

The Ballad of Elly Sketchit

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Elly and Tracey, and how they met, etc. This is great - I'll just be adding chapters as I redo them.

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It was raining in Pallet Town, Kanto. Pools of muddy water ran everywhere about the dirt roads, splashing furiously when the rain came down in bursts. One large facility that was set apart from the others seemed the hardest hit. What looked almost akin to a moat was flowing past the door of the building, sloshing grime and small rooted-up weeds at the faceplate that read:

"Professor Samuel Oak: Pokemon Laboratory #001"

All the lucky pokemon were holed up in the forest nearby or in nice, warm homes as revered pets. But here in the Professor's yard a small pair of lavender eyes glowed faintly from a badly dented, overturned pail that had been blown there by the wind.

"It's been raining for a week now, Professor."

"I know, Tracey."

"Is it ever going to stop?"

A sigh and a soft rustling sound was the only answer. Everything was dark within the room, but the glow of a half moon from between storm-drenched clouds made it just bright enough to see a large shape moving about. A smaller figure was slumped disconsolately at the window.

"And...there. I knew I'd find it eventually." There was a bright flash of light and suddenly the room was lit up as if from a large candle. Lights flickered on the wall, showing an older man with greying hair dressed in a lab coat and khaki pants. He was smiling and holding an open pokeball.

"Char!" The tiny charmander he had released was smiling broadly, glad at the chance to show off. The flame on the end of its tail was just enough to see a few feet in each direction.

"Now, charmander. Let's go find some candles!" Oak walked over to the smaller form by the window. As they approached, the flame lit up the tanned features of a teenager kneeling with his arms crossed on the windowpane. His chin was resting on the sill and he was staring out at the wind-swept meadow as objects blew about in the gale.

"Professor...it looks like someone's out there." He turned dark, sincere eyes on the older man, who looked surprised at first.

"I don't think - ahhhh, you mean a pokemon." Oak rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Where, Tracey?" He leaned closer to peer outside as well. Tracey flicked a black strand of hair absently away from his face

and pointed.

"There," he murmured, "over by the clump of bushes." He frowned.

"I think that's just a pail."

"Charmander?" The tiny fire lizard hopped up onto Tracey's shoulder. The boy staggered and almost fell over.

"Hey, you're too big for that!" He yelled. One of the creature's little paws grabbed the red headband Tracey wore and dragged it down over one eye. Luckily, by pinwheeling his arms he managed to stay upright. The charmander didn't seem to notice. He was chattering excitedly and pointing outside.

"Charmander seems to believe you," Oak said.

"Yeah," Tracey agreed. He fixed his headband and stared more intently. "I can see what looks like a pair of eyes and a very small shape. Maybe it's a flying pokemon that got dragged down in the wind."

"Maybe..."

"I have to go help it." Tracey leaped up, dislodging the charmander, which uttered an unhappy squawk. "Sorry."

"Char-char." It stuck its tongue out at him and pulled down an eyelid.

"Cut it out." Tracey dug in his shorts pocket for a pokeball and found one. He ran a finger over the symbol on the front and then smiled. "Here we go. Marill!" He started out for the main door as he tossed the ball, and very soon a small blue mouse was sitting by his feet.

"Marill!" The rotund little creature burred happily. Its tail bobbed back and forth, as if it were wagging. Tracey picked it up and smiled at it.

"Marill, it's raining hard outside, but we've got to get to that bush over there." He held it up and showed it where he meant. Marill nodded. "Get it? It's gonna be hard for me to stand upright. I'm counting on you to swim out there and get me whatever it is!" Marill closed its eyes and grinned at its owner.

"If anyone can do it, Marill can," Professor Oak said encouragingly. "Tracey, your marill - " and here he paused as the boy released the pokemon and opened the door, " -- it's one of the strongest I've seen. Those tests we've been doing on it can be augmented by this rescue."

"Really?" Tracey turned about to watch as his pokemon splashed in the muddy water and swam out into the yard. The water mouse grabbed at something, caught it and began swimming back. Tracey cheered as he got closer.

"Rill-rill-rill-rill..." Marill was puffing hard as it neared the Lab. When it got to the door both men blinked. It had dragged the small pail back to its master.

"Wh- what? That was it?"

"<i>Marill!</i>" Sighing in exasperation, it turned over the pail. A wet, furry lump fell at Tracey's feet.

