

Interlude: Watch Where You're Going!

- *In which an author's persona meets his embarrassing old OC.*
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One good thing about Rudi's: the food served is better than in the Cafeteria by a noticeable margin, if a bit more expensive. It was no surprise, therefore, that a decent amount of agents visited the bar whenever they needed food for this exact reason.

The laws of probability dictate that eventually, two of those agents will visit at the same time. The Laws of Narrative Comedy dictate that when that happens, the two agents will literally run into each other.

In his defense, Falchion (in his human disguise) was thinking more about the food he was going to order than the exact route to the counter. So he didn't realize that a blue-haired girl with an Oshawott in her arms was coming his way until they'd already collided.

"Ow! What the—"

"Ah! Sorry, sorry! Got distracted!" Falchion instinctively backed away.

The Oshawott brandished its scalchop at him accusingly, and the girl bared a set of shark-like teeth as she retorted, "Well, watch where you're going next time, you—"

She stopped talking, her arms dropping to her sides (and giving her Oshawott a moment to freak out before falling to the floor). There was something familiar about this guy's messy black hair, his dark brown eyes, and the rushed, frantic way he had spoken just now...

Before he could say anything, she'd hugged him tightly round the waist.

Falchion had no idea what had gotten into her, so after a moment's deliberation, he decided to awkwardly return the hug. "Uh, are you okay?"

With a startled yelp, she pulled away. "Y-yeah! I'm totally fine! Sorry... You just looked like... I just..." She hid her face behind her hands, blushing. Falchion realized that one of her hands was in fact a prosthetic, but he decided not to openly acknowledge it.

"Do I know you from anywhere?"

The girl looked at him again, a little confused. "Uhm, no? Why?"

He smiled a little. "You're Lapis, right? Sarah's partner?"

Her face fell. "Y-yeah. I, uh, guess I should be going..."

Falchion glanced around the bar. "Hey, are y— er, *were* you looking for somewhere to sit? I think we've got time to talk about this. Sarah's my sister, after all, and I'm sure she's told you a lot about me, so... yeah."

Lapis reluctantly agreed, and the two of them found an empty table and took their seats, opposite of each other with the Oshawott and Falchion's bag opposite them both. Right away, the waitress attending the table gave all of them their menus and silverware, and Falchion began studying his menu with an absent-minded expression.

"So... Come here often?" Lapis asked.

Falchion looked up at her. "Yeah, well, the food's good here. It's the only place where I can eat decent stuff when I'm not on missions."

"That's exactly what I was thinking! It's a shame I didn't get to visit more often before I became an agent — I had a hard time trying to ask the Nursery staff if I could leave without supervision."

"Understandable. Wait, the Nursery?" He looked at her, a little confused. "How old are you?"

"Oh? I just turned thirteen this past June."

"Ah, happy late birthday, then!" He paused, blinking. "...wait, you're an agent already? An actual bona-fide agent? I know Ripper told me about what happened to your arm a while ago, but I still find it hard to believe..."

"You'd better believe it. I know, it's been hard—" she held up her right arm stump so he could see it — "but I seem to manage."

"But how? You're only thirteen. I mean, I know Sarah's underage, too, but she's a *Super*. You're just a little girl with blue hair and a missing hand."

The Oshawott glared at him briefly before going back to the menu.

Lapis likewise scowled, gritting her shark-like teeth. "Are you trying to tell me I'm not good enough to be an agent?"

"Oh nonono, not at all! I'm just concerned that you'd get yourself hurt, or worse. I mean, you've already lost a limb, so..."

She glared down at her menu. "Look, this isn't the first time that I've had people tell me they thought a twelve-year-old fighting toe-to-toe against Mary Sues is a ridiculous notion — especially a disabled twelve-year-old — but that doesn't make it sound any less insulting. These people, and you by extension, obviously haven't met Toph Beifong. I know I did back in my..."

Suddenly, she snapped her head up, her large blue eyes widening. "Hang on. That's it!"

"What?"

"I think I know—"

But she was interrupted by the waitress appearing again. "Have you decided what you want to eat?"

Lapis let out a small shriek and cowered next to Falchion, who tried to push her away. The Oshawott bonked its furry white forehead against the table.

"Y-yeah!" Falchion said to the waitress. "I'll have the usual — Brock's famous Five-Alarm Chili and a cup of fresh-cut Mago Berries."

He covered his mouth, blinking slowly. "Wha — H-how did I know that?!"

"Know what?" asked the waitress.

"Never mind. I'll take a *Chili con carne* and the Mago Berries, plus a Diet Dr. Pepper without ice. What about you, Pi—er, Lapis?"

