

lemonzsauce

... Author's Notes ...

Dear reader,

I go by the pen name j.j. scriptease and I've been writing fan fiction on and off for almost a decade and a half now, predominantly of a lemon/erotica variety. None of the places I've posted my stories on however quite felt like home, whether it be due to the design or structure of the website, the restrictions imposed on saucy content, or anything in between. And thus, I thought it would be neat to have a personalised hub for my fan fiction works.

I teamed up with a developer buddy to create a site called lemonzsauce.com where you can find ALL my literature along with extra goodies - like downloads in PDF format, seeing the artwork that inspired the fics, and subscribing for new story and chapter updates!

The site does cost money to keep up and running. If you enjoy my work and would like to help with maintenance (or would simply like to support me), please feel free to visit lemonzsauce.com/donate to make an offering - no pressure, and it's not necessary at all :) - any amount from a dollar up will be very much appreciated.

Thank you for reading! I hope this piece of writing lives up to your expectations.

- j.j. scriptease

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WARNING

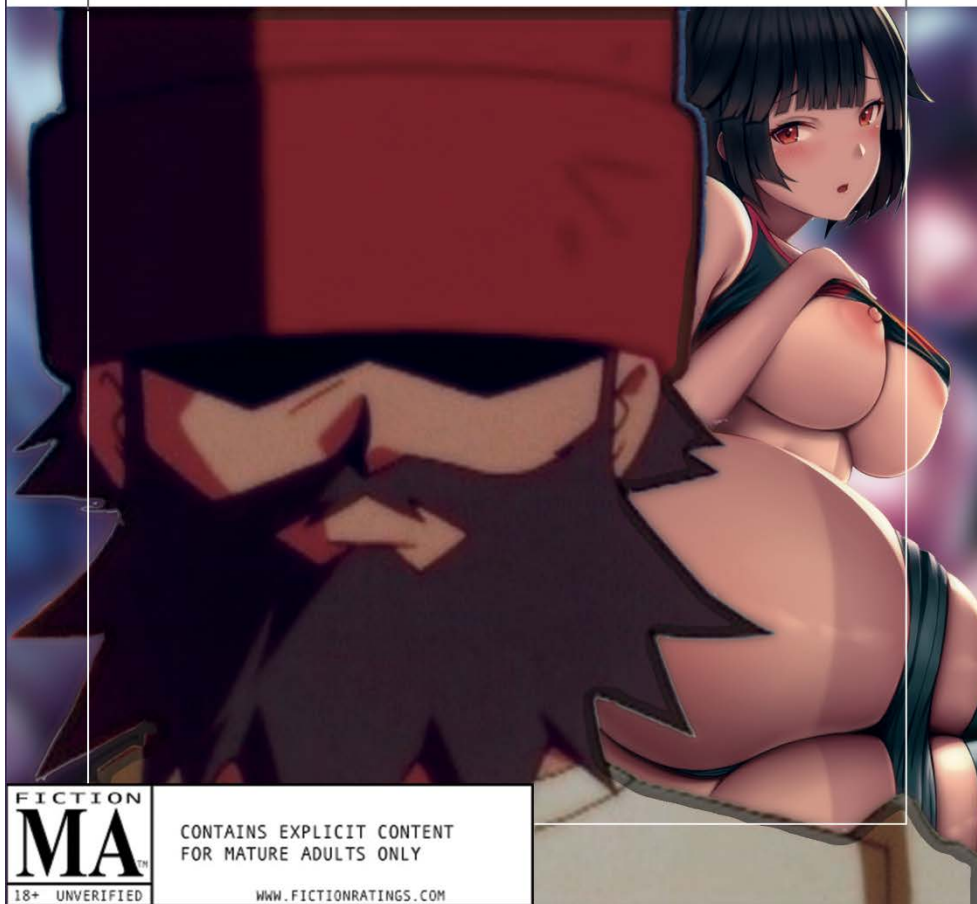
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J. J. SCRIPTEASE

HO'ING FOR HOENN

(A Pokémon Fanfic)

CHAPTER 4



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Synopsis

When May and her father wind up broke and stranded on foreign territory, an untimely wardrobe malfunction questions the boundaries they're willing to push to get back home.

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Ho'ing For Hoenn

A Pokémon fanfic by j.j. scriptease

Chapter 4 – The Time That Got Away

Norman knocked a businessman to the ground whilst dashing through the crowded sidewalk.

“Hey! Watch where you’re going, prick!”

“Oof, sorry!” Norman turned back to help him up when two burly men in black suits came rushing round the corner. They scanned the vicinity through sinister shades, spotted him and then tapped their earpieces. “Oh, shit!” Norman dropped the man back on his arse before hightailing it. “Sorry again!”

One of the bodyguards pointed in his direction and shouted, “There he is!”

“Somebody, stop that thieving runt!” bellowed the other.

Despite the impassioned order, the common pedestrian continued on their languid way, paying little mind to the foreign men clad in expensive suits. Norman wasn’t the first to pickpocket in Toxi City; hell, he wasn’t the first to pickpocket in the last ten minutes. Thievery afflicted the streets as surely as the sun rose and, unless it hit their own pockets, jaded locals turned a blind eye.