"<i>Vee,</i>" it coughed.

"It's an eevee," Tracey gasped, shocked.

"<i>Veeeee</i>," the little pokemon cried. It was soaked completely through and as far as Tracey could see, was wild - it had no tags or collars on. Such a pokemon was a little harder to find and made a great discovery. Oak patted his helper on the back.

"Good call, Tracey! And good job, Marill." Marill beamed. Tracey picked up the whimpering, sodden lump in his arms, not caring that the pokemon soaked the front of his green shirt. The Professor motioned them further inside. "Close the door and let's help the poor creature."

"Poor eevee," Tracey said sadly. The tiny pokemon was shivering and sniffing pathetically. Cradling it gently to his warm chest, he brought it inside as the door slammed shut behind them. Another gust of wind hit the Lab and the rain started to fall again, heavier than before.

They brought their rescue to the inner part of the lab. A woman in a lab coat was bustling about and talking quietly to herself as they entered with marill and the charmander. Tracey still held the eevee in his arms.

"Ah ...hah!" She triumphantly pulled a lever and all the lights flickered back on.

"Way to go, Koji!" Tracey grinned. The lady turned around. She was a bit younger than the other Professor. Her long brown hair was tied back in a simple ponytail and she wore a pair of stud earrings that matched her bright amber eyes.

"Way to go Zeus, you mean." She pointed at the table behind her, where a large lime colored pikachu with a bit of zigzag fur on top of its head sat. It was zapping at the emergency generator.

"<i>Veeeeeee</i>." The eevee perked up and seemed impressed by the show of electricity. Zeus waved a curious paw at the new arrival.

"<i>Pi!</i>" He called out. All the humans stared silently, amazed. Zeus had come to them from an abusive owner and he hadn't opened up to anyone, even other pokemon. Koji could only get him to do various tasks by letting on that he could show off his skills to impress the others.

"That was amazing!" Tracey grinned, enthused. He laughed boyishly and Zeus snarled to himself. "Sorry, Zeus."

"<i>Chaaaa.</i>" The electric mouse glowered at him.

"Apparently he""s not come <i>all</i> the way around yet," Professor Oak murmured. He smiled and tapped his young helper on the shoulder. "Let""s dry her off, shall we?"

"Yeah! Uh...her?"

"Tsk. Now I know you""re more observant than that." The Professor pointed at the eevee. "Hasn""t she already been practicing her feminine wiles on you?"

"<i>Samuel,</i>" Koji groaned, rolling her eyes. Tracey was blushing furiously, not quite understanding what they were getting at but knowing just enough to be embarrassed. "I""ll help, Tracey," Koji said to break up the moment. She walked over with an armload of towels, but the fox pokemon hissed and wouldn""t let anyone near her but her rescuer.

"That""s not so odd," Oak remarked. "She""s probably scared. Let""s leave them alone for now."

"We""ll be all right."

"I""m sure you will. You know what to do. I just opened up a new bag of food - it""s in the top drawer near the grooming supplies."

"Okay." Tracey didn""t even see them leave. He was too busy towelling off the bedraggled vulpine. Then eevee sighed and rolled over on her back. When he""d rubbed the fur a bit more he noticed a small tattoo on her inner thigh.

"...L4J...#0023?"

"<i>VEE!</i>"

"Waugh!"

"<i>Myaaaaaa!</i>"

"It""s okay! I""m not gonna hurt you! I just wanted to see that. Do you belong to someo-" He was bowled over by a fuzzy tail slapping him in the face. Tracey blew his ruffled black hair away from his mouth and sighed. "You...didn""t like that."

"<i>Vee.</i>" The little one sat with a frown on her features.

"Well, the way you""re sitting tells me you""re angry at me." She blinked at him with those odd lavender eyes. "Surprised I knew that, huh?"

"<i>Myahaaaa...</i>"

"So you""re not owned by anyone."

Frown.

"Tagged for research, then...?"

Bigger frown...and some fangs started to show for good measure, too. Tracey thought quickly.

"You want to be free?" He grinned at the bewildered expression this question caused. Cautiously, he reached out a hand and stroked the eevee's long ears. She sniffed his long fingers and allowed herself to be petted.

"You'd rather be someone's *friend*," Tracey said softly. "Well, if you want, you can be mine."