Lapis didn't notice that he was waiting for her answer until a few seconds later, probably due to her staring at him in total shock.

"Oh! Uh, yeah. I'll have sauteed Krabby claws with Nomel Berry sauce, a fresh Tropius fruit, and a Caterpie Cola. Triton would like a steamed Shellder and a water bowl."

"Oshaaaa~!" The Oshawott, apparently named Triton, raised its scalchop in approval.

The waitress noted down the order, thanked them, and made off with the menus, leaving the three of them to look at each other in stunned silence.

"What. The heck. Was that about?" asked Falchion.

"What was that about?! You still remember!" replied Lapis. "I knew you'd escape, too!"

Falchion blinked at her again. "Me? Escape? I just happened to end up here at the PPC via a plothole."

"Of *course* you did. We both did. Right, Andrew?"

His eyes widened, and he slowly turned his head away. He hadn't realized until now that Lapis really *did* look familiar, and not just because she was partnered with his adopted sister.

He made to stand up. "I'm sorry, Pi, but could you tell the waitress to cancel my order? I need to head back to my RC—"

She grabbed onto his arm. "N-no! Andy, don't leave me again! It's been two years and I didn't even know you were here all this time and—"

"I've only been here for *one* year. And my name isn't Andy. It's Falchion."

He looked down at her just in time to notice her and her Oshawott's matching, very convincing "sad Growlithe puppy" expressions. Falchion sighed, sat back down, and buried his face in his hands.

"What's happening to me?" he moaned. "I'm literally talking with my stupid old OC..."

"Hey, I'm *not* stupid!" Lapis was now visibly annoyed. "At least not compared to my partners, anyway."

He rounded on her. "Dissing my sister in response to me lamenting that one of my old shames is literally right next to me, huh? At least Sarah was a *decent* character, and she still is."

Triton frantically tried to find a way to defuse the argument, but the two agents were already verbally tearing into each other.

"You weren't so well-written yourself, for your information!" Lapis shot back, a cross-popping vein appearing in her hair. "The circumstances of your birth made *no* biological sense, you dragged me into a ridiculous subplot, and Ash and Aang and all the other canons were just *there!*"

"Lapis, I'm only going to say this once. *I'm not Andrew!* Not anymore!"

"Then why do you look just like him?"

"This is a disguise. And no, my true form is *not* some dragon-winged shameless self-insert who rides on the coattails of people on deviantART like some leeching hack with no sense of respect!" He inhaled deeply before adding, "*That* ship has sailed, thank you!"

"Oh, so you *were* Andy, weren't you?" She grinned smugly, baring her pointed teeth. "Denial is the proof, you know!"

Triton glared at Lapis this time, shaking his head slightly. But unbeknownst to the others, a whole host of memories were already flooding back to Falchion by now. But what could he tell her?

He turned away, huffing. "Why should I care if I was? The Andy you knew is gone. He *should've* been gone."

"Then why am I still arguing with him? Is it because of the author thing? If you *aren't* Andy, are you *still* a self-insert or not?"

He thought for a moment and then sighed. "I *am* a self-insert, but I'm *not* Andy. I'm not even human in this life. I'm a Skarmory, and I just use this disguise when in public so I won't have to worry about accidentally disemboweling someone while trying to shake their hand. Among other things."

There was a long moment of silence. Then Lapis asked, her voice trembling slightly, “T-this life? Does t-that mean... Is h-he...”

He looked at her, his expression regretful, and nodded slightly. “...Yes.”

The dam burst right then and there. Tears welled up in Lapis’ eyes, and then she slumped over the table. Next moment, Falchion began hearing her muffled bawling.

Triton decided he’d had enough. Opening up Falchion’s bag, he fished out the collar with his Universal Translator and snapped it over his forehead. Then he hopped onto the table, waddled over to the male agent, and dope-slapped his face with his scalchop, before speaking in the voice of a little boy.

“Nice going, genius! You made my master *cry*!”

Falchion looked at him in surprise, but then his face twisted in regret. “So, what? I wrote both her *and* Andy. She would’ve known anyway sooner or later.”

“Yeah, but coming from you? How could you be so insensitive?!” Triton dope-slapped him again. “You’d think you’d treat her with a little more respect than that!”

“She was as much of a Sue as Andy was back then!” Falchion rubbed his cheek, scowling. “It’s a miracle she escaped, let alone survived for three years without anybody noticing her.”

“For your information, you birdbrain, other agents *did* notice! They saw worth in her, and they still do! Think about it: what does she have that Andy didn’t?”