Norman had learned to be of the people, to move amongst them, to use their indifference to his favour. In his unwashed, oversized hoodie and knee-torn slacks, he turned no more heads than the common vagrant. He weaved in and out of the throngs while the burly men in pursuit slogged behind shoving and barging past sluggish pedestrians.

Norman lost his pursuers in the human maze then snuck into a dingy alley to catch his breath. He leaned on the wall with an outstretched arm, his cut-off glove pressed against soot-stained bricks. Fatigue burned in his chest and poured out in hot breaths. Next to his

tattered sneakers gathered a puddle of rainwater, alcohol and God-knew-what-else. The stench of garbage and dried-up piss barely frazzled his desensitised nose. He didn't smell so hot himself after a week without a shower and several more without a shave. But that was the least of his problems.

He poked his head around the corner to check on his pursuers. All the buildings in this part of Toxi City looked the same, a mundane reddish-brown with grime and soot feeding on their old brick. The commotion he'd escaped reached his ears from a distance but no sign of the men in black coming his way. As far as he could tell, no one had seen him sneak into the alley except a scrawny Poochyena drinking out of a dirty puddle.

It was the first time he'd have a chance to look at the watch since nabbing it from its snobbish owner. Well, previous owner. Norman fished the stolen goods from his hoodie's pocket. The timepiece sparkled in his dull eyes like nothing this pitiful city could ever produce, a gold trinket in a mountain of filth and rubble. He almost wanted to keep it for himself.

His steal had to be worth an absolute fortune, especially considering he'd nicked it from an infamous figure. The silver-haired Marc Stone bore a striking resemblance to his better-known brother, Steven, but unlike the latter who'd risen to meteoric heights spearheading the family's business and reigning as Hoenn's Champion for a laudable stint, Marc set out to make his own name in his own way. He hadn't inherited Devon Corporation from his father like Steven had, but built his own lucrative mining and excavation company with shrewd determination, although the sources of his funding remained a major mystery. His fiercest detractors went so far as to say the organisation was only a front for other illicit business endeavours. Albeit, whatever the so-called 'illicit business endeavours' might be, no one could say, nor prove.

Norman didn't know the man, had no interactions beyond relieving him of his luxurious timepiece, but harboured suspicions about his legitimacy, too. In the several months Norman had been stranded on Dytopiah, Marc Stone flew in on his private jet and partook in a sit-down with some of the region's high-ranking bureaucrats at least once every four weeks. What business could a 'humble', Hoenn-based CEO have with the fat cats in this region? Hell, anyone frequenting Dytopiah deliberately was already due close scrutiny as far as Norman was concerned.

Nonetheless, it was through monitoring Stone's movements Norman had hatched the masterful pickpocketing plot. And he'd pulled it off without a hitch.

"Over there!" someone shouted.

Spoke too soon.

Norman jumped, startled by the abrupt alert. The watch fumbled from his hands. He jerked his foot reactively and caught it before it hit the ground. Phew! Damn it though, how had Tweedledum and Tweedledee caught up to him? No time to hang around and ask questions. Norman stashed the gold watch and made a break for it down the alley.

"Oi! Hold it you dirty rat!"

The bodyguards chased after him. "That shit ain't yours!" Tweedledum exclaimed. "Hand it over and we might let you keep your teeth!"

"Yeah," Tweedledee said, "we'll only break half your limbs!"

These guys really need to work on their negotiation skills, Norman thought, running full speed ahead without looking back. From behind him, a loud splash caught his ears and one of the men blurting, "Shit! Not my *Gio-V Force Ones!*" Yeah, stepping in puddles of piss was no fun. Norman chuckled, glad he'd never been wearing expensive attire when it had happened to him.

"Alright, enough of this crap!" Tweedledee groaned. "Houndour, go!"

"You too, Houndoom!"

Norman heard two Poké Balls burst open as crimson flashed in his peripheral vision. *Not good.* He ground his teeth; God, how much he hated the Houndour family. Suddenly, an army of paws joined the footsteps pattering at his heels.

"Get 'im, Houndoom!" Tweedledum roared. "Drag his stupid ass back here!"

The other bodyguard ordered his Houndour to bite Norman's ankles. He really needed to get back to civilisation, where commanding pokémon to attack humans could get you thrown in prison. There'd be no justice for a pickpocket like him around here. He heard a hound's grumbling growl at his heels, practically felt its hot angry breath on his calves

before jumping onto a closed dumpster. The Houndour snapped at the back of his pant-leg, tearing off a piece as it skidded to a halt after narrowly missing his flesh.

Heart thrashing, Norman teetered on top of the dumpster as the two hounds snarled and barked at him, venom dripping from their fanged muzzles. When they began to jump and snap at his toes, he very quickly realised his high ground was not nearly as high as it needed to be. Norman swivelled his head, looking for an escape, but there was no way out... except up? Just as Houndoom bounded onto the dumpster, Norman leapt off and grabbed the steel grating of a fire escape like a monkey bar.

He used the momentum to swing his body away and land on a broken thrown-out couch. The flat and worn cushions made for a harsh landing, but still preferable to the snapping jaws of rabid dogs. Norman sprung up off his sore ass and continued sprinting down the alley.

He made it to a wired fence and leapt for it like an Olympian performing a long jump, the longest jump of his life. Norman was pretty sure he would've set a record if any official observers had been present. The bloodthirsty hounds lunged and snapped at his feet while he scrambled to climb the fence. He hoisted one leg over the top rail when Houndour snatched his trailing limb by the pants, dragging him back down a foot.

