteriously wanted to make the trip alone.

Figuring that it had to do with whatever happened in the past sixty days, Rhea waved her off. Amira had already reserved their spots in the Silver-tier Challenger's lineup earlier this morning. She reassured them that on her way to the art exhibit, she'd show up personally to verify that they were in the city since it was a part of the process. She half wanted to stalk her, but knew Amber would easily sniff her out.

So, left with her taller, more city-versed companion, Rhea offered a bright grin that soon fell as Lori gave her a similar strained smile. As it turned out, the Unovan girl would be checking out a ton of sales for TMs across the city, which was something she couldn't do on her current budget. It was a shopping day for Lori as she figured out some last-minute strategies against Misty for tomorrow's battle.

If that wasn't enough, the purple-haired girl was also planning on challenging a few people around the Seaside Battle Zones to sharpen up. She also had some secret meetings that would happen between the two activities, and not wanting to get caught up in whatever shady business deals she was plotting, possibly with black market TMs, Rhea let her off the hook instead of forcing her to try to come up with other excuses to ditch her.

Standing in the center of a nearby park, outside of the airfield, Rhea puffed out a long sigh as her violet-haired teammate disappeared behind some brush to hail a cab.

"Pwe-pwe?" Nova mumbled from beside her, Lulu riding on her back.

"Nene..."

"Yeah..." Rhea mumbled. "Yeah, we were a team, and now... we're on our own again. Hmm. Let's figure out what we're going to do."

Moving to a nearby bench, she took out her phone from the small purse she'd gotten in Fuschia months earlier for city use and set it by her side. Nova and Lulu were just as curious as her other Pokemon, watching her bring up Cerulean's map, but Rhea's mind was totally blank.

"Maybe we should have made some plans like they did," she said, glancing up to see all the Pokemon and humans going about their own tasks or enjoying themselves in the park. "I kind of expected Lori or Amira to take the lead like usual and have a place where we can all hang out, but I guess we're still coming off that training mentality."

She flipped through the various districts of Cerulean, not seeing anything particularly interesting that stuck out to her. Then again, the fish farm facility and all its exhibits, showing tons of endangered breeds that had been hunted out of the wild by Pokemon, could be fun, and they even had samples of some for humans and Pokemon to try.

"Hmm. Maybe we could do some tourist stuff, sample more of the local cuisine, and maybe... have some battles near the sea ourselves? You girls would like that, right?"

"Nenene?!"

"Pwe-pwe," Nova said with a chuckle while patting the disappointed Cosmog, telling her that her 'time' hadn't come yet.

"Nee..."

Alice and Mya roared their support for having a good battle. It was true that Rhea hadn't seen everything they'd learned from the trips outside of the temple. Sure, she'd seen a few things they'd shown off, proud of their growth, but she did need to see it all in action.

“Alright! Let’s go have some fun,” Rhea chimed, plucking up Nova and Lulu to transfer to her head, the Eevee wrapping around her neck to rest on her shoulders. “Why don’t we see some of the fish exhibits before grabbing a bite to eat?”

“Pwe!”

“Ne!”

Getting approval from her girls, Rhea used her GPS to track them in the right direction; only it soon became apparent that it would take longer when she kept getting stopped by people who recognized her and wanted to know where they’d been.

Rhea ducked inside a Golett-themed clothing shop after the fifth interaction, plucking out a hat and taking out her aunt’s hair ties that were too recognizable. Nova was well enough hidden lying across the back of her neck, and Lulu hid in her shirt front; they had to go incognito if they were ever going to get to the fish farm slash museum.

Putting on her sunglasses, she continued their journey, feeling far less eyes on her. However, it was hard to escape all attention, considering how thick her typically thigh-length hair was. At least she wasn’t being stopped on every street with more people being drawn into each discussion.

The breeze was still somewhat warm during the fall since the southern air currents swept in from the south, but the cool mountainous gales from the western and northern mountains could quickly plummet the temperatures during certain parts of the day.

Adjusting her hat and looking up at the clear sky, she counted her luck. It would be a good day for a battle when they were done with this.