In the last fanfic, Tracey Sketchit had made tentative friends with a tiny, lavender-eyed eevee he had rescued from a storm. The eevee, in turn, had befriended both the red-headbanded boy and "Zeus", a pikachu with an inflated ego the Professor hadn't been able to tame. Today is a new day, and it starts out as every day at Professor Oak's does...

"Chaa!"

"Ow ow ow ow ow!"

"Chaaaaaaaaa!"

Tracey Sketchit opened his eyes sleepily.

"Time to get up already?" A small bundle under his green nightshirt stirred restlessly as he yawned. A burnt-looking figure darted past the boy's cracked bedroom door, followed by a much smaller one throwing off sparks as it ran. Tracey's new eevee stuck her head out from his shirt collar and gaped at the scene.

"Cut it out, Zeus!"

"Pi...ka...chuuuuuuuu!" The lime pikachu chased relentlessly after the already smoldering Professor. When they passed the door again from the opposite side, he was chuckling wickedly.

"Pi, pi pi pi...!"

"He does that every morning," Tracey murmured.

"V - vee?"

"Yeah. Every morning." He gently lifted the small pokemon out of his shirt and placed her on his pillow. "I have to get showered and stuff." He turned and walked a few steps over to some dressers and began rummaging through. Curious, the little one followed with her eyes, and saw that each drawer he slid open held either green shirts or red shorts. He opened another and she coughed.

"What?" He turned hastily around, a pair of marill-printed boxers dangling from one hand. Tracey glanced down at his hand and blushed.

"Vee, vee, vee..." She whipped her head around, flicking her ears to one side and humming innocently.

"Uh...yeah. Okay." He closed the drawer quickly, but not before she saw more boxers imprinted with a

venonat motif and a neat stack of red headbands. Flushing a bright red color, he headed off into a small side room and closed the door. She heard more drawers opening and closing and water running.

Eevee waited patiently until she heard the water turn off and the flap of a towel. Then she nudged closer to the door and pushed near the knob. The handle turned, and the door opened on one *very* surprised young man.

"*Eevee!*" Tracey gasped. He had a towel wrapped around his waist and his hair was dripping down his tanned shoulders. Eevee sighed and turned her back on him.

"What's the matter?" When he didn't get a response, Tracey shook his head in wonder. "Okay, just don't turn around yet." He dried as fast as he could and threw on his boxers and shorts.

"*Veeeeee...?*"

"Yeah, okay, now." He rolled his eyes. "You're too clever for your own good. You know, with that intelligence and the tattoo on your leg...you just *have* to be a Lab pokemon." Her eyes narrowed immediately.

"What now?" She just growled and stomped out of the room in a huff, swishing her tail at him. "Geez! Is this what all girls are like?" He picked up his red headband and snapped it into place on his forehead.

"*Myaaaa.*" He turned to find the eevee was sticking her tongue out at him from the bed. He quickly finished dressing, talking to her all the while.

"You know if you belong to someone else I can't keep you here." He grabbed a handful of pokeballs and absently slipped them into his pockets. "But...until then!" Motioning with one hand, he led her out of the room.

The breakfast table was set and Koji was moving purposefully about, flipping pancakes on the stove. Tracey sat down and eevee hopped up on a chair next to him.

"Good morning, Tracey." Koji smiled, never taking her eyes off the whirling cakes. She tossed one at his plate and he lifted it up, catching it with an ease born out of practice. She threw another without looking back, but jumped when she heard boyish laughter erupt from behind her.

"What the...?"

Eevee had picked up a plate and caught the other pancake. She now sat demurely in her seat, licking one paw and slyly peeping out of the corner of her eye at the older woman.

"You want syrup on that?" Tracey teased.

"I wouldn't be surprised if she did," Professor Oak coughed from the doorway. He grinned sheepishly at

them all. His lab coat was charred in some places and he puffed out a small cloud of smoke. Koji rushed over to him, concern warring with mirth in her voice as she asked if he was okay.

"Of course."

"*Chyaa.*" Zeus wandered in looking pleased with himself. He sniffed at eevee's plate and she happily offered him half a pancake. "*Pika!*" She hopped down off the chair and ate her meal with him as the humans grinned down at them.

"She's something, isn't she?" Tracey smiled.

"I'll say," a new voice called from the doorway. The nasal tone caused Tracey to flinch.

"Hello, Gary," he groaned.