"That's it, boy! Sic him!" encouraged his scathing master.

Norman groaned and clung to the top for dear life, panic thrashing in his chest as he feared slipping to the ferocious beasts snapping underfoot. As an avid fan of pokémon training, Norman developed a trust and love for the species, a mutual respect that prevented him from inflicting any physical harm on the creatures. But, like many etiquettes eroded by the toxicity of this derelict region, his diplomacy took a backseat to instinct. Norman felt himself slipping and kicked out wildly, wriggling his pant-leg free of the hound's maul after delivering a desperate stomp to its muzzle.

Houndoom whined and recoiled. Norman won the time and space he needed to haul himself over the fence.

He landed on the other side and doubled over catching his breath. For all their ferociousness, neither Houndour nor Houndoom had the dexterity to climb the height of the fence.

Tweedledum was not happy about it. "You think you're so slick, huh?" He snarled. "We're not gonna let you get away with this! Houndour, Hyper Beam!"

What?! Norman's eyes grew wide with shock. *They wouldn't!* But they did.

He turned and ran as the hound began to gather a ball of blistering energy in its maw. A loud clank rang his ears and an explosion of heat threw him to the ground, moments before chunks of wired fence went searing past him. Norman protected the back of his head and kept his face to the ground as shrapnel flew every which way.

He looked back to see the middle of the wire fence had been completely blown off, smoke wisping off the scorched edges. More frightening still, the suits and their rabid canines had nothing in the way of chasing him down. "Fuck," he groaned and struggled to haul his body back to his feet. If this was the end for him, he wouldn't go down cowering to these suited-up thugs.

They set their hounds on him again.

Norman dragged himself forward as fast as he could with a limp. Panting, heaving, hurting, he hobbled into the street carelessly and would've gotten run down by a motorcycle if the rider hadn't screeched to a stop right in front of him. He jumped back, barely avoiding the tires flattening his toes.

The rider lifted the visor on their helmet and he fully expected to be cursed out. He didn't expect to hear, "Hop on!"

"Wha...? Who?" He squinted, struggling to recognise the rider with only her russet eyes and dark fringe visible through the headgear.

"Get on already!" she screamed.

Norman started; between her alarming cry and the growling hounds charging them, he sprung back to his senses and hopped onto the back of the bike. They sped off, leaving nothing but exhaust fumes for Houndoom to choke on. Norman glanced over his shoulder and watched the shrinking men overturn a dustbin and kick a fire hydrant. He grinned through his body aches and waved back a one finger salute.

...

A speeding motorcycle weaved in and out of Toxi City traffic. Norman wrapped his arms around the driver's slender waist and rested his cheek on the back of her helmet. The rushing winds blew the hood off his head and fluttered his long, straggly hair. He would've given anything to keep riding to the end of the city. Litter touched every street, poverty camped on every corner, a choir of car horns polluted the air and the wind dragged in industrial fumes from the west sector. No decent human being could find it easy functioning in a morally bankrupt city where the very act of breathing hurt your health. The corruption had already gnawed at his conscious, and Norman feared it would swallow him whole if he didn't escape. As he leaned against his unexpected saviour, he whispered a feeble "keep going" that got carried away by the wind.

In his state of adrenaline-fuelled panic back at the alley, Norman hadn't had the clarity of mind to identify his rescuer. Now, however, he realised it could only be one person. Hugging her back, he took in her natural scent as confirmation. After fleeing kilometres away from the danger, when the traffic dwindled to a handful of cars, she slowed down the bike to a pedestrian pace and his voice carried over the subtle wind.

"Zinnia," he guessed.

She kept her eyes on the road. "Who else would it be?"

Of course, the only other people he knew in this region were his daughter and Jake, neither of who rode motorcycles. "How did you know where to find me?"

"Wherever trouble goes, Norman follows."

He gave a small laugh. "If I didn't know any better, I'd think you were stalking me."

"I don't need to stalk you. Fate seems to have a way of ensuring we cross paths time and again."

She had a point.

He thought back to when he first met Zinnia at Smuldering Town by complete accident. She had been pickpocketed and unable to catch up to the culprit in the congested market. Everyone ignored her cries to help seize the thief and Norman would've, too; he tended to mind his own business and, while there was no honour amongst thieves, there were

unwritten rules that spoke against thwarting another's score. Before he could even comprehend why he did it, Norman stuck out a foot and the pickpocket fell over it. He retrieved two multi-coloured stones with odd markings on them. What they were meant to be, he hadn't the slightest of clues, but Zinnia was overwhelmed with relief to have them back.

Since then, they'd bumped into each other on several coincidental occasions. Or, seemingly coincidental. On one hand, Norman was burdened with guilt for betraying his kinship but, on the other, he'd earned himself an unlikely ally. Granted, Zinnia remained a mystery to him despite their brief and timely encounters. She was on a mission, that much he was certain of, and that was all he was certain of.

"You're right," Norman said, "we do end up running into each other like this quite often, don't we? Why do you think that is?"

Zinnia had no answer for him. She revved her bike and swerved into a back alley. After several twists and turns down narrow paths, they wound up at a tall, square building with large windows, half of them cracked, shattered or altogether missing. It appeared to have served as an office once upon a time, but now it was crumbling and deserted and turned into Zinnia's place of operations.

Norman sat on a teetering desk in a dark room with panels missing from the ceiling and cables hanging down, broken swivel chairs and fallen shelves spewed across the floor flooded with loose papers. The air was stale and dusty, the windows boarded up, light seeping in through cracks in the wooden beams. Not the picture-perfect safe haven he'd had in mind but much better than being out there right now, especially whilst clinging to the hot piece of property in his pocket.

Zinnia dabbed an icepack on his exposed back and he shivered. "You big baby."

"You try having a Hyper Beam fired right at you."

"I have. More times than I can count."

Norman clicked his tongue. "Show off." Clearly, she had more practice dodging fiery blasts from pokémon than he did.

“In any case, it looks like you avoided a direct hit. A little bit of bruising and swelling, but no burns. You’ll be just fine.” She pressed the icepack on his lower back. “What were you doing back there?”

“What we’re all doing,” Norman said, flinching at the cold. “Surviving.”

“Looks like you might’ve bitten off more than you can chew.”

It was definitely his biggest score to date. “Nothing I can’t handle.”

“If I hadn’t come along –”

“Thank Arceus I have a stalker. What were *you* doing back there?”

She fell silent and calculated her response. “Following up a lead.”

“Right. I don’t suppose you’re going to elaborate on what this lead is all about?”

“When the time is right, the whole world is going to know.”

He furrowed his brow, bewildered, but thought better than to waste his time digging. “Well, that doesn’t sound ominous at all. You’re not part of Team Illuminati or anything are you?”

“I’m part of anything I need to be when I need to be.”

“I was only jok- ah, never mind.”

“Besides nearly getting yourself blown to smithereens, how have things been going for you?” Zinnia asked. “And your daughter?”

My daughter...

May was the only reason he hadn’t cradled himself under a bridge and given up weeks ago. Sweet and innocent in every way, she didn’t deserve to have everything stripped from her, to wind up stranded in Dytopiah while her peers explored their youth and chased Contest Ribbons around the globe. He promised her they would be back home soon. That was seven months ago. Every blood-orange sunrise he witnessed in Toxi City was a glaring reminder of his failings as a father. And yet, somehow, she hadn’t given up on him.

“She’s... doing okay.” Norman reflected on their last rendezvous three days ago. In retrospect, she’d appeared to be doing better than okay, certainly better than him. Over the past four weeks, a little more sustenance filled her gaunt cheeks and her skin radiated the kind of healthy glow he hadn’t seen since back in Hoenn. The upturn in her appearance coincided with her reported upturn in pokémon battling. Over and above fending for herself, his little girl was out there kicking some major tush! To think, she’d ever doubted herself as a Pokémon Trainer. “She’s great, actually. I’m supposed to be meeting her tonight at Skrumpton Steaks. Her treat.”

Zinnia stopped stirring the icepack as though she had to dedicate all her faculties to process what he’d just said. “*The Skrumpton Steaks?*”

“Yeah. Heard of it?”

“Who hasn’t heard of Skrumpton Steaks? Only the second most lavish restaurant in all of Dyttopiah. She must be doing exceptionally well to afford that treat.”

A proud grin connected his ears. “That’s my May! Always been a fighter – just like her old man. Lacked a little confidence starting out but she’s definitely come into her own.”

“I’d say... Skrumpton Steaks. That’s incredible. Nice of her to let you join in on the spoils, too, old man.”

“Hey, I’m not that old!”

“A younger man would’ve gotten away from that Hyper Beam.”

Norman chuckled. “You’re never going to let me live this down, huh?”

“Where would the fun in that be?” She patted the top of his head playfully. “All jokes aside though, you’re a good man, Norman. A great dad.”

Good man? Great dad? Heh. He’d beg to differ. And his daughter probably would, too, if she ever discovered her dear old father had reduced himself to grand theft wristwatch.

“You really think so?” Norman said. He hadn’t felt like it in months.

“Absolutely. I don’t know you all that well but even I can see it. That grit, determination and fighting spirit of hers didn’t just fall out of the sky. Anyone who can make it in this morally bankrupt region for as long as you two have earned my respect.”

Hm, maybe he didn't consider that perspective often enough. He was great at putting up a façade, especially in front of May, projecting this confidence he didn't really have, this notion he knew what he was doing and everything would work out for the best. Sure, he'd survived Dytopiah thus far, but he felt like a fraud by his own standards. Toxi City nabbed a reputable Gym Leader and turned him into a lowly petty thief. May had been doing better for herself in spite of him not because of him. Nonetheless, Zinnia rarely handed out compliments (this was the first he could actually remember), so Norman did his best to accept it gracefully.

"Thank you. I appreciate it."

She smiled kindly. "If you ever need a place to lay low or to hide from the human Muk sullyng this city or just need a breather from all the depression out there, you're free to come here whenever you like. Just, make sure nobody sees you. It hasn't been compromised and I'd like to keep it that way."

"Of course."

She frowned at the sea of papers covering the floor and the broken office furniture scattered throughout the room. "Not very much in the way of creature comforts I'm afraid, but there's a gymnasium on the ground floor right across the kitchen, fully equipped with a dumbbell or two and a half-working shower."

"Ooh, a half-working shower. Is that your subtle way of saying I reek like Muk puke?"

Zinnia shrugged. "Take it however you like." She pressed the icepack on a swell lining his collarbone. "Here, hold this."

As soon as he took over, she disappeared from the room. "Where are you going?" She gave him her favourite response: complete silence. "Right. Why do I still bother asking?" he mumbled to himself.

In the silence of his own company, Norman studied his shirtless form, noting how the streets had chiselled any excess fat from around his waist. Slabs of abdominal muscle took shape and his arms appeared leaner, more toned by the day. Save from the fang marks striped across his right forearm, Norman had done well to avoid scars, often running from any potential altercations. Not that he couldn't hold his own; at over 6 feet tall, he cut a lean,

intimidating figure when he sought to, even more so with the Viking beard jutting from his jaw. He only sought to return home in one piece, with all his teeth intact.

After what felt like hours of addressing his own bumps and bruises whilst scanning the carnage surrounding him, Zinnia made her silent return, announced only by her light footsteps treading the papered floor. “Ah, couldn’t stay away, could you? That’s okay. I’ve been known to have that sort of effect on wome...” Norman’s playful jibe petered into stunned silence when he swivelled his head towards the entrance. “Zinnia... what are you...”

...wearing?

Nothing, he soon discovered, after the cloth wrapping her body hit the floor with a crinkling of paper. Shadows contoured her sinuously slender form, incredibly long legs climbing towards a narrow waist winding into modest humps. A strip of light across her face revealed feline eyes and a wet fringe clinging to her forehead. He gulped down a knot of something. As she sauntered towards him and through narrow beams of light, glimpses of her trim figure filtered in and out of view: small humble breasts... a flat tummy... a triangular patch of jet-black pubes... Norman instantly came alive in the crotch area.

Although devastatingly pleasing on the eye, this uncharacteristic development tethered his excitement a notch. Zinnia, this mysterious Draconid woman who’d shared next to nothing about her life, suddenly appeared before him seemingly prepared to share *everything* about her body. Very curious. She stood between his parted knees, stark naked, dotted in what he presumed was hot shower remnants. Steam radiated from her body and heated his cheeks. He looked down, ashamed to confront her gaze, only to have his eyes drawn to her pierced nipples. Raw excitement pitched a giant tent in his pants, one that wouldn’t go unnoticed by the shadowy temptress before him.

She put her warm palms on his naked chest. He flinched, dropping the icepack off his shoulder. Far from lacking experience, Norman couldn’t remember the last woman to get him this jittery. Sometime long before he married Caroline. Zinnia’s touch felt so foreign, perhaps because intimacy had been as scarce as anything else in Dytopiah. He’d forgotten the caress of a woman, the caress of any woman that wasn’t his wife.

But it all started coming back to him.

Her hands roamed down his hard-bodied torso and the urge to reciprocate her touch itched at his fingertips. He could grab her teeny waist and have her wailing up against the wall in a matter of seconds. There was a lot more to the 'good man' she perceived him to be and once that inner beast tore away from its tethers, not even Norman himself could stop it from getting its absolute fill.

She traced the grooves in his washboard abs and came dangerously close to bringing about her own reckoning. Not a soul would ever find out either, not in the darkness of this abandoned office block. Zinnia wasn't the type to blab about her exploits and he sure as hell wouldn't let anyone know he'd been unfaithful – he didn't need his daughter regarding him a loser anymore than she probably did. Although Norman had no doubt he and Zinnia possessed the tact and maturity to relieve each other without giving themselves away, his conscious stopped him when her hands tugged on his waistband.

"I can't." He seized her wrists.

Zinnia didn't resist. An awkward silence gripped the room. Norman kept his head hung while she stepped back, turned on her heels and walked out the door.

He cursed the moment she was out of earshot. Was he an idiot for passing on free, hot tail? Lord knew he needed a big release after the months of hardships he'd suffered through. No one would've found out! He just turned away his first decent opportunity in favour of a musty old blanket, a cold cardboard box and his trusty right hand deep into the night. Hey, at least he could still fantasise about what could've been. *Dummy!* He smacked his forehead.

But then he remembered his vows. The vows he hadn't betrayed nearing twenty years of marriage. This should've been another proud moment. It *was* another proud moment. Gosh, he was broken in more ways than he realised. Anchoring his thoughts to Caroline helped him reaffirm he'd made the right decision. He'd lost so much to Dytopiah already; he couldn't afford to lose himself, too, or lose everything he'd been fighting so hard to return to in the first place.

Zinnia came back into the room – wearing clothes this time, thankfully. He recognised the black bodysuit and tall shin guards from their first encounter, a sure-fire sign she was in ass-kicking mode. His rejection might've shot him right to the top of her list of

targets. Norman very much preferred his ass un-kicked and thought best not to leave any resentment or awkward air hanging between them.

“Look, it’s not that you’re not a beautiful woman,” he said. “You’re absolutely stunning. Gorgeous. Probably the most attractive woman I’ve come across on this whole stinking island. Er, a little rough around the edges, maybe?” She looked up at him with a cold expression while fastening the plaited twine belt looped in her shorts. “Uh, but aren’t we all?” Norman quickly added with a nervous laugh. “Anyway, what I’m saying is, if things were different, I would’ve been all over you like white on rice. But now, I can’t because –”

“Your wife,” Zinnia said flatly, cutting his rambling short.

“Well... yeah.” One of the treasures he’d been fortunate to keep after the plane crash was the golden band on his ring finger.

“I figured as much.”

And yet, he detected no annoyance in her voice. She spoke as though the topic was just another casual conversation people had over breakfast. “So, you’re not mad? Or offended?”

“Offended?” She stifled a chuckle. “I’m offended you’d think I’d be offended.”

Phew! Thank goodness she took rejection like a champ. “I’m glad you understand.”

“I suspected you wouldn’t let things go too far anyway.”

“Oh? Then why’d you try?” Not that her nakedness had hurt his eyes in any way.

She turned her face to a boarded-up window, speckles of light dotting her visage. “I guess I needed to know if that was the reason fate brought us together.”

“You sure talk about fate a lot. Maybe it’s simpler than that.” He picked up the icepack and placed it back on his shoulder. “Maybe we’re meant to help each other escape this hellhole.”

“I can’t leave. Not until I find the Azure Key Stone. All the signs suggest it’s hidden somewhere in this region.”

“Key Stone?” Those strange rocks she almost got robbed of? “What do they do anyway?”

As if she'd spoken too much, Zinnia abruptly fell silent again and swung a long, white, jagged cape around her shoulders. “If we weren't destined to become lovers, and you weren't destined to lead me to the Key Stone, then maybe...” She tied the cape in a knot over her breastbone. “Maybe I'm destined to meet your daughter.”

“May?” She lost him there. Norman couldn't imagine his daughter getting mixed up with mysterious signs and Key Stones and whatever dangerous business Zinnia got herself roped into. An hour ago, he would've willingly introduced her to May; now he kind of wished they'd never meet. “I don't think she –”

“Don't worry. I'd never do her any harm or allow any harm to come to her.”

“Ah, well, that's reassuring to know.”

She nodded, then whipped around dramatically, cape swooshing behind her. “So long, Norman of Petalburg.”

“Wait, you're leaving?”

“I must.”

“Before you go doing... whatever it is you do, could I ask one last favour?”

...

The motorcycle stopped halfway across a rundown, rusted old bridge. Norman hopped off the back. Zinnia raised her visor and scanned the desolate streets on either side of the highway bridge. Nothing but broken-down cars littered the winding roads. Moss cracked through sidewalks and devoured dead traffic lights and billboards. There was nothing apparent here but ghosts of days gone past. “You're sure this is the place?”

Norman wished it wasn't. “I'm sure.”

“All right,” she said, uncertainly. “Take care. May still needs her father. So keep an eye out for those Hyper Beams – I won't be around to stalk you all the time.”

“Ha! So you finally admit it?”

She dropped her visor and kicked her bike into gear. “Bye, Norman.”

He waved until her rumbling engine quietened in the distance. Nice girl, if not a little on the melodramatic and femme fatale side. You didn't get to choose the kind of friends you made in a place like this though; you were just happy to have any. Saving him a fortune on taxi fare proved enough to cement her place in his good books.

Norman walked down the slope at one end of the rusted bridge. Cradled between its tall, stained piers, a brown-green tarp covered a bulky egg-shaped mass blocking half the road. The roof of the bridge above and non-existent traffic below made for a secluded and spacious refuge. Norman treaded cautiously around the sharp edges of steel wings sticking out from under the tarp. The mass grew and shrunk in heavy, slumbering breaths, and Norman skulked at his quietest not to rouse it.

“That you, Norman?” Jake called out from behind the snoozing mount.

“Nope. It's the hot date you invited over for dinner.”

Jake emerged in a tattered trench coat wearing a huge smile on his face. “You know if I invited a hot date she'd be a lot prettier than your bum ass, right?”

Norman flicked his hair back like a dainty model. “I doubt it.”

“You're a damn fool, man.”

They laughed and slapped each other's palms in a rough and hearty handshake.

“I'm not looking so hot myself these days.” Jake combed his fingers through his curly overgrown beard and sneered at the holes in his filthy shirt. “All this homeless business is really cramping my style.”

“Oh, don't be so hard on yourself,” Norman said. “Your style was never that great to begin with.”

“You know what? I'm gonna let that one go. 'Cause I'm assuming your sarcastic ass didn't come all this way without some sort of good news.”

“Hm. Maybe.” Norman teased a secretive smile, turned and walked away.

“What the- what is it, man?” Jake followed him, on the edge of his toeless shoes.

Norman deliberately ignored him. “How’s Skarmory doing?” He knelt down next to its exposed wing and scrutinised the feathers’ state of disrepair. “They actually look a little better than last time I was here.”

“Yeah, Skarmory be like that. Their wings usually restore themselves on a yearly basis. But, I dunno, man.” He looked down over Norman’s shoulder. “Dunno if it’s because the damage it suffered was too traumatic or because it hasn’t gotten the kind of rich nutrition it needs to heal itself completely. Nothing’s really changed. Skarmory won’t be up and about in the air till we get it those meds and specialist surgery.”

Norman came to the same conclusion and his grim expression said as much. “You might be right for once, unfortunately.” He pocketed his hands and rose to his feet with a sigh. “If only that numbskull hadn’t released a giant fucking steel bird in a cramped passenger plane.”

“Pfft. Hey man, would you rather be Magikarp food right now?”

Honestly, some days, yes. “Speaking of food, you’ll never guess where I’m going to be dining tonight.” He paused just in case Jake did want to guess. “Skrumpton Steaks.”

“The WHAT?!?!? Quit playing, man.”

“I’m serious.”

“No shit? Woosh, talk about a hot date.”

“Er, not quite. May invited me.”

“Word? Damn. Is she turning tricks or something? How can she afford all that?”

“Turning tricks?” Norman scowled. He could take any foul-mouthed jibe thrown in his face, but the slightest remark disparaging his daughter had a way of riling him up to the nth degree. “You know May isn’t like that at all.” Why would he even *suggest* that?

Jake threw his hands up. “I know. It was only a joke, man.” He slapped Norman’s shoulder playfully. “Come on, you two are the only family I got out here.”

It was a terrible joke but Norman could let it slide. Jake was like a brother to him, too. “You’re lucky I’m such a laidback guy.” He hadn’t always been.

“I heard that,” Jake agreed with a nervy chuckle. “Anyway, you came all this way just to rub Skrumpton Steaks in my face?”

“Well, yes. That, and I think I found a way to pay your surgeon buddy’s £42,000 asking price.”

“What, really?” Excitement grew in Jake’s eyes. “How?”

Norman brandished the dazzling wristwatch.

“Holy crap! That looks like it could be worth more than my house!”

“Probably twice as much.”

“Where’d you get it?”

“Oh, just right off the wrist of a certain Marc Stone.”

“Marc... Stone...?” The name instantly drained the excitement from Jake’s face. “You legit robbed Marc Stone?”

“Well, I’m not exactly proud of it but... actually, I kind of am.”

“Are you nuts, man?! Put that shit away.” Jake looked around in paranoia. “One doesn’t simply rob Marc Stone and live to tell the tale.”

“I’m still breathing, aren’t I? The dude’s stinking rich. He probably has a dozen more like it in his underwear drawer.”

“I dunno, man... and your grand idea is to hand it off to some street kingpin for the forty-two grand?”

Norman shrugged. “Something like that. Could probably get even more.”

Jake shook his head, his hopes suddenly a nightmare. “All right, man, look. My advice is you keep that shit to yourself. Don’t let anyone know you got it. Sit on it for two or three months – till the heat on it dies down – pawn it for a hefty bag, *then* come back here and we can discuss how best to utilise the profit.”

“Two or three months?” Norman was taken aback. “Aren’t you sick of this damn region? I don’t know if I can survive another month, let alone two or three.”

“You’re singing to the choir, my dude. But I’d rather get out of here in one piece than in a box, you feel me? Trust me on this,” Jake pleaded. “Marc Stone isn’t the kind of guy you want to risk jumping into bed with. You hear me, Norman?”

“Yeah, yeah.” He stashed the stolen watch back in his hoodie’s pouch. The revelation hadn’t gone at all the way he’d imagined it would. Jake was supposed to be singing and dancing and worshipping him for pulling off the heist of the century, celebrating their soon-to-be return to Hoenn. Instead, he laid down a whole lot of street smarts that dampened Norman’s spirits.

“Now, don’t you go doing anything stupid,” he warned.

“I won’t.”

“Have a lovely evening with your daughter, enjoy the wine and steak then head yourself right to bed, got it? But please, oh *please*, take a shower before you do all that.” Norman sniffed his armpit. Did he really smell that bad? “Oh, and don’t forget to bring back some of that Skrumpton Steaks for your boy.” Jake winked. “Skarmory’s definitely gonna appreciate a bite, too.”

“You got it, man.”

“Remember, nothing stupid.”

“Of course.”

...

Sorry, Jake, if this ends up being stupid.

Norman tugged his hood over his eyes and approached the pawn shop with both hands in his pockets. If anyone looked, he was just another bum wandering the streets. He moseyed past pedestrians without notice but caught the eyes of two spotty teenagers smoking cigarettes outside the storefront, cigarettes they probably got from people like him.

Neither looked older than May, and the taller junkie wore the same league cap Ash had when he first appeared at the Petalburg Gym, only slanted sideways with the League emblem etched out. The other boy bore an ugly scar across the right side of his jawline. Norman averted his eyes from it as they regarded him inquisitively, concerned he might be some nosey adult coming to rain on their parade. They reminded him how grateful he was May and Max never had to grow up in a city like this. Norman had more urgent matters to attend to than parenting this region's youth. He gave a slight nod to communicate his non-threatening presence and they returned the gesture before resting their attention back on their cancer sticks.

Norman approached the clerk in the small, overstocked pawn shop. It hadn't been his intention to visit but the store just so happened to sit on one of the corners leading back to the hostel. Luckily for him, the shop was empty, too, no patrons to overhear his secretive inquiries. What would it hurt to get a rough idea how much he could expect for Marc Stone's snobby watch?

Turned out, it could hurt a lot.

"3,500 Pokédollars?!" he exclaimed, incredulous. "You've got to be kidding me! This is worth at least this entire store. It's an original. Look at it. And you're only offering me 3,500 Pokédollars?"

"Where did you get it?"

"From Marc –" Norman hushed his voice and restarted in a whisper. "From Marc Stone himself."

"From Marc Stone, eh?" The clerk raised a doubtful eyebrow. "Let me see." He brought out some sort of magnifying glass thingamajig from under his desk and scrutinised the gold watch at every perceivable angle. Norman could see the moment he recognised it was authentic when his brow went from creased intrigue to subtle surprise. "Well, I'll be. It *is* an original."

