

# ZoruAdventure Prologue: Death of a Hero

This story is 18+

Trigger warnings for gore, blood, mention of puke, mind loss,

The summers at Bright Bay were scorching, which drew Fire types out to the beaches.

Braixen though, had seen the crowds of tourists come and go all her life. She sat at a public bench, nursing an ice cold lemonade, her fur pleasantly soaking up the sun.

She gently shook the bottle in a circle, watching the bubbles fizz over. She frowned into it and went back to crowd watching.

And there he was.

His striped fur glimmered in the sunlight. His gentle but confident voice carried his beautiful laugh. He turned and met her eyes.

The two of them stared at each other and the world stood still for a moment.

Then the moment passed, and he walked up and sat with her.

"Hey, morning!" Arcanine said. "You here to hit the waves too?"

Braixen turned and blushed.

"No, I just live here." She smiled. "Is this your first time? I haven't ever seen you around before."

"Yep, you got me!" Arcanine laughed. "I'm from the other side of the mountain, came this way to do Rescue Team work."

"Oh? You're a Rescuer?" Braixen asked.

"Yep." Arcanine nodded. "Me and Blaziken, who wandered off. We're Team Inferno, but with the work drying up we decided to take a vacation."

"Few places better for it." Braixen giggled. "So you got a place to stay?"

"Uh, not really, haha." Arcanine awkwardly laughed. "He and I were just gonna camp out nearby."

"Mmm, so you prefer the company of other men, is that it?" Braixen teased.

Arcanine burst out laughing.

"Hey, what's wrong with that?" He grinned. "I'm more used to guys but I certainly don't mind a girl as pretty as you."

Braixen covered her face, blushing.

"Aw, shush." She smiled, waving him off.

He laughed in response, his fur shaking majestically.

"Hey, come on!" He said. "You are! I'm not just saying it, you know."

"Well..." Braixen smiled. "If you really have nowhere to stay, I might have some room for you."

"Just me?" Arcanine grinned.

"Just you." Braixen smirked.

"Well, Blaziken won't miss my snoring." Arcanine laughed.

"Oh boy." Braixen giggled.

♂ ----- ♀

Braixen and Arcanine laid together in bed. Arcanine took up the whole bed by himself, so she laid on top of him. He was more than pleasantly fluffy enough.

The two were still laughing over stupid jokes they'd been making all day.

Braixen sighed with comfort.

"Do you think you're going to stick around?" She asked.

"You kidding? I'm thinking of retiring now!" Arcanine laughed. "This is a hell of a life. Getting to loaf around on the beach all day, drink cheap drinks and nap whenever I want!"

"It's pretty cozy here." Braixen giggled. "I've always seen it as pretty boring. You make it sound like paradise."

"It's a paradise with you here." Arcanine looked down at her smiled. "I've never met someone so fun before, or so damn sweet!"

"Oh, please." She laughed, feeling his fur. "A big shot guild hunk like you could have any girl you want."

"Honestly, It's not that glamorous." He leaned back. "Being part of a Rescue Team, you're usually seeing people on the worst day of their lives. Seeing a big guy like me coming to save 'em is great in the moment but once it's all said and done, they want to forget it happened at all. I don't blame 'em, either."

"I think you're a hero." Braixen said, petting his fur. "Putting yourself on the line like that can't be easy."

"It's not." He admitted. "But I try my best anyway. I'm big and strong so not everybody has to be. If things get busy again, I'll go back, but-"

He held Braixen in his paws.

"I'm happy to take the time off with you." He continued. "And hey, if things stay quiet and easy, I ain't going anywhere."

She hugged him back, both of their tails wagging swiftly.

"Well, let's just hope." She smiled.

♂ ----- ♀

Arcanine was woken from his nap on the beach by a soft kick to the gut.

"Get up, you lazy ass." Blaziken huffed.

"We're on vacation!" Arcanine grumbled. "If you won't chill now, when will you?"

"Where the hell were you?" Blaziken folded his arms. "You up and vanished yesterday."