"Gary!" Oak bounded over and placed an arm around his grandson's shoulders. "How are you? We thought you wouldn't arrive until later this week!"

"Much later," Tracey whispered to himself. He disliked the other teen because he always had to try to be better than everyone else. This included Tracey, and the last time he had been here he'd had to battle him every few minutes. Eevee had finished her last bite of pancake and now stared mistrustfully at the spiky-haired stranger.

"Say," Gary said, ducking out from his grandfather's shoulders and elbowing past the older boy, "Is that *your* eevee?"

"Tracey rescued her from that large storm we had," Oak said. He helped himself to a few of the pancakes and sat down.

"So it's yours now?" He bent further down, staring intently into her large lavender eyes.

"Not really," Tracey confessed. "She's not in a pokeball or anything, if that's what you mean."

"Hmmm." Gary tilted his head, causing his brown hair to sway about as he pondered something. His eyes slit in concentration. Tracey grew tense as he realized what was coming. The eevee wandered slowly over to sit near her rescuer's leg, her ears laying back as she sensed his worry. Finally, Gary grinned and snapped his fingers. The amulet he always wore swung and caught the early morning sunlight, causing light to refract all over the kitchen in yellow and blue highlights.

"*Hurrrr...*" Eevee's back had started to rise. She was starting to look more like a Halloween decoration than a pokemon.

"*Pi?*" Zeus stared first at her and then the annoying other human.

"Tell ya what! I'll battle you for it. I need one more so I can complete my eevee team."

"Gary, this pokemon was just rescued from a dangerous situation," Oak intervened. "She may have

attached herself to Tracey."

"Vee!"

"Well, maybe we'll just see if she has or not."

Tracey and eevee followed Gary as he walked into Oak's practice Gym. The larger-sized version of an actual Pokemon Gym was set up like a stadium, with a row of bleachers on the side and a green and red light on the floor. The battlefield itself was a mixture of anything a pokemon trainer might come across. One section was a fair-sized swimming pool, built to look like an actual pond. Rocks covered it on all sides and were sprinkled liberally across the floor to create a rough area on all sides of the small body of water. A little ways from that the rocks gradually became less as it smoothed out into a plain, flat terrain. Plants and trees had been planted on the far side to establish a mini grass and forest area as well.

On the very farthest corner of the Gym, however, was something very different from these somewhat pleasant battling fields. Small pools were standing amidst oversized rocks, tendrils of steam lazily rising forth from the water. Even though the pools were used as hot tubs by the members of the Oak household, for all intents and purposes it was one of the worst battlefields available.

Gary marched steadfastly over to the formidable area and jumped, planting his boots firmly on the tallest rock.

"Come on, Sketchit, and let's see what you're *really* made of this time!" He grinned impudently at the older boy.

"All right!" Tracey called out, sounding more sure of himself than he actually was. He felt around in his pocket and took out all three of his pokeballs. "One on one or...?"

"Yeah! One pokemon against one, if you're sure." Gary seemed to sneer, but it seemed that was his normal expression, so the effect was lost on Tracey. He shrugged.

"Okay." Tracey bent over to talk to the bewildered eevee. She sat with her tail curled around her, staring at him expectantly. "I know I shouldn't have to do this, but you really should go to the most experienced trainer, I guess," he said seriously. "And that would be whoever wins this match."

"...eee..."

Tracey rose up and jumped on top of one of the rocks as well, facing Gary. Professor Oak and Koji had settled down in the stands close by. They appeared to be having a rather animated discussion. Koji threw her hands up in the air at last and simply waited as the two young men faced off.

"You chose the battlefield, Gary, so I get to choose my pokemon *after* you."

"Yeah, but don't go thinking you're gonna get a good advantage!" Gary tossed out his pokeball. "C'mon!" The light flashed brilliantly, then coalesced into a huge furry form. "Arcanine!" Gary shouted triumphantly. The fire dog raised its head and howled thrillingly. Tracey's eyes widened, but he tossed his own ball just as confidently.

Marill appeared, looking about as big as one of the fire pokemon's paws. It curled its arms and uttered a defiant little squeak.

"*Rill!*" The water mouse blinked as it stared up at its menacing opponent. It started to sweat and looked back at Tracey. "*Maaaaaarill!!!!*"

"It's okay, Marill," Tracey called soothingly. "I know you can do it!" On the sidelines, eevee's ears had drooped all the way down. Her eyes were sparkling strangely as she watched the impending battle. The green light flicked on, and Gary was first to shout out a command to his pokemon.

"Fire blast!"

"Marill! Water gun!"

The two conflicting attacks cancelled each other out. Steam rose from the battleground as the fire from the big dog's mouth was put out by the tiny blue pokemon. Marill cheered and narrowed its eyes, trying to look tough. The arcanine shook its yellow mane out and set all four paws more firmly on the ground. It wasn't about to be defeated that easily. After another command, it leapt at marill with paws outstretched, but Tracey had his pokemon withdraw. Marill ducked under the swiping claws without a single scrape. They had now changed places on the field, the water pokemon standing opposite Gary and arcanine across from Tracey.

"That little thing is faster than it looks," Gary grunted. "But I know marills have a low defense. Arcanine! *Swift attack!*"

Tracey blanched. Would marill be able to jump out of the way? Swift attack always hit...and the arcanine was stronger than his little water mouse. One direct hit might be all it would take.

"Marill, bubblebeam! Hide in it!" Marill nodded, and worked up a good jet of frothy bubbles. They spewed forth from its mouth, floating all about and making it hard for the larger pokemon to see. Of course, this also made it hard for *anyone* to see. Everyone heard a thump and a roar, then a skidding sound. Gary strained forward and let out a triumphant yell as he saw his arcanine still standing. Tracey's marill, however, was wobbling around tiredly.

"C'mon, marill! I *know* you can do it!" Marill heard its master and nodded. It used its tail to prop itself up and stared defiantly at the fire dog. Arcanine's tongue lolled out impudently.

"*Whuff,*" it snorted, panting and sitting on its haunches. It let out a huge yawn, exposing razor-sharp teeth.

"*Ma - rill!*" Marill bared its own tiny fangs and twitched an ear. It was weaving a little, and Tracey looked

worried. Gary smiled and bowed his head to his opponent. But before he could give a final command, he heard a surprising sound.

"Arc! Arc!"

Gary jerked upright when he heard his prized pokemon yelp. He took a step back and almost fell off the rock he was perched on as he saw his arcanine thrown across the field. The massive beast hit the ground with a sickening crash.

"What did you..." He stammered, confused. Tracey was standing there with a stunned look on his face. Steam from the pools was lightly blowing the hair on the sides of his face as he gaped at the scene before him. He was pointing, and Gary followed his finger past an equally shocked marill to see the eevee on the field!

"Veeeeeeeee!" Her fur was straight up, and her fangs were bared. The eyes that had so enchanted everyone before were glowing white, obscuring the pupils and giving her a terrifying appearance. She hissed again and waved her tail. Gary gasped. His arcanine was fully disabled. The eevee had stood up for Tracey and won the match for him!

Back on the bleachers, Oak nodded sagely.

"I thought she would make up her own mind," he said.

"You said your grandson was going to win!" Koji chided. She elbowed him and air whooshed out of the Professor in a rush. He flushed a little and sweated lightly.

"Good match, boys!" Oak called out, leaping to his feet and laughing awkwardly. Koji was staring at him, eyes narrowed and arms crossed, from the bleachers. He passed a hand through his grey hair and grinned, closing his eyes and tilting his head towards Tracey. "I guess you found out whether she wants to stay with you or not!"

"Well, there's something wrong with that eevee if she wants to stay with someone that can't battle anyway," Gary sniffed. He had long since recalled his arcanine, and now clipped the ball back onto his belt.

"Now, Gary... Tracey was doing quite well in that match. Especially considering you train for battling more than he does."

"Thanks, Professor." It was Tracey's turn to blush. He flicked a hair away from his mouth and picked eevee up. "I guess it really is you and me, huh eevee?"

In the last fanfic, Tracey battled Gary's arcanine for possession of the lavender-eyed eevee. Marill was faltering after a hearty effort, but at the last second eevee stepped in and beat back the fire pokemon. They seem to have a tentative friendship going now...

"C'mon...stay still."

"...eee!"

Tracey was sitting on the steps of the Professor's Lab. His backpack lay next to him, loaded with new sketchpads and sets of pencils. One of the fresh pads was propped on his knees and he was trying to draw his new pokemon friend.

Eevee was having none of that, however. She twisted and turned in the grass, showing her tail and then her furry stomach. There were noises that sounded suspiciously like giggles coming from the tiny fox as she impudently stuck her tongue out.

"I said stay...oh, the heck with it." Tracey set down his sketchpad and rubbed eevee's belly. The little one coughed lightly and tried to roll back over, but he insisted. Eevee laid her ears back and looked up at him with wildly staring purple eyes.

"Vee."

"Why won't you let me do that? I thought you finally trusted me." He sighed and stood up. Eevee mumbled to herself, then toddled over to his side. She sniffed the breeze and snapped her long ears around in a bored way.

"Hurr...?" Puzzled, Eevee looked back over her shoulder at the forest nearby, frowning a bit. Then her ears shot straight up and her eyes widened. Tracey had been watching her closely and when she flinched he whipped around to look at the line of trees also.

"What is it?"

"Vee vee vee vee!" All the young man saw was a flash of brown as eevee darted with all her speed towards the forest. He stood still for a moment, then caught his backpack in one hand and called out.

"Eevee! Wait for me!" He darted out the main gate and ran as fast as he could.

Once inside the forest, the day seemed muted as it streamed through the trees in varying sizes and shafts of light. It was a lot cooler, too. Tracey slung the straps of his pack fully over his arms and glanced

about. Eevee was nowhere to be found. He scuffed a foot at the small dirt path while peering about and finally spotted her tiny pawprints. Carefully stepping to one side so as not to wipe the trail out, he began to track them as quickly as he could.

"Eevee!" Tracey cupped his hands to his mouth, trying to make his voice more powerful. He kept following the prints but listened as well for any sound that might give him an extra clue as to where she had gone. The forest, however, was frighteningly still. He didn't hear any branches breaking or even a single bird pokemon chirping. No bug pokemon were out, either. Sweating a little, he hurried along faster. He began worrying about Eevee and what she might have gotten herself into.

He was rushing along so fast with his eyes searching carefully on the ground for pawprints, he didn't even see the odd scattering of leaves right on the side of the road. He walked directly onto the small patch and yelped as the ground gave way. Leaves flew everywhere as the young man was caught in a huge net that bounced back, swinging up. It ended up dangling precariously from a stout tree limb some distance from the ground.

"What's going *on*? Let me go!" He struggled, but he couldn't reach the pocket that held his pokeballs. It was then that he heard the voices coming from the far end of the road.

"Let me go!"

"Cut it out! Let me go, you idiot!"

"Why should I? You belong to me." The familiar gravelly voice paused. "The net caught something *e/se*. Stay here."

"Like I have a choice, you mankey! I'm all tied up!"

"Hey!" Tracey called out angrily, his hands balling into fists at his sides. "Let me go, whoever you are!"

"So, what else have I caught?" The growly voice startled Tracey into forgetting where he was. He slumped in the net, gaping at the black uniformed figure that strolled out into the path.

"Butch!" He gaped at the older boy. Wearing full Team Rocket regalia and looking slick and proud, the pale renegade pointed at his prey.

"Of course it would have to be one of the Twerps," he snickered. Butch shook his head, short green hair moving only slightly in the faint breeze. His eyes sparkled with mirth as he turned back to see Tracey baring his teeth in an attempt to show his anger. The result was completely unthreatening.

"You don't know what you've gotten yourself into."

"Wh - what?" Tracey froze again. "Why?"

"Give it up, doodletwerp." He bowed before the stunned boy. "She's mine."

"What? Who? I only came into the forest to look for my..." Tracey blinked. "Eevee?"

"Eevee?!" The Rocket's mouth quirked. He rubbed a hand over his eyes and spoke so low the younger boy almost couldn't hear him. "What *have* you been up to?" If he expected a response there was none, just an angry huff and an odd growl from the tree's other side. Tracey thought he saw a flash of tan fur slip into view.

"You didn't come here to steal pokemon?" He set his jaw and somehow managed to cross his arms. In doing so, his fingertips touched the button of one of his pokeballs. Smiling grimly, he pressed it even as Butch opened his mouth to answer.

"Yes!" It had been the right ball. Scyther flashed into view, hissing and slashing like crazy. It turned around and spotted the man standing there. Butch crouched to one side, reaching for his pokeballs. He swore when he realized he didn't have any with him.