"What'd I tell ya?"

"We'll make it ₳5,000."

Now the man was just trolling him. “You’re going to give me ₱5,000 for a luxury watch worth more than ₱50,000?” That offer wouldn’t even begin to cover Skarmory’s medical expenses.

“Look, if it’s really Marc Stone’s as you say, I’ll be inheriting incredible risk taking it on. For that risk, I have to shave a little off the top.”

“You shaved the whole damn top.”

He shrugged. “Final offer.”

Men like him took advantage of desperate people at their lowest. Norman really must’ve looked the part because the clerk took him for some junkie willing to accept anything to afford his next hit. “Thanks, but no thanks.” He grabbed the watch off the counter and stuffed it back in his pocket.

“₱10,000. If you throw in that ring, too. I cannot do more than that.” Norman stifled a laugh. He’d sell his soul before he sold his wedding ring. There was nothing left to negotiate but that didn’t stop the man trying to rob him of his treasures. “Don’t be so rash,” he said. “Do the right thing. You try any pawn shop in Dytopiah and I can guarantee you will not get a better deal. My offer only stands as we are here right now. You come back two days later and I tell you ₱5,000 again,” he said, as though he had no more control over the price than he did the weather. “Be a man. Do the right thing.”

The ‘right thing’ being getting swindled by this goof? Right. The only value Norman took away from their exchange was that the watch was certainly the real deal and worth every penny he imagined it was. He walked out of the pawn shop ignoring the owner’s desperate pleas, hid his face under his hood, clenched the watch firmly in his pocket and continued on his way to the hostel.

Twilight would soon fall upon Toxi City and Norman needed to prepare himself for dinner with May. Usually, he’d head off to their rendezvous point in whatever happened to be covering his back at the time. Considering the location tonight, and May having already agreed to fit the bill, the least he could do was attempt to look presentable so as not to embarrass her.

Norman splashed water on his face, sponged his underarms, tied his hair in a long ponytail, combed his beard, somewhat, and put on the dress shirt and black slacks he’d

walked out of a thrift shop wearing three days ago, after no one picked up he hadn't paid for them. The pants were a little tight and short, showing more of his mismatched socks than he'd cared to reveal, but hopefully he'd hide them under the table before anyone noticed. He took one last look at the stranger in the cracked mirror then forced himself out the door.

Norman kept looking down at his socks and shoes on the way to the bus stop, half his mind prodding him to turn around and reassess his slapdash attire. She'd understand, right? May had always been reasonable. If he had a full wardrobe at his disposal –

“Hey buddy, got the time?”

Norman started at the unexpected voice so unexpectedly close to his ear. His musings had left room for the skinny kid to creep up right alongside him, though how he hadn't smelt him approaching remained a mystery. “Oh, you gave me a fright, son.” He laughed sheepishly. “The time? Ah, I'm sorry, I don't think I have it on me.” He patted his dress shirt and pants in faux search of a time-telling device. Then he noticed something peculiar about the boy. The ugly scar on his jawline. “Wait a minute, aren't you that kid from –”

A sudden force barged him from behind. Pain exploded in his back and propelled him forward off his feet. He raised his hands just in time to stop his face hurtling into the concrete. But a swift kick caught him in the ribcage, then another floored him. All too suddenly, a hail of angry feet descended upon him from every direction, stomping out any inclination to take on the overwhelming numbers. He curled himself into the foetal position, legs guarding his organs, forearms protecting his face.

Fast and furious feet flew at him all at once, too many to count, though the range in juvenile voices suggested at least three attackers: “Did you get it?”, “Stay down, old man!”, “You sure it's him?”, “Hurry up and get it, bro!” One of the assailants rummaged through his pockets while his co-conspirators kept him busy shielding himself from their spate of merciless kicks. “Holy shit, I got it!” the mugger exclaimed as he tore his grubby hand out of Norman's back pocket and left a worrisome gulf in its place. “Come on, let's split!”

The swarm overshadowing him dispersed in a flurry of footsteps. No one but the cold, hard concrete left to hug. Norman raised his head delicately and peered over his forearms. A hurried trail of dirty sneakers scrambled round the corner. The will to give chase burned within him, but a jabbing pain reduced him to his knees the second he got up. He clutched his side and groaned at his failing body.

The scheming bastards probably made off with his bus fare. When Norman patted down all his pockets, however, he quickly realised he'd lost a lot worse than a few Pokédollars. Marc Stone's prized watch, Norman's golden ticket back to civilisation, his deepest hopes and sincerest desires, gone.

All gone.

Norman balled a fist and slammed it into the sidewalk, and the streets drank the blood seeping from his knuckles. "Fuck."

... TO BE CONTINUED ...

Author's Notes: Thanks for reading! Please help me become a better writer by sending me your feedback. Whether you hated it or loved it, I'm open to hearing all opinions as long as you're genuine and respectful about it. You can drop a review at lemonzsauce.com or hit me up at reviews@lemonzsauce.com. I do my best to respond to all reviews.

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Special credit goes to *zuky* for the artwork that inspired this fan fic cover! As of the time of this writing, you can find more of the artist's work here:

<https://hentaiera.com/gallery/894458/>

As always, thanks again for reading! Have a nice day and take care!

Sincerely yours, j.j. scriptease.