"I met someone." Arcanine rolled over.

"You met someone." Blaziken repeated.

"Yeah." Arcanine scoffed. "You could stand to make some more friends too, you know. We're supposed to be relaxing."

"You could stand to be a little less relaxed." Blaziken huffed.

Blaziken set down a glass bottle by Arcanine's head and sat on his back.

"Let me know if you need help getting that stick out of your ass, buddy." Arcanine laughed, biting the cap off the bottle and downing it.

Blaziken said nothing, drinking from its own bottle.

Braixen walked up, smiling and waving.

"Hey, guys!" She smiled, sitting down beside Arcanine's head.

"Who's this?" Blaziken asked.

"My new friend." Arcanine laughed, sticking his tongue out.

"Of course. A girl. You lucky bastard." Blaziken scoffed, kicking Arcanine's side and standing up.

"Blaziken of Team Inferno. We're Gold Rank and proud of it." He addressed to Braixen, towering over her, but only about as much as Arcanine did.

She looked up with a paw on her hip and a smirk on her face.

"I'm a girl, as you noticed." She said. "Braixen. I part time at a few places around here. Basically any job that needs fire or heat."

Blaziken stuck his talon out and she shook it with her paw. He had to lean down and she had to lean up so it was a little awkward for both, but they laughed about it.

"And you're acquainted with my friend here." Blaziken said, sitting on Arcanine again.

"Yeah, we had fun yesterday." She blushed.

"She's letting me stay at her place for the time being." Arcanine grinned. "Cramped but super cozy!"

"Probably beats the Inn. Damn tourists." Blaziken grumbled.

"Tell me about it." Braixen giggled. "They take up all the space everywhere. At least it means I get plenty of work."

"It's a pretty beach, I guess." Blaziken shrugged. "I'm getting bored to death just looking at it, though."

Arcanine rolled over, bowling Blaziken off his feet as he stood up.

"You want some action, I'll spar with you!" He smiled, taking an offensive stance.

"Seriously?" Blaziken lit up, taking one too. "I thought you'd never offer."

"Boys." Braixen playfully rolled her eyes. "I'll be the ref, then. Go!"

Arcanine dashed at Blaziken who took the opportunity to parry its charge with a flying kick, slashing at his face with sharp talons.

Arcanine took it without flinching, instead biting down on his leg and flailing him around. Blaziken squawked angrily as at last he was sent flying with a rough flick. He screeched and took a different stance as Arcanine rushed again.

This time, he was able to entirely launch Arcanine off his feet with a throw, following it up with a kick to the gut.

Arcanine hit the ground hard, groaning.

"Ough, you actually got me with that this time!" He laughed.

"I've been practising my timing. You tend to leave yourself wide open." Blaziken said, keeping up the stance.

"I compensate with fire! You got fighting to back that up, I'm at a disadvantage there." Arcanine whined.

"You can get a good hit in. I know it." Blaziken nodded.

Arcanine darted again, this time way faster. Braixen and Blaziken completely lost sight of him as his Extreme Speed kicked in and he slammed with full force at Blaziken, knocking it off balance.

"I knew it. Ugh, you hit hard." Blaziken complained. "Fine, I'm going to try my best to counter that this time."

Blaziken got into his defensive stance to try and throw Arcanine again, but Extreme Speed was too fast and instead he got launched backwards, falling onto his back.

"Damn it." He groaned, staying down.

"Arcanine wins!" Braixen shouted.

"You okay, Blaziken?" Arcanine asked, walking over.

"Yeah, I'm fine. How's your face?" Blaziken looked over.

"I'm good. Just surface scratches, no cuts." Arcanine smiled.

"Good." Blaziken huffed. "I've been honing my Aerial Ace."

"It shows." Arcanine nodded, then turned to Braixen.

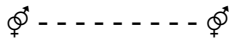
"How was that? Did I look cool out there?" He asked.

"You looked awesome." Braixen said, walking up and hugging around Arcanine's neck. "How about we cool down at mine?"

"Sounds like a plan." He smiled, wagging his tail.

"Nice to meet you, Braixen." Blaziken waved, sitting up.

"You too. Now come on, big guy." She said, her tail wagging too as their twosome left.



Arcanine and Braixen kissed, and then kissed again. The two panted, and Braixen giggled.

"This all going so fast. It's been barely a week since I've known you, but... I really do love you." She blushed.

"Heh, I'm sorry. I don't hold back my feelings. I love you too, I really do. I've never met someone as beautiful, smart, funny and honest as you." He blushed back.

"I've never met anyone as caring, sweet, inspiring and handsome as you." She said.

"So... We're serious, then?" He asked.

"I think so. Boyfriend and girlfriend." She answered, unable to stop smiling.

Neither could he as he pranced on the spot, giggling.

"Girlfriend and boyfriend. I'll try not to let you down, I promise!" He said.

She wrapped her arms around him and kissed him again.

"You won't. You could never disappoint me." She smiled.

He nuzzled her lovingly.

"I got the best girlfriend in the world. Everyone at the guild's gonna be jealous." He grinned.

"Oh, right. How did it go? You said you were going to talk to your boss?" She asked.

"Oh, fantastic!" Arcanine laughed. "Guildmaster Azumarill said what I thought he would. Things have been so slow they won't miss me. Blaziken's able to handle it solo just fine."

"That's fantastic!" She hugged him again. "We can stay here together."

"Nothing could stop us but the end of the world, Braixen." He said.

"Maybe you're right. Go if they really need you-" She said.

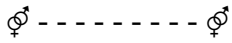
Braixen flicked her tail and turned to a flattering angle.

"But right now I need you more." She growled.

"Oh?" He asked.

Braixen laid out on the bed.

"Oh." He said.



Braixen and Arcanine laid on the grass, The glimmering moon illuminated the two watched the stars.

"I wish this moment could last forever." She said.

"Mmm, it's a good pick. But for me, It's hard to choose from all the time we've spent together." He said.

"What do you think we should do?" She said, carefully sitting up.

"About our future? I guess we can't stay in that cramped little place forever." He said.

Braixen's tail flicked anxiously as she tried to work up her courage. It had been just over a month that they'd known each other, but she was confident about one thing.

He'd be a perfect father. He was loving and doting when needed, endlessly patient and knows when to give a little space.

She'd wanted kids for so long now, and a better opportunity might never come, not with a man as great as him.

Braixen took a deep breath.

"I need to tell you something." She said.

"What's wrong? You're so tense." He asked.

"Arcanine, I'm pregnant." She said.

Arcanine took a while to fully comprehend what she said.

"...Pregnant. Really? You're certain?" He asked.

"Yeah. I am." She answered.

"I guess... we have been going pretty hard at it. It was bound to happen, huh." He said.

Arcanine sat, looking up at the moon, then down at her.

"I'm a father." He said.

She smiled and nodded.

"I'm... gonna be a daddy." He smiled back, getting excited.

"To a little Fennekin." She nodded.

"It's gonna be the cutest little thing ever, with its little face and its little yips... Oh gosh, I'm gonna have to be SO careful... and our little cramped place, yeah we gotta move."



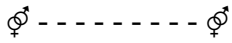
Braixen giggled. He smiled and nuzzled her. She nuzzled back.

"Getting a little ahead of myself, sorry." He awkwardly laughed. But his tail never stopped wagging. Neither did hers.

"One step at a time." She said. "But I think we could be so happy together."

"You, me and our little Fenn." He grinned.

She laughed, so did he. The two laid back down together, enjoying the stars and the possibilities that having a child could bring.



Arcanine walked up the hill where several Pokemon were watching the object slowly falling from the sky far off in the distance.

Blaziken stood there, arms folded with a very serious expression. Arcanine stood next to him.

"What's happening?" He asked.

"Something real big's falling from space." Blaziken answered. "The guild's freaking out, same as everyone else. Some are saying Rayquaza's going to deal with it."

"You're still worried?" Arcanine asked. "She can handle it, can't she?"

"You remember that old story from when we were kids?" Blaziken asked back, turning to face Arcanine.

"Huh? Oh, I think I know. The story about Jirachi, right?" Arcanine answered.

"The same. That after years and years of greed and selfish wishes, it said the end of the world would come for us when the sky fell." Blaziken said.

"I didn't take you for the superstitious type." Arcanine whined.

"Sky's falling. Looks pretty end of the world to me." Blaziken said.

"What do we do?" Arcanine asked.

"Pray for the best and prepare for the worst. If I'm needed at the guild, I'm going." Blaziken answered.

"I don't know if I could do that. I have a kid to think about now." Arcanine whined louder.

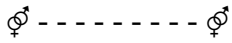
"I understand." Blaziken said. "I'll fight for each of you, even if I must do so alone. But for now, we pray it doesn't come to that."

Arcanine walked down the hill, praying with his whole heart his family would be safe. Both Braixen, and Fennekin.

But he also felt a pain at his heart at the feeling of abandoning the chance to save people who might need it if some huge catastrophe were to happen.

And something deep inside him, some innate instinct, told him the worst was going to happen.

He shook the thoughts off and ran home.



Braixen sat with Arcanine at the top of the crowded hill.

"Are you okay, sweetie?" He asked, nuzzling her.

"I'm fine, I'm fine." She sighed, nuzzling back. "It's really starting to show now, huh."

Blaziken sat beside the two of them.

"Congratulations." He said, his sharp eyes focused only on the falling meteor.

"Yeah, thanks." She said, watching just as closely.

All the muttering on the hill fell silent as a green shape on the horizon appeared. A few Pokemon cheered for Rayquaza.

Rayquaza's brave roar was heard from the hill, inciting more cheering as she charged up and unleashed a devastating hyper beam.

But the meteor wasn't destroyed. All she'd done was unleashed a shower of black goo, and Rayquaza crashed to the ground and out of sight.

The Pokemon on the hill fell silent, not entirely sure what had just happened.

Rayquaza's haunting, anguished screams reached as far as the hill hundreds of miles away, past the mountain range blocking the view of what happened.

Then the meteor finally crashed with a deafening rumble that shook the whole world.

Everyone on the hill was left speechless, and most were left in a horrified daze.

"Did something bad happen to her?" A voice said.

"She's tough. Maybe she'll be okay?" Another asked.

Braixen looked up at Arcanine. She could tell on his face that he was every bit as scared as she was.

"What do we do?" She asked.

"I don't know." He answered.

Blaziken stood up, clearing its throat.

"Everyone, go home." He announced. "Find your families, keep each other close. The Guild will find out what happened, and we'll all get through this."

The voice quieted down, and eventually the hill grew less and less crowded as the scared Pokemon went home.

Then, it was only the three left. Blaziken fell to his knees.

"That was the most difficult thing I've ever had to do." He panted.

"Harder than that fight against the monster house in that ocean dungeon?" Arcanine asked.

"Well, maybe not." Blaziken chuckled. "Top three, at least."

Arcanine smiled at first, but it fell quickly.

"I..." He said at first, but stopped when Braixen grabbed at his leg.

"Go." She said.

"But-" He started.

"I know. I know you want to stay here for me. For us." Braixen said. "But there's going to be Pokemon who need you more right now. Please, don't let me keep you from that."

He sighed and nodded.

"You're right." He said. "If I didn't go, I'd hate myself for it."

He turned to her and kissed her. She kissed back.

"Come back home, okay?" She smiled.

"I will." Arcanine nodded. "As soon as I can, I will."

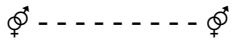
He turned to Blaziken.

"Team Inferno's on the case." He said.

Blaziken nodded, standing up.

"You're a brave woman, Braixen." He said. "We'll stay in touch if we can."

Braixen waved goodbye as the two left, then setting a paw on her bump.



Arcanine rushed into the busy town in sight of the meteor's crater. The whole place had been evacuated of civilians, with only the Guild around.

Rushing up to him in return was the bouncy blue body of his boss, Guildmaster Azumarill.

"Arcanine!" He yelled. "Arcanine, thank the gods you're here! It's... It's a catastrophe!"

"What's happening?" Arcanine asked.

"So much at once." Guildmaster Azumarill puffed, catching his breath. The bags under his eyes were from days on end without sleep.

"That meteor that crashed down, it's leaking this black gooey stuff everywhere." He continued. "It drove Rayquaza insane, and it's also infecting every other Pokemon that touches it. It got into rivers and... Feraligatr's kid is infected bad. Everyone's terrified. We're trying to get all the Pokemon in the towns nearby away from here."

"I want to help." Arcanine nodded.

"Thank the gods." Azumarill sighed. "Blaziken's out evacuating towns too. Head for the ones to the east. Whatever you do, absolutely do not go near the meteor. It's drenched in goo, and anyone who does go near it gets... weird or infected. Don't do it. Don't touch ever the goo. Not under any circumstances."

Arcanine nodded faster.

"I'll route anyone I find through here." He said.

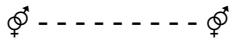
"Great! We're setting up a line of safe spots all the way back to our headquarters, we can take care of it all from here." Azumarill said. "Also, it seems like Mystery Dungeons are safe from the black goo, most Legendaries are taking refuge in there. If it's too dangerous, take them there instead. We can come get them when they're safe."

Arcanine turned to leave, but Azumarill grabbed his leg. He looked back.

"Please." Azumarill begged. "Be careful. Rayquaza's been on a rampage, and I think it's been attacking towns."

"I'll be careful, I promise." Arcanine said.

Azumarill let go, and Arcanine raced across the plains of dying grass.



Arcanine had finally made it to one of the towns on the western edge of the plains.

The sight made his breath catch in his throat.

Every building was smashed to pieces.

Pokemon lay still on the ground, either with deep red claw marks or horrific burns.

The world would have been silent if not for the howling winds.

Arcanine gulped, took a deep breath, and carefully walked past, stepping past all the bodies.

He made a lap around the destroyed town before he started calling out.

"Hello?" He shouted. "Is anyone here? I'm a Rescuer, with the Guild!"

Shuffling came from one of the wrecks. A small pair of eyeballs was leering at him. He didn't move, only turning to look at it.

"I'm here to help, really." Arcanine said.

"Is she gone?" The shaky voice asked.

"It's just me. Is anyone else around?" Arcanine asked.

"It's just me." Drowzee said, stepped out from the rubble while holding its broken arm and limping on its broken leg. "Everyone else is dead. Torn apart or blasted to bits."

"Whoa, whoa!" Arcanine shouted. "Don't push it, that looks bad."

Arcanine carefully lifted Drowzee onto his back.

"My house fell on me. I pretended to be dead." Drowzee muttered. "Everything's gone. Everyone's dead."

"I'm taking you somewhere safe." Arcanine sighed. "There'll be help there."

"Do you mind if I pass out?" Drowzee wheezed. "I'm not doing so good."

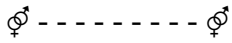
"Try not to be out for too long if you've lost a lot of blood." Arcanine said, carefully galloping away. "We'll be there soon."

He raced across the dead grass that had stretched even farther during that time.

The meteor loomed in the distance, evil to even look at. Arcanine avoided doing so, keeping an eye on where he was running, and the sky in case Rayquaza flew past.

He hadn't seen her yet, and the wind kept blowing meant her Air Lock ability wasn't anywhere close by.

So far, so good.



A helpful Audino helped get Drowzee down from Arcanine's back. Once free of the load, Arcanine laid down in the corpse of what was once a park.

The ponds were fetid and still, the grass was dry and crispy, the trees were bare and dead. But it was still at least safe.

Azumarill found him quickly again and sat down. He looked even more haggard and worn. It looked like his colours were starting to fade, and he had to stifle a cough.

"How... How did it go?" He asked.

"The whole place was destroyed." Arcanine sighed. "Just one survivor, in a really bad way."

"Just one?" Azumarill's voice trembled.

"I was too late." Arcanine looked away.

"You can't blame yourself. We're trying... We're all trying our best." Azumarill whimpered.

Arcanine looked back to see tears in Azumarill's eyes.

"Hey, did something happen?" Arcanine asked. "You're not usually so... miserable."

"It's really bad. It was bad before, but now some of our best are gone." Azumarill sniffled. "Feraligatr totally lost it and left to do something about the water. That set off Serperior's ego, and he left too. Incineroar, Ampharos and Ampharos left to make sure their kids are safe elsewhere. If it wasn't for you and Blaziken, nobody would be saving anyone. It's..."

Azumarill grabbed his ears and grit his teeth.

"It's insanely frustrating." He seethed. "How am I supposed to save anyone when half the rescuers aren't here yet, and the rest all leave?!"

He took a deep breath, letting go.

"I get... having to protect your family." He said. "I have a son too. But every day, countless Pokemon are dying. There's a bigger picture here."

Arcanine nodded, silently processing it all.

"There's one last town." Azumarill sighed. "It hasn't been hit yet, and there's a dungeon close to it. Please. Please, I'm begging you. Save them."

Arcanine stood up, shaking off the creeping doubt.

"I can do it. You can count on me, Guildmaster." He put on a confident smile.

It brightened Azumarill a bit, emotionally and literally.

"Thank you. Thank you, thank you." Azumarill hugged against his leg.



Then he let go, and Arcanine raced off.

♂ ----- ♀

A weight shook from Arcanine's shoulders as he raced into the still surviving town.

He cleared his throat, relieved.

"Everyone!" He announced. "I'm with the guild, I'm here to evacuate you!"

A crowd formed around him, and many Pokemon were rushing to grab the last of their things, but most were ready.

Then a roar filled the whole world.

There was no time to make a choice.

Arcanine turned around, and put the needs of the many before his own.

"There's a mystery dungeon in the forest north of here! Run for it now and you'll make it!" Arcanine yelled at the top of his voice. "GO! NOW!"

The Pokemon fled. They all made it out the town's borders before the green serpentine dragon descended.

Rayquaza flew down, staring face to face with Arcanine.

Arcanine stared back, mustering up all the courage he could.

His mind turned to his family. Braixen and Fennekin. He hoped they would understand what he did. Why he did it.

Being a hero means one thing above everything else.

Sacrifice.

"Hey, Rayquaza." He spoke gently but with audible nerves to it. "Are you feeling okay, in there?"

Rayquaza studied him, watching for weakness. There was no sentience behind her eyes, only feral madness.

"Look, this is bad but it's not the end yet." He pleaded. "Fight it. This isn't you. Come on, snap out of it!"

Rayquaza was knocked slightly from her feral state, grabbing at her head with her claws.

"Tooo.... Lllaaatee...." She managed to grumble out.

"It's not too late, Rayquaza, come on!" Arcanine shouted, sensing progress. "Fight it! You're strong!"

Rayquaza roared. She lost the mental battle, and lost the last of herself trying it at all.

Arcanine tried to run, darting underneath her. She struck, grabbing at him with her sharp claws and sinking them deep into his flesh as she took off, rocketing through the sky.

Arcanine roared with pain as he felt his body start to get ripped apart. Then, with crunching and squelching, he had been torn in half.

He screamed louder, panicking as he felt his guts spill out across the sky. Rayquaza dropped his lower half, then his upper half. He felt the impact to the ground, unable to move as he landed on his back. It would have been excruciating if it wasn't for all the other pain that was setting his whole body alight.

Then it was growing numb, and he felt himself start to slip away, growing colder.

"ARCANINE! NO! NO NO NO!" Azumarill cried, sitting beside what was left of Arcanine's top half. "No no no, please... S-stay with me! Are you... Oh gods, this can't be happening! No!"

Arcanine turned slowly to him and smiled.

"I saved them all... They made it because of me." He mumbled.

"You're... the greatest hero I've ever known." Azumarill sobbed.

Arcanine clung to the last ounce of strength he had left in what remained of him.

"Tell Braixen I'm sorry." He said.

Then, he finally died.

Azumarill clutched his ears, getting more faded.

"No. No. What do we do?" He whispered, before a loud whoosh caught his attention.

A giant glowing red coiling monster soared into place above the meteor. Its giant hand-like appendage reached down, as if to grasp it, but it stopped moving there. The clouds swirled around it, red and angry.

Azumarill ignored it and started to drag his dead friend away.

"I don't have time for this right now." He sniffed, shaking.

♂ ----- ♀

Braixen leaned against the crib, watching the egg.

She had a sinking feeling about something, but keeping an eye on Fennekin's egg soothed her.

Even if it also sometimes reminded her of how much laying it hurt. It was a very fresh memory, and she still limped a bit.

She turned to the knock at the door and hobbled over, opening it to see Blaziken there.

"Oh!" She said.

Then she saw the dour look on his face and her heart sank.

"Oh." She said.

"I'm sorry." Blaziken nodded. "Arcanine has passed away."

She fell to her knees, breath catching in her throat. If Blaziken said anything else, she didn't hear it. Her eyes grew blurry even before the tears filled it.

Blaziken kneeled down, then sat down on the doorway.

"Braixen." He said calmly.

She looked up at him, rubbing the tears out of her eyes.

"...I know. I don't show it, but I felt exactly how you did when I heard it too." He continued.

She nodded, sobbing.

"He saved a lot of Pokemon. It was maybe thirty or so. He was a hero, without any question about it."

Braixen struggled to her feet, sitting by the crib.

"I... I can't..." She struggled to get out.

Blaziken followed her and sat next to her again.

"It's going to be hard for a while. I can't promise to always be there for you, but there's a town growing around the guild's headquarters. You'll be welcome there."

Braixen slowly nodded.

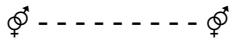
"I'll... think about it." She whispered.

"Please do." Blaziken nodded back, then standing up.

She leaned against the crib. Blaziken took note of the egg, and got up to leave.

"I'm sorry that I can't stay to help you myself. I'll find you if I have the time." He said.

Braixen nodded limply. Blaziken left.



Braixen stared at herself in the mirror.

Somehow, she'd completely lost track of time.

She couldn't remember the last time she ate. She couldn't remember the last time she drank. She couldn't remember the last time she slept. She couldn't remember the last time she went outside.

She couldn't remember when her fur turned from yellow and orange to grey and grey.

She couldn't remember when the voice started whispering to her when she wasn't paying attention.

Right now she pushed it down and tried to ignore not being able to remember anything.

Fennekin's egg shook now and again. She picked it up and held it, barely able to feel the being inside it.

And yet, it felt so warm, and her paws were so cold.

"I... I think I need help." She muttered to herself.

She recalled Blaziken saying she'd be welcome at the town by the guild.

Maybe someone there might know what was wrong with her. At the very least, they could help Fennekin.

She scooped up her egg and mentally buried the voices that whispered to her to smash it, break it, burn it, throw it into the sea.

Something was really wrong, and she cursed herself for taking so long to realise it.

She hoped it wasn't too late.

♂ ----- ♀

Braixen's feet struggled to walk in the right direction. They knew where they wanted to go, and it wasn't where she was forcing herself to go.

Biting down the voices whispering horrible things was growing tiring, and it was getting harder to tune it all out.

Finally, she made it to the gate of the town. A stern looking Empoleon stood in the way, and crossed her arms.

"Yeah, no. Sorry. I can't let you in." She said.

"Why not?" Braixen asked, carefully holding her egg.

"You're... maybe the most infected I've ever seen." Empoleon said. "You're completely monochrome."

"...Infected?" Braixen asked again, more worried.

"Oh, you don't even know, do you?" Empoleon sighed. "The corruption plague. When it's as bad as you have it, there's no cure."

"But I stayed in Bright Bay..." Braixen said. "I don't know how I would have gotten sick."

"It can happen if you lose all hope." Empoleon said. "It's cruel like that."

"What about my egg?" Braixen asked.

"...You laid it before you were infected, right?" Empoleon asked back.

"Yeah..." Braixen answered.

Empoleon visibly mulled it over before sighing.

"Five minutes. Find somewhere to put it, then leave. Take too long, I'll drag you out."

Braixen slowly nodded.

"Thank you..." She said.

"Don't mention it." Empoleon said, not meeting her eyes. "I have my own egg waiting for me at home. Go quickly. I'm watching you."

Braixen hurried along. She was keenly aware that everyone around her avoided her. It didn't matter. She found a quiet spot between buildings and pulled some grass together to make a small nest.

"I'm sorry." She said. "I'm really, really sorry. I tried, but I couldn't hold on."

She set the egg down.

"I hope somebody nice finds you and raises you." She sobbed. "Someone who won't fail you before you even get to meet them like me."

She turned around, taking a deep breath, and taking the first step away.

"Goodbye, Fennekin." She said, and left.

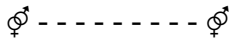
She no longer fought where her feet wanted to take her. With the egg gone, the whispers instead were telling her to keep walking.

And walking.

And walking.

She let herself fall, mindlessly obeying the instructions.





Braixen suddenly woke up to herself from a familiar voice calling her name.

Someone was roughly crushing her shoulders to keep her still. She blinked and found it was Blaziken.

"Blaziken...?" She asked. "What's... happening?"

He stared her dead in the eyes.

"Where is it?!" He shouted. "Where's your egg?!"

Braixen tried to hold onto her newly found consciousness, but it was hard fought.

"I left it behind... at the town you told me would welcome me... but they kicked me out." She sputtered.

Black goo filled her throat, leaking from her mouth. No matter how much she swallowed or spat up, there was infinitely more. She couldn't even breathe past it.

"There's no cure... is there?" Braixen asked.

"No. Not for this." Blaziken sighed. "I'm sorry. I should have done more to help you."

Braixen looked, feeling the iron grip crushing her shoulders, keeping her still.

"You think... I'll hurt you?" She asked.

Blaziken said nothing, but didn't let her go either. Braixen kept struggling to try to breathe, making more sludge spill from her mouth.

"I'm sorry." Blaziken said at last. "There's nothing more I can do for you."

Braixen panted, feeling her mind slipping away again.

"I'm... going away..." She whispered.

Blaziken sombrely nodded.

"Goodbye, Braixen." He sighed.

"Goodbye... Braixen..." She repeated, the last of the light leaving her eyes.

And she was lost again.

Blaziken let go of the zombie and it shuffled away, joining the others as they endlessly circled around the meteor's crater.

He kneeled in place, watching them.

"That's what happens to all of them..." said a voice.

Blaziken stood back up, crossing his arms. He knew Azumarill was standing behind him.

"You're a time bomb." Blaziken said coldly. "It's already taken root in your body, waiting for you to give up."

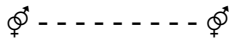
Azumarill held himself.

"How haven't you?" He asked.

"The only things I cared about in this world are already dead." Blaziken said. "I have nothing left but to fight in defiance."

"I'll hold on as long as I can..." Azumarill nodded. "The guild needs me."

Blaziken walked past, ignoring him.



Venusaur strolled quietly through town.

Losing her home was brutal, but at least she and her egg were safe. This new town was assembled pretty quick, but it was cozy enough.

Plus a free new house out of the deal was pretty sweet.

Her train of thought was interrupted by the sound of an egg rocking. She grabbed her egg from her back, but it was totally still. She heard the noise again and followed it to find Fennekin's abandoned egg.

Her eyes widened and she looