

Juke hesitated before knocking at the door in front of him. As his eyes scanned the beat-up wood base and shoddy frame, uncertainty began erupting inside his mind. Memories of his sister's ambition and hard working attitude didn't exactly add up to the unkept porch that he was now standing on. The state of disrepair was perturbing. Even Forrest seemed wary, his mane fluffed out, with his tail curled tightly around his static orb. Taking a deep breath, Juke activated his display and assured himself that this was the address she had sent him all those years ago, checking over the archived email carefully. This was it, the address matched, but the musician still had a bad feeling as he minimized the hologram. Taking a deep breath, he finally steeled himself and knocked on the damaged wooden door.

An explosion of barks and snarls came in response from the other side, along with a blunt thudding against the door as a pokemon crashed into it from the other side. Forrest leapt back in alarm as the pokemon inside began scratching at the wood in a desperate plea to reach them. He cast his trainer a worried glance as Juke's red ear lowered in anxious resignation. This was his sister's place, alright; the vicious barking echoed in the trainer's mind as fearful childhood memories of his sister's partner pokemon quickly flashed before his eyes. His heartbeat quickened, and he took a small step back. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. As footsteps began to approach from the other side, Juke's breathing caught up with his heart, and suddenly his feet felt glued to the floor. Involuntary shakes occasionally took hold of his tensed arms, causing Forrest to squeak in alarm. Juke silently cursed himself for reacting like this, completely taken off-guard by the sudden escalation of the situation and his complete bodily shutdown. Why was this happening? His eyes were so focused on the door that he didn't notice Forrest step in front of him defensively, fluffing out to intimidate whatever would come through the door.

"What are you so worked up for? Georgette. Georgette, calm down. Geez," A familiar yet puzzled voice came from the other side of the door as the doorknob began to jiggle; the old materials seeming reluctant to open. The barking quelled to a low growl as the voice continued, "I haven't seen you get this worked up about anyone except—" The door opened a crack, revealing a sliver of the person inside. The familiar reddish hair and angular face of his sister were undeniable, and her green eyes went wide as she paused in shock. It took Amelia a few moments to analyze that, despite the changes that come with a nera infusion, this was in fact her youngest sibling standing on her doorstep. "Harper..." She breathed, and the pair shared a moment of utter confusion as their eyes locked.

Juke attempted to say anything, but his mouth felt like it was made of sand. In her bewilderment, Amelia had loosened her grip on the door, and like lightning, Georgette was taking her chance. The greenish-blue nose of a Furfrou wedged through the door, and with a quick twist of her neck, the normal type had thrust her way outside. The musician's blood ran cold as Georgette focused in on him, eyes narrowing in recognition as she pulled her teeth back in a snarl. Amelia quickly gave chase, stumbling out the door and immediately attempting to call her off in frantic, repeated commands. The enraged pokemon ignored what she was asked, determined to chase off her old enemy, and lunged with her jaws open wide in a go at Juke's arm. However, in her blind rage she hadn't noticed the electric-grass type at the musician's feet. Forrest jumped horns-first into the Furfrou's chest, bowling her over a few meters into the yard before hopping backward to put himself between her and his trainer. Georgette picked herself up off the yellowed grass and turned to face Forrest, muscles tensing beneath her matted fur.

Amelia slowed her pace as she studied her sibling's partner pokemon, stopping just short of the commotion. A new spark of interest gleamed in her eyes as she brought a hand to her chin in thought, silently opting to spectate the curious situation in front of her. The beginning of a smile tugged discreetly at the corners of her lips.