Standing outside the modern facility, it shows a live exhibit of weird fish with smooth, transparent, or puffy cheeks. One with a huge nose made her giggle, and Alice swapped places with Nova to press her face against the glass and make faces at the fish, who didn’t react.

“Look at this,” she whispered to Lulu, poking her head out to see the plaques with information written across the front. “Some of these fish look like Pokemon. Some people think Pokemon took on their shape to hunt them, or maybe fish took on Pokemon shape to not get eaten. Crazy, huh?”

“Ne…”

“Lop-lop!” Alice chirped, jumping up and down as a few fish followed her motion.

“Haha. I bet they do get a lot of Pokemon and people staring at them, so they’re not scared.”

Walking inside after Mya swapped out to have her fun, Rhea paid for the day pass at the receptionist’s desk, snagging the premium pass—it was only 10 credits more—that allowed her to bring out all her Pokemon since they were inside the size limit.

She put away her sunglasses but kept her Golett-themed hat on. Her Pokemon ran through the dimly lit walkways, vast tanks of water on all sides, showing various fish interacting. Old wildlife scientists spoke over television sets, explaining various facts about the Preservation Act that was enacted by the United Indigo League to save the endangered species of animals that were dwindling around the world.

Crazily, she learned that fish actually ate one another, too. She’d supposed they only ate algae or the smaller insects, much like many other Pokemon did in the wild, but there were concerns globally about a decrease in the normal insect population. Pokemon were so dominant and untouchable with their energy matrix to animals that they didn’t stand a chance.

Rhea’s gut tightened when she saw a lazy Whiscash rise out of the seabed, trailing mud as it entered a pack of clustered fish and produced an electrified field; dozens of the creatures

locked up before floating belly up to the surface, where the Pokemon swallowed a few before moving on, leaving the rest to be cleaned up by other Pokemon.

“Nene?” her cosmic girl asked, pointing up at the wide-eyed fish.

Rhea slowly shook her head. “No, they can’t go to a Center, Lulu... It doesn’t work like that for animals. Remember the Nidorino and how it threatened me? When I was in the hospital after our first battle, I was lucky... It’s a cruel world, and everything wants to survive.”

“Ne...”

Mya hugged herself as the puffball settled on her head, the steely girl frowning at the floating-away Electric Pokemon.

Moving on, they went through the deep-sea exhibit, where Pokemon like [Relicanth](#) swam. According to the information, typical deep-sea fish didn’t have the same adaptability as the Longevity Pokemon to live beyond its habitat. A model next to it showed something called a [Coelacanthus](#), which had a similar frame as the Relicanth.

From octopodes to squid, there were all kinds of creatures that looked like but weren’t Pokemon. Everything she was discovering reminded her of her mother, laying in bed with her whenever she was home to teach her something new about the world, history, or Pokemon.

Nearing the end of the tour, she couldn’t help but call her mom. It rang for a time before her mother answered.

“Our Little Swablu! I was wondering when you’d finally call your old mother,” she laughed, sounding a tad tired, as was typical for her hopeless mom. “I heard you unlocked quite a few special abilities from my chats with Ash. I saw the plane ride and Lori’s posts. How are you doing?”

Mouth becoming a line, she swiftly pulled her phone away to flip to Pikabook to swap to her teammate’s profile; she’d totally taken secret pictures of her, talking about how cute she was, terrified of planes.

That is... totally on point for her; Rhea internally sighed while keeping up with her mom. I wasn’t ‘terrified,’ but it was scary.

“I was a little scared, but I’m fine now. Actually, we’re at the fish museum in Cerulean; Amira and Lori had their own things to do today.”

She bent down to rub between Alice’s ears before the hoppity girl jumped up several meters to reach a ledge she could use to look at the fish from a different angle.

“I heard you’re doing a lot of big research with the old Hisuian stuff in Sinnoh. I saw the article with Granny and you after seeing that new horror/romance movie yesterday. It was good. Do you think the next part will be accurate?”

Walking toward the joint, fancy-looking fish restaurant beside the farm, Rhea was a little worried about the price but wanted to give her girls a treat after all their training.

