

The day had gone all according to routine. After securing the night's dinner and making sure she was alone, she made her way back to the old, run-down home in the slums of Castelia City as dusk fell around her. It was not a place that many ventured, but that worked out to her benefit - secrecy was of the utmost importance to her well-being. The door creaked open loudly, and a tall, red-haired young woman flopped onto an equally creaky bed with a sigh as the door swung shut on its own weight. She gave herself a mental review of her day's performance.

As per usual, she had stolen two loaves of bread from a nearby bakery, and as always, she kept her head down throughout the day; she stayed nestled behind a deep hood, blending into the bustling crowds. Like always, she observed and pitied the enslaved Pokemon that people flaunted so haughtily, and as usual, her inability to change her situation at all pained her. After only a short time in proximity of humans, this routine in combination with the events which landed her in her situation to begin with quickly began to wear down her psyche. Every night, she arrived at her filthy, run-down home, paranoid and anxious, the fear of being discovered constantly nagging from the back of her mind. If nothing else, she treasured the night, when she could slip home under cover of darkness with little fear of interacting with a human.

Now, her mind wandered. She thought instead of the events that led to her current situation, cursing herself for getting wrapped up in the past again - Mostly, though, the vivid memories came of their own volition, beyond her conscious control. As she drifted off to sleep, the scene replayed itself in her mind for the umpteenth time.

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A grating commotion awoke Anya from her slumber, shocked awake and alert by the din - the sounds of struggle could be heard from her resting place, ringing through the Zoroark nest she called home. Seeing no immediate danger, she pulled herself off of the ground and went to investigate the situation.

The sight that greeted her was a horrifying one. Humans in black suits, equipped with bizarre headpieces that covered their eyes, were setting to work capturing the entire population of Zoroark in the den, throwing nets over those who ran or cowered and having their Pokemon easily outmatch any who tried to fight. Her parents had told her about these 'Pokemon Trainers' - they enslaved Pokemon, trapping them with their captors forever, forced to fight each other against their will.

Try as they might to defend their families, even the strongest males of the tribe were no match for these powerful invaders. Anya spied several fallen Zoroark in the area; from the way the intruders ignored the corpses it was clear that they had no qualms killing any that got in their way, despite their apparent goal to capture as many as possible. She recognized several that she knew among the dead and her stomach churned with a painful mixture of shock, fear and sadness.

As she struggled to process this information, her mother called out to her from under a heavy net. "A-Anya!" she cried. "Anya, you've got to escape! Leave us - just save yourself!" Anya

hesitated, tears welling up in her eyes as she beheld the sight of her trapped mother. "Please, Anya... There's no hope for us. They're all distracted keeping us under control, they're at their capacity - you can escape if you're careful about it. Get out of here, please! I love you, Anya. Please, be safe."

Anya continued staring in disbelief, but only for a moment - one of the suited men had spotted her and was making a beeline for her. Before she could react, though, a male of her species tore out of the bushes, drawing the attention of several other humans to the aid of their comrade. Seeing this as her chance, she spun on her heel and ran, ran, ran as fast and as far as her legs could carry her.

Finally, leaving the sounds of the struggle far behind her with no sign of pursuit, Anya slowed to a halt, leaning against a tree branch, chest heaving. *Alright*, she thought, *I escaped. Mother and Father... There's no telling what may have happened to them.* Her head sank at the thought of that. *And the attackers, those humans... I've seen very few of their kind before. It seems to me they're all the same... Despicable, frightening things.* A sudden thought struck her that made her gut twist into knots. *These are the creatures that rule the Earth. Anywhere I'd go, people just like them would be crawling all over the place. Even in the wilds, these 'trainers' would come out to find me. Catch me - enslave me.*

She kicked at the dirt nervously. *I have to think of something... There were so many of them in the nest, that couldn't possibly have been all of them. If there are more of them out there, there's no way the forest is a safe place to be anymore. But the only other way is...* Turning her gaze skyward, a faint glow on the dark horizon signalled something her family had warned her about as a kit - That was a *city*, a vast nesting site where tribes of humans lived. It was to be avoided at all costs, they had said, for the humans would snatch a young Zorua right up and make her their own. *I always thought they were just trying to scare me away from going anywhere interesting*, she mused, *but I guess there was way more truth to it than I thought...* Without realizing it, though, Anya had run straight towards the city - she had picked a poor direction to run in, apparently. She wasn't quite there yet, not in close enough proximity to be in danger, but she was far closer to it than she'd ever been before. She could just barely, against the midnight black sky, make out the silhouettes of the monstrous buildings that reached up to touch the sky. Even setting aside her deep-seated fear of humans, it was an intimidating sight, albeit one that intrigued her deeply.

At that moment, something strange blew towards her in the wind. She caught the curious square as the wind carried it past, glancing at it curiously. It was a very colorful square of some glossy material, with pictures of Pokemon and more of those humans plastered all over it, along with some strange symbols on it which she couldn't make any sense of. What caught her eye, though, was the colorful display of humans. They wore bright, vivid garments that, despite her abhorrence at the species as a whole, intrigued her visually. *I wonder if I could make myself look like that*, she wondered. Always eager to practice a new illusion, as well as jumping at the chance to calm her nerves with a diversion, she approached a nearby pond and threw herself under the guise of her own powers. Gazing down at her reflection by the dim moonlight, she

admired her work - She now appeared a tall young woman with bright red hair, wrapped up in a baggy black hoodie and rough-looking blue jeans. The sight of her successful illusion brought a small smile to her face. *You know*, she thought, *maybe this could come in handy*. She cast another glance at the skyline, and the looming city plastered across it. The idea beginning to form in the back of her mind filled her with dread, but it was beginning to look like her only viable option with the forest full of those madmen actively hunting her kind. Shaking slightly, she stood up and faced the lights in the distance. *I'm gonna have to make this work, one way or another*, she thought, and started off towards the metropolis in the distance.

On her walk there, Anya suddenly realized that her plan as it stood was not going to work. She stopped herself, now only a stone's throw from the city - she tensed up as the occasional passerby caught sight of her on their way out, but thankfully they seemed to ignore her for the most part. *At least the illusion works*, she thought. *But now that I'm so close... What do I actually do?* A fatal flaw in her plan; she hadn't even the foresight to think this far ahead. She was disguised and in the city, now what? Although she was innately able to grasp basic meanings of the English language, she couldn't actually fully understand it, nor could she speak it one bit. She didn't exactly want to interact with humans, but she figured it may be a necessity at some point - and despite her species' natural intelligence, it wasn't exactly something that she could pick up in an instant. She decided, then, that she would do some reconnaissance to get a feel for how humans lived life.

That was for later, though. She figured that humans perhaps weren't nocturnal - for all her parents had warned her about the sheer volume of humans in this area, there only seemed to be a few active at this hour. She decided that she would need to spend at least a few days of light to observe them properly. After the night's events, she was thoroughly exhausted, as well - now was her chance to rest up and prepare. The issue of shelter presented itself, but she saw no issue - she was used to sleeping in the wilderness with only trees as her cover, so a nearby dead end alleyway, made of cold concrete as though it was, shielded her from the bitter wind and made an acceptable resting spot for the night. Curling up and praying no human had any use for this place, she drifted off to sleep.

As sunlight flooded her resting place, Anya shook herself awake. Panic and dread set in briefly before she remembered what had happened the night before, and she calmed herself slightly. Although recalling the painful events of the night prior still pained her, losing her family and the entire rest of her tribe, she knew now that she had to survive given her lucky opportunity. Stretching as she stood, making sure she was still under her invisibility illusion, she set out into the vast city to observe the human way of life.

To call her experience culture shock of the highest degree was an understatement. She, a wild Pokemon, trying to wrap her head around the dizzying bustle of human life was not an easy thing to do. She persevered, though, and even began picking up on their language. Zoroark interfacing with humans was not unheard of - if nothing else, she could convey her meaning more easily by tailoring her illusion to human ears, but she still had to understand what was being said back first. For now, hidden in broad daylight, she simply observed all that was

happening. Humans having an exchange of goods: A few slips of paper and some shiny coins in exchange for a delectable-looking slab of meat, or a handful of with round, red and white things - Anya shuddered as she realized those were the devices they used to capture Pokemon. "Despicable," she muttered.

As she wandered the city, so too did she notice the Pokemon present. Many 'trainers' seemed to live in this city, as their Pokemon sometimes followed alongside them, usually on a leash. *Figures*, she thought, *even outside of their cages the humans keep them restrained*. The whole concept of catching Pokemon still revolted her; even if some of the Pokemon actually looked happy, she was certain they had been manipulated into doing so. Threatened, maybe, outright brainwashed by the devices? She couldn't be sure what they did exactly, but she knew that something must go on during that process.

That night, after a full day of observing, Anya decided to head off in a direction she hadn't gone before to find somewhere better than an alleyway to sleep. She seemed to have wandered into a more poorly-maintained part of the city - in stark contrast to the massive, clean buildings in the inner city, as she travelled out to the outskirts there were nothing but tiny, squalid shacks. The humans she saw seemed to be living live none so easy as those she'd seen earlier, wearing tattered rags rather than the sharp black suits she'd seen from most of the other humans in the city. She almost felt a twinge of sympathy for them living so harshly when better conditions existed so close to their home. She speculated that perhaps the inner city had already been fully populated, leaving no room for those who arrived here later. Something she liked about this area, though, was that it was a fair bit quieter than the rest of the city. Only a few people walked the streets, absolutely nothing compared to the massive crowds that threatened to slam into her and break her illusion at a moment's notice before. By extension, it wasn't as densely populated - she wagered that some of these buildings may even be uninhabited completely. The idea piqued her interest, being that she had come out here seeking shelter in the first place. She approached a nearby small house wearily, senses on high alert for anyone who might have been taking a wayward glance at the house in time for the door to swing open seemingly of its own accord, but luckily she sensed no one's presence.

Trying to stay undetected, she pulled the door shut slowly - but due to its age and disuse, it instead creaked and whined the whole way, causing Anya to wince at the noise and pray no one cared enough to investigate. After a moment had passed and she was sure no one was coming, she heaved a sigh of relief and surveyed her new surroundings. This building clearly hadn't been lived in in quite some time - a thick layer of dust covered every piece of furniture, rendering everything a dull beige-gray color. A stiff-looking mattress was shoved against a wall, with a drawer on the opposite side of the room which, upon inspection, turned out empty. The rest of the house, too, was empty - Nothing adorned the walls of any room, and the only other room in the house was full of strange facilities with knobs and levers all over them which didn't seem to function. Returning to the main room after a brief, futile investigation of the mystery facilities, a wave of fatigue suddenly set over her; looking out a dusty window, she could see the sun had already set. She set herself down on the squeaky mattress, surprised at how comfortable it was in spite of its appearance, and sneezed at the dust kicked up by her sitting.

Clearing the air lazily, she laid on her side and shut her eyes.

The next morning, she awoke with her stomach growling, and she suddenly remembered she hadn't gotten any food for herself the night before. Hunger pangs struck her, and she decided that food would be a priority. *The only problem is, how am I supposed to get food in a thickly-settled area like this..?* She thought about her day in the city and wracked her brain for something that could help her out here. Remembering the meat vendor she'd seen the day before, a plan hatched in her mind. With the ability to render herself invisible and so many fresh cuts of meat separated from passerby only by a thin glass shield, the best course of action seemed obvious.

And so she set out, retracing her steps back to the heart of the city, to where the scent of fresh, bloody meat called out to her. In the wild, whatever wasn't claimed was ripe for the taking. This would smudge those rules a bit, but if she could catch a fresh slab of meat unattended, it was hers as far as she was concerned. She arrived back at the market starved and on point to get herself fed. Slipping deftly behind the stand where a large, robust man worked, she sat in silence off to a corner and watched him work, waiting for an opportunity. As she stood idly by, she realized that after a day and some change of nothing but exploring and listening she was beginning to make out the words that were exchanged.

"Yeah..." His next words were lost on her as she strained herself to process his meaning. "Here. ...Fifteen hundred Yen." She couldn't even manage to make out a full sentence, but she got the gist well enough. The gruff butcher grabbed a particularly juicy-looking morsel and slapped it on the counter for the woman in front of him, taking in exchange a handful of these shiny coins she'd seen passed around. The butcher glanced around looking for more potential customers and, seeing none, placed a small slip of paper on the front of his stall. He excused himself promptly, headed toward a room labelled with a quaint silhouette of a man. While the purpose of these rooms was still unknown to her, she noted that they were strikingly similar to the one in her makeshift home. Becoming aware of her mental tangent, though, she snapped herself back into focus that this was her chance. Glancing around nervously despite her invisibility, she swiped up a cut in each hand and escaped. Trusting that her illusion worked - after all, a couple of steaks flailing around in the breeze would likely attract some unwanted attention - she made way back to her home, again careful to dodge the troves of people rushing about their days unaware of her presence.

Safely back in her dusty shelter, she tore into the first cut of meat savagely, heeding her primal hunger over any sort of manners with no one around to scold her for it, opting instead to get this meat of unknown origin and delectable taste into her stomach as fast as possible. She huffed, nearly out of breath from having wolfed down her meal so quickly, and patted her stomach. It wasn't a truly massive steak, but it was more than enough to fill her compared to the next-to-nothing she'd managed to forage until now. Deciding that it would be wise to spread out her rations as much as possible, she placed the remaining piece on a cool countertop (after clearing away the dust of course) and set back out to explore the city once again.