Falchion looked first towards Triton, then to the still-weeping girl. He had to admit, the Oshawott had a perfectly valid point — unlike Andy, Lapis *had* developed as a character.

Of course, there were a few things in her favor. For one, she wasn’t an author insert. But she *had* looked up to the character who *was*.

While Falchion was thinking of all this, Triton had moved over to console his trainer, pressing his whole body against her head.

“It’s okay, Master... It’s okay. He may be gone, but, well... for what it’s worth... I’m still here for you.”

“Y-you... c-can... talk?” Lapis asked, looking up at him.

“Oh, this?” He pointed at the device strapped to his forehead. “This is just a Translator. I had to borrow it from Falc— er...”

They had both turned to Falchion, who was gazing down at his lap. Looking up to see her red-faced and teary-eyed, he instinctively handed her his napkin.

“N-no thanks, I’ve got my own,” she replied, before taking it and blowing her nose with a loud HONK.

“I’m so sorry,” said Falchion, reaching out and patting her shoulder.

“A-and I’m sorry, too, for snapping like that... I thought you really *were* him... that he, well... hadn’t...” She buried her face in her hands, sobbing again.

His expression turned thoughtful. “Can I tell you guys something?”

“Hmm?”

“Did Sarah tell you about my first mission? The one that led to her being recruited?”

“Oh! The badfic with over eleven continua?” asked Triton.

“Yeah, that’s the one. That one had a self-insert of my author, too. And sadly, I wasn’t any better in *that* fic.”

"Terrordactyl?" asked Lapis, wiping the tears from her cheek. "Sarah said you were the one who killed—"

"She helped, sort of," replied Falchion. "She was just as happy to find out the truth as you were."

"I heard."

"You know what I told her?"

"Yeah?"

"Even though Terrordactyl was a goner, I was still willing to be her brother. I still have his memories, including the time I spent with her. And now, well, I have Andy's memories, too. So I'm still willing to be the kind of friend he must've been to you — just, well, better-written."

"But it's not the same! You yourself said that you aren't—"

"Andy? Yeah, I know. But I don't have to be. I think it would be better for both of us if you got to know me as I really am, as my author really is. I may still be a bit cocky, but I *try* to respect how people feel. And I certainly don't have dragon wings, either... Tch, go figure."

Lapis' eyes widened again, and she smiled for the first time since her outburst. She would recognize that saying anywhere.

"Look," the disguised Skarmory continued, "I understand that our author made a *lot* of mistakes back in the day. But the thing is, he's learned so much since then. And you know what, so have you."

She looked away, blushing a little. "You mean you... You still have faith in me? After everything that happened?"

He smiled and stroked her hair. "I've never *not* had faith in you, for two reasons. First, we've only just known each other in person for like what, ten minutes or something?"

"Seven minutes and thirty-four seconds, and counting," said Triton.

Falchion laughed. "And second, I completely understand how you feel, having to live with your past like this. Though in my case, I've got multiple histories, some unwritten, some... well, you know. I can say with confidence that I've got it worse than you!"

It was Lapis who laughed this time. The mood improved, Falchion and Triton were happy to join in — and in the case of the former, allow her to hug him a second time.

The waitress arrived just then, wheeling a cart with everyone's food. Triton scampered back to his seat, hastily taking off the Translator and putting it back in Falchion's bag.

"Your food, everyone," the waitress chimed, handing out the plates and drinks to each of them. She also passed a stack of extra napkins to Lapis and added, "For you, I believe. I'm sorry for your loss, miss."

Lapis squeaked in fright and disengaged from the other agent.

"Don't worry," said Falchion, patting the top of the smaller girl's head. "We've already sorted it out."

The waitress nodded. "And you would do well to get a Translator of your own," she added to the Oshawott. "I think it'll be quite helpful in the future. Now, enjoy your meal!"

The agents and the Pokémon thanked her before she headed off. Before Falchion could bolt down his meal, though...

"Hey, uh, do you think we could do a toast or something before we eat?" asked Lapis. "I've always wanted to try one."

“Oh?” asked Falchion. “What would you like on it, Nutpea butter or jelly?”

She chuckled. “Not *that* kind of toast, Winged Twerp! The one with the cups!”

“Pffft, I *knew* that already! I was just trying to be funny... Oh, alright.”

The Oshawott tried to pick up his water bowl, found it much bigger relative to his body than a glass, and pouted. The agents, of course, held their drinking vessels up with ease.

“So, to your author?” asked the blue-haired girl.

“To *our* author, Lapis,” Falchion replied, grinning, before they clinked their cups together. “And as they say in Kalos, *bon appétit!*”