“Oh, you saw that movie?!” her mother chirped at the news. “Actually, the director has been consulting with Celest College of Archeology in [Celestic City](#) on accuracy for the next part. I had a sneak preview with your father a week before its release. What a twist! Am I right?” her mother excitedly exclaimed.

“I loved the reveal that Jessica’s father was Maybell’s great-grandfather as well! That he was the sealed Ninetales of legend that was forced to take on human form and lock away his powers is a story as old as time, but the relation, and—oh, that poor girl’s mother,” she sniffed. “She was seduced by that devious fox before being used as the first sacrifice to unlock his illusion powers.”

Rhea pushed open the doors to the bright sun overhead, returning Nova and Alice to their Poke Balls. “She was dead for years; I know! Ugh. I thought it was super tragic with that sacrifice and want to punch that director in the nose for that cliffhanger! The Ninetales was wounded by the opening Ralish made for Maybell, but his Trainer is cursed, and both Maybell and Jessica have to handle the fallout.”

“Mhm! Mhm!” Her mother huffed, making Rhea smile as she shifted her purse to put on her sunglasses again. “Tragic?! Maybell evolved into a Delphox to save our heroic Typhlosion, only for him to save her from the Cursed Shadow Ball, throwing him over the cliff. My heart goes out to Jessica and Maybell because they need to save their men, and the whole town now thinks that they’re just like her father. What will happen?!”

“Right?! It’s like, the *worst* place you can leave us! Ugh. Anyway, I’m going to eat at this fancy fish place,” Rhea said, standing outside of the doors into the luxurious doors and giving a few formally dressed couples a strained smile. “We’ll have to watch the next one together.”

Her mother’s voice softened. “I’d love that. Have a good meal. I’ll give your dad, aunt, and granny your best. I’m glad to see you have such a healthy appetite, too!”

“Bye, Mom!” Laughing and hanging up, she smiled as Lulu popped out of her shirt front to sit on her head. “Hmm. Well, I’m kind of underdressed, but what is up with this place?” she asked, examining the fancy restaurant next to a fish museum and fish farm. “I guess it would be the best location since the farm is *right* here...”

Pulling up her account balance, her mouth became a line. “I mean, we can splurge a little if we’re going to have some battles today. We just need to get some high-betting Trainers... Yeah, we’ll go with that!”

Nova gave her an internal nudge that said it wasn’t a good idea to put their faith fully on not only finding decent Trainers but also ones that would be willing to face them. There was also the possibility that they’d lose.

Mya and Alice roared in protest, Lulu joining after getting one of their rare connection moments where they were in unison. Rhea wanted to try it out, though, so she opened the doors and let Mya proudly walk through.

The carved, wood-themed interior had artwork designed around the unique fish that the museum showcased, and the floor was glass, showing the aquatic creatures swimming underneath them. It was all very extravagant, with hired-on Pokemon maintaining the habitat below. If that wasn’t enough, veins of water channels lined the ceiling, providing a passageway between various other tanks throughout the eight-story structure.

Stepping up to the front desk, Rhea tightened her cap and cleared her throat, but the well-dressed man on the other side had long already noticed her.

“I... don’t know if we need a reservation, but, eh, we’d like a table for just me and my Pokemon—umm, let me get them out so you know their size—sorry,” she said, stomach squeamish at how awkward she was being, but Amira usually handled all this kind of stuff.

Nova and Alice hopped out, giving cute chirps to the man as Lulu waved from atop Rhea’s Golett hat. The seater only gleaned at them before pressing a few places on the digital screen in front of him.

“Of course not, Ms. Rhea,” the man stated, suddenly showing a fake, business-like smile before gesturing for her to follow. “Naturally, your name comes up on the VIP listings; you are always welcome at Sea Delivuur. Please, this way.”

Lips pulling in as she did as directed, Rhea gave her team a shrug; she expected this kind of treatment for Amira, but not her. Then again, her aunt was the Champion of Sinnoh and a former World Champion.

Entering an elevator she was brought to, she caught quite a few stares from the 1st-floor diners before she met a classy and handsome blond boy inside who gave her a slight bow as they rose to the top floor. “Do you have any seating requests?”

Rhea shook her head, holding her fingers behind her back so they wouldn’t fidget. “No. I was just hoping to get some good fish to eat. I, umm, don’t know anything about it, so... can you just do something you like?”

The man chuckled. “My apologies, but I am not your server, Ma’am. I can let them know.”

“Oh. My bad,” Rhea mumbled, cheeks coloring as Nova giggled and bumped her leg with her tail. “Thank you.”

“Umm... Ma’am?” he asked as Lulu floated over to squish his cheeks to see his full lips pucker.

“Lulu! Don’t touch other people...” she hissed, snatching her out of the air. “Sorry! Sorry!”

“Nee?”

“Eh-hehe. No problem. Please, take any seat you desire.”

When the doors opened, her eyes widened; the area was a hallway that led into the aquarium itself, where thousands of fish of all colors swam. It must have been on the private top floor of the museum, and she concluded the two *must* have a shared business.

“Uh-huh,” Rhea whispered, walking inside the nearly empty place as he motioned to a door opposite them that no doubt led to a private, top-floor kitchen.

“The server will be out shortly to take your beverage order.”

Stepping onto the reinforced glass, Rhea looked down at the amazing variety of fish that swam around the large box, making her way to a more private area where wooden barriers were placed to provide a solo eating area. It was unnaturally quiet, and the businessmen in suits across the area rose to leave, having just finished their meal after shaking hands and signing a few papers on their table.

She sat at the corner booth area, where a silvery veil kept her hidden. Breathing out a heavy sigh, she scooted inside with her Pokemon, muttering, “This is totally an Amira place.”

“Maw-Maw,” Mya returned, smugly taking her own chair with Alice beside her.

Lulu floated down on the table between them, face pressing against the glass to look at all the shiny colors that glittered in the faint light shining through the aquarium. Nova took the chair beside the glass, as well, so she could follow their progress; Rhea could practically see her drooling to sink her teeth into them.

Alice was less into meat, being more of a vegetarian herself, but Mya was all about the fishy diet, and Nova’s tail wagged, probably going back to hunting with her mother. Lulu had never had anything but the more vegan diet at the temple, so this would be new to her, and Rhea wasn’t sure if she’d like it or not.

When the black-haired young male server’s voice came from outside of the veiled booth, she jumped, turning to see his charming smile. “What can I get you for your drinks, Ma’am. We can supply anything you might desire.”

“Uh... water. Yeah... water works,” she hastily repeated. “We’ll all have water.”

“Of course. And am I right to think that you’d like the chef’s choice?”

“Uh-huh... Sure,” she nodded, gulping as the man slid the menu and small device with a button onto the table; his fingernails were perfectly groomed, which was odd to notice, but something she did.

“Excellent. If you have any more desires, then please press the button to be served. We will start with a mixed mushroom medley appetizer. I will be back shortly.”

“Uh-huh.”

He left them for a few minutes, the silence closing in around them as she began to lose herself in their little window into this seemingly endless void. From their position, it made it look like they were dining in a mystical underwater sanctuary at the bottom of the sea with rich plants dotting various areas before things faded into black.

She was starting to get comfortable when their server returned with a plate of what she assumed were plates of folded crackers, inserted with ingredients. Biting into one of the crunchy, warm treats with her Pokemon after he left, even Alice found it delicious. She had eaten fish before, but nothing like this, and the mushrooms, cheese, and various other things brought a unique flavor to her tongue to enjoy.

Enjoying herself while the chef prepared their appetizers, her nerves settled, only for a new voice that entered the VIP section to make her almost choke.

“Haaa. I don’t know if I’m up for eating right now, Brock. I’m just... stressed. Ugh. I can’t believe he showed up now, and why did [Daisy](#) have to call him, huh? Now I feel like he’s seeing me as a *responsibility*.”

The strained laughter of a doctor’s voice she’d come to know followed. “C’mon, Misty, you know Ash isn’t here because he feels responsible. Why would he? He’s here because Lily’s worried about you not giving her the reins of the Gym while you’re what... seven months pregnant now?”

“Oh, she can shove her fake pink wig down her throat,” Misty snarled, dropping into a chair. “She’s just pissed that she can’t have the Gym Leader title when she’s been training to replace me. Sure, they kept the Gym afloat when our parents ditched us, but I’m the one who brought it up to its current level.”

“You don’t mean that the way it came out,” Brock groaned. “See, your recent battles have been a bit more... intense and snappy than you usually are. They’re just worried about you with the stress—it’s not good for the babies.”

“Ugh. Taking their side? Where’s Holly? She’d understand. My sisters have always been jealous... Muk, I was jealous of them before—never mind. Mmmgm. She’s standing straight as a board! Ack! Leave my spine alone,” she whimpered, making Rhea wince.

After some back and forth, Misty cooled down. “Haaa. That’s better, and get me some cold water,” she said to the server, who jumped to comply. “The only reason why they want us to have this ‘remembrance’ journey is to get me out of the City-State because they don’t think I’m fit enough for the Gym. Bah. I could do it if I had triplets!”

Brock laughed. “Well, you have twins, and it is funny how you can tell which is pressing against your spine.”

“She’s a little monster!” the woman groaned. “My little boy is an angel compared to her. Ack! It’s like she can hear me... And what if I accidentally let it slip, Brock? What then?”

The man sat back, voice becoming more serious. “I mean, it’ll get out eventually, I’m sure. All of you conspired together on this when Christie said she’d obtained the donation. What I’m shocked about is how he hasn’t asked once.”

Rhea's arm prickled at the information. *This cannot be happening right now*, she internally cried to her Pokemon, but she didn't want to interrupt them or make it awkward; then again, it would be even more uncomfortable if the server came to her table.

Misty groaned, and by the sounds of it, she slumped to the table. "Serena, Iris, [Melody](#), [Anabel](#), [Miette](#), Dawn, and the others agreed that if he ever found out, we'd own up to it, but he can't be mad since he was the one that donated it to *science*... Iris is weird, though, talking about a harem. You were the one that put him up to it in the first place."

"Harem?" Brock snorted. "Not me; I was joking! Iris took that Muk and ran with it, but you know how territorial she is. Hahaha. I mean, he came to me about getting fast cash, and Christie was looking for samples from Champion-tier Trainers and above. It paid well, and it was a Muk of a lot more than donating plasma. I think it's great that he hasn't been like the Mandibuzz outside, spamming you with questions about the father."

"Mmmgm. Yeah, and just like that, I've lost my appetite. Let's go to that little snow cone place by the Old Wharf Lighthouse; it reminds me of sneaking out as a kid... Maybe we should call Violet to join since she was the deviant who would get me to go with her."

"Haha! You and your sisters." They stood and walked toward the elevator, yet their voices could be easily heard in the glass box. "You love, and you hate. I swear you fight with them more than Ash or Serena."

"Oh, shut your face," the redhead snarled. "Besides, Serena and I have come to a more reasonable position. Everyone else besides Dawn is insane. Fine. I'll do this little 'reunion trip' in two weeks if Holly's there to help me and your 'doctor' skills can be of use... Ash better not piss me off, though. I'm already annoyed by that look he gives me."

"Maybe that should tell you something deep down," Brock muttered, making Misty balk and start down another topic that had nothing to do with what he'd said.

Rhea let a heavy stream of air pass through her puffed-out cheeks, her throat sticky as she gulped down the lump. Misty had gotten the sperm from her mother during a research project?! And if that wasn't enough, she all but confirmed that Ash was the father and that he didn't even know.

What kind of crazy, catastrophic gossip scandal did I just stumble onto?! she internally cried. Does that mean that every one of these girls who have a crush on him has a sample? But Chloe and Lillie weren't named... Poor girls.

Trying to wrap her head around the news, she felt queasy upon thinking about her teammates:

The purple-haired gossip girl in a black outfit with Impidimp ears popped up on one shoulder and wanted her to babble it to her friends. On the other hand, the level-headed, graceful Gardevoir of a redhead appeared on the other side, telling her not to let that information see the light of day for as long as she lived.

A battle took place inside her, and she didn't know which side would win out.