"The one time I don't bring Morpheus..." He edged away from the road but Tracey barked a short command. Scyther cut the net in one quick slash, then eyed the villain across the way again. Tracey shrugged. He got up, dusting himself carefully off.

"Go ahead."

"Scyyyyyyyy!"

"Hey! Ow! Knock that off!!" Butch threw up his hands and ran as fast as he could away from the angry mantis pokemon. Scyther leisurely flitted after him, chuckling wickedly to itself.

In the meantime, Tracey had strolled cautiously around the tree he'd heard the woman's voice come from. He expected to find a rich lady that the Team Rocket boy had tried to rob, but what was his surprise to find the ropes bitten through and his Eevee sitting there! She had a strange look on her face but seemed happy, nonetheless.

"Did you really belong to..?"

"*VEE*." Eevee pawed the dirt and kicked some back over her shoulder at the retreating Rocket. Tracey shook his head.

"That tattoo..." But Eevee was running towards Oak's Lab again and he could only start along after, thinking hard at what had happened. The tattoo was something a Lab or Breeder would place on a prized pokemon. Team Rocket had once boasted they had a Breeding Center - and Butch had been one of the Rockets in charge. Could his Eevee really belong to Team Rocket?

In the last fanfic, Tracey's Eevee had run off into the forest. Tracey followed and got caught in a trap - and who had set it? None other than Butch of nefarious Team Rocket fame. He claimed "she" was his and the tattoo might prove to be a certain organization's Breeding Center numbers. If they were, it could mean only one thing...

Dinner was subdued that night. Tracey didn't want to find out that Eevee was registered to another, but now he thought he might be able to find out for sure. The good young man wanted to obey the law, but he didn't want to surrender a pokemon that trusted him and had become his friend back to a home she ran away from in the first place. The others didn't question him much; Oak was off in his Lab researching and Koji let the boy eat in peace. She simply set the plates down and then held up a hand when he started to clean up after he was done.

"I'll do it tonight," she said quietly. "You go on. Get some rest."

"Are you sure?" He looked earnestly at the good woman and she nodded.

"Of course."

"Mwee." A light tug at his sock startled Tracey before he set off in the direction of his bedroom. He found Eevee lightly pulling on it with one paw, the other waving up in the air towards him. Her voice was softer and she seemed as upset as he was. He stooped to pick her up and she immediately buried her head in his chest.

"I'm sorry, I don't want to frighten you," he murmured as he walked down the hall. Eevee purred faintly, letting him know she was listening. "I just don't want to do anything wrong." She made a funny little sound and he paused before opening his door.

"What?"

"Ssss."

"Please don't hiss at me. I know you ran away from someplace." He went in and shut the door behind him. Eevee immediately leapt onto his bed and curled her tail around herself, staring intently at him the whole while. Tracey was at a loss. He went into the bathroom to get ready for bed, his thoughts full of the little pokemon. He knew Professor Oak would want him to do the right thing, but what was the right thing in this case? He was fairly sure her attitude told the tale of some kind of neglect or abuse. She certainly hadn't acted like she wanted to go back with Butch even if he *did* own her. Tracey knew he'd have to look tomorrow - get up early and check out the pokemon database in more depth than he had before. The prospect was unexciting.

He stood in the bathroom a moment longer, staring at his reflection distractedly. Two piece pajamas had given way to a simple pair of boxers as he grew older, and though his chest was still smooth he had a faint gathering of downy hair on his chin. He ran a finger along this, wondering how long it would be until he needed to shave. Most guys his age did already.

"Vee?" Eevee was seated at his side. He looked down, hardly startled by her sudden appearance. Nothing she did surprised him much anymore; it was almost as if she were human under that furry skin. Tracey pondered that for a moment.

"If you could speak things would be a lot simpler," he sighed. "But I'll have to take you back to your owner or prove you were abused somehow." He shuffled out the door, the fox pokemon following close behind. When he flopped onto his bed she seemed to consider something briefly, staring up at him. Tracey looked down at her for a few good minutes before tapping his headband thoughtfully.

"You never drop your eyes," he murmured. Professor Oak had taught him that while pokemon were treated by kind people as equals, they still couldn't hold a person's gaze. The pokemon would always look elsewhere first. Now Tracey twisted around until he was laying on his belly facing his furry friend. He started to grow sleepy before long and still she sat and stared. Her large violet eyes were almost hypnotizing, and, Tracey absently thought, quite pretty. He wondered aloud again how anyone could mistreat such a beautiful pokemon. Eevee whuffed under her breath and leapt up beside him, finally breaking eye contact to nudge his hand.

"Want me to pet you?" He blinked, surprised. Being careful to move as slowly as possible, he lightly ruffled the fur on her head. The little brown fox ducked her head. She almost seemed to be blushing...but of course that couldn't be. "Wha - did you hear something?"

"Scy!" A swift blast of wind whipped by and there was a cold blast of something that hit them both. Eevee had time to spot the grizzled-looking bug pokemon chuckle to himself as he sped out the door.

"POPS!" Tracey yelped. He reached up and gingerly touched his damp face. "Oh great, he threw ...he threw something from the lab at us? What?" He held a hand up in front of his face. It was yellow and sticky, and although uncomfortable didn't smell bad. But it was still unpleasant, and he made a terrible face.

"Ugh."

"Vee." Eevee seemed to agree. She had her paw across her eyes in resignation.

"Sorry," Tracey apologized. "I promised him I'd train him today and he's a little upset, I guess." He made a face. "I know he wouldn't toss anything bad at us, but it's nasty anyway." She nodded.

"Mwee." She seemed a little miffed.

"Well, let's go get cleaned up," he murmured. He picked her up and carried her into the bathroom. Yawning hugely, he leaned over and ran the water in the large tub. It was huge, more like a hot tub than a bath - and it ran deep. Tracey muttered something to himself about old bugs that liked to play practical

jokes as he searched for what he needed. He found a brush and emptied several various concoctions onto its stiff bristles before laying it carefully down on a shelf beside the running water. When he motioned Eevee in she sniffed his hand curiously and stared.

"It's usually for me, yes. But it's too late for me to be walking the hallways."

She purred and gladly sank down into the water with a contented sigh, paddling to stay afloat. As she relaxed she watched Tracey sit on the edge of the tub with his back towards her. Her ears flicked and eyes grew wide when he started to remove his headband. Then he removed his sneakers and socks. The pokemon calmly observed while he pulled his green shirt over his head, disturbing his lanky black hair quite a bit in the process. Delightfully roughish-looking, he stood and put his hands to the waistband of his red shorts. His movements were quick and economical as he removed those and his briefs.

"I don't believe Pops did that. What's *wrong* with him?" Tracey groaned. "Well, you first." He stepped into the water and grasped her gently but firmly in both hands. Eevee mewed with alarm.

"*Eee!*" She squirmed momentarily, but Tracey shook his head, hair swinging.

"No...just be still so I can clean you. You can't tread water the whole time." He paused and settled her on one knee. "Um...and please don't scratch," he begged, blushing a little. Eevee quieted down immediately, her ears laid back. Tracey rubbed the shampoo and conditioners briskly into her fur in a no-nonsense way, lathering her thoroughly and completely. When he felt she'd been soaped enough, he let her sink under the water to rinse. She came up quickly, shaking water droplets to clear her vision. His brown eyes flicked across her features momentarily and then she felt his fingers kneading the rest of the soap out of her fur.

"There. You're cleaned off." His voice was thick and low, as if he was thinking hard. Without another word he suddenly dipped underneath the water and emerged, dripping, his eyes closed. He shook the moisture from his face and ran his fingers through his hair, pulling it away from his forehead. Tiny strands of his bangs automatically curled rakishly on either side of his tan face. Eevee was batting at his knee under the water and he laughed. "But now we're both wet." He stood up, water trickling down his clean body, and stepped out of the tub to get the towels. When he turned back he almost fell.

"Eevee!"

Eevee was laying on the edge of the tub flicking her tail across the tattoo on her thigh. Fearing she would fall and hurt herself, he rushed forward but she demurred.

"*Eevee.*" Flick.

"L4J..."

"...*vee*..."

"L...ell. El? How about Elly." Tracey stooped and pointed at the marking. "Is that what you wanted? A name?" The little eevee grinned hugely, showing all her fangs.

"Vwee!"

"Just like Pops." She stuck her tongue out at him. "Well all right - not just." He chuckled as they dried off.

Elly rolled her eyes as they headed back for bed. She was warm and content in that "after bath" way - soft and fluffy (and purring like a little engine). The pokemon was asleep before Tracey clothed himself again and joined her.