Juke, on the other hand, shook his head, fighting desperately to regain control of his body. The impending fight drew his full attention. He watched as Georgette shuffled her paws along the coarse grass, searching for a weak point while Forrest barked out a series of gravelly chirps, hopping side to side. The pair were now locked in a pokemon battle. The sudden realization that Forrest was now the one in trouble seemed to flip a switch in his mind, turning freeze to fight. "Forrest, dodge left, then spark!" It was almost as if a hidden instinct had pulled itself to the surface, Juke hardly had time to blurt out the command as he watched the Furfrou shift her footing to pounce. Forrest did as he was asked, rolling to the side as Georgette tackled the spot where he had been in a mass of off-white fur. An audible crackling began to sound from the orb that was wrapped in Forrest's striped tail as his fur stood on end, tiny sparks of greenish-hued electricity sporadically rippling out to the tips. He dashed toward Georgette while she was busy getting back up, colliding in a cascade of sparks as the electricity surged into the normal-type. Georgette yelped as the pair rolled once again from the force of the impact, coming to a stop with Forrest proudly ending on top. One of his forepaws held her shoulder while the other kept her head pressed still against the ground, his long form dropped all of his weight to keep her down. Even so, Georgette was quick to fight, thrashing as best she could in her position. "Alright, nuzzle, then end it." As the battle quickly turned in their favor, Juke's voice became more confident. Forrest buried his nose in Georgette's neck fur, rubbing back and forth to generate currents of electricity as her thrashing slowed. When her movements finally came to a stop, Forrest released his hold and hustled back to Juke. The trainer winced as the hybrid circled his legs lovingly, releasing crackling static as the pokemon's fur brushed against his pants. "Whew, you okay, Forrest? Good going. You really had my back that time, thanks buddy." Crouching down to be eye-level with Forrest, Juke reached out his hand and gave his partner pokemon a thankful scratch behind the ear. The pair turned their attention to Georgette, who was struggling to stand due to the paralysis inflicted on her. She seemed to have no interest in continuing the fight now that she had a status effect to worry about, and slowly slunk back to Amelia with her head down.

Amelia met Georgette halfway, widening her stance slightly so that the moping Furfrou could hide behind her more easily. She placed one hand on her hip and broke the silence with an amused chuckle. "Well, *this* is not what I was expecting today. I can't believe it! You're fused!? And when did you become a trainer?"

Her tone caused Juke to stand back up with a frustrated groan, "Good to see you too— have you *seriously* still not trained her? Mimi, it's been—"

"Oh, come on, she's only ever been like this with you—" Amelia rolled her eyes, unhappy with where this was going so quickly.

"She's only ever been this *bad* with me!" Juke interjected angrily.

"And look, she's behaving now!" Amelia retorted, motioning to Georgette as the pokemon began her slow trek back to the house, suddenly wanting to be alone as she realized in disgust that the humans were about to happily converse. Pausing every few steps due to the paralysis, she cast one last stink eye at Juke before disappearing indoors. Uncomfortable with the silence, and

starting to feel guilt creeping in over the situation, Amelia gave a small sigh. "Sorry, sorry. I was surprised when I saw you, and I couldn't hold on to the door. At least now she'll leave you alone?"

Juke let out a sigh of his own, pinching his brow as he forced himself to let the altercation go. Arguments never went anywhere with his sister, and he really didn't want to mess up his chances of having a place to stay while he was in Brookfell. "Alright, whatever," he mumbled. Looking back at Amelia, he was able to push forward a genuine smile. Even though she got on his nerves at times, it really felt good to finally see her again.

"But seriously, when did you start training pokemon? That was quick thinking, I've never seen you take charge of a battle before. I've never seen you battle, period!" Amelia closed the distance between the two, pausing just short to crouch and inspect Forrest up close. The electric-type recoiled from her advance, but tolerated her visual study as Juke gave him calming ear scratches.

"That was...my first one, actually...technically? I think?" Juke paused, thinking about what had just happened. Sure, the situation was terrible, but the more he thought about the fight, the more he focused on the feeling of being in sync with Forrest. If it weren't for the crushing anxiety, that might have actually been fun. "Maybe we should try it some more. On more friendly terms with someone, eh buddy?" He gently shook Forrest by one of the horns, earning an enthusiastic chirp in response. *Battling pokemon, huh? A lot of people are into that...maybe I can give it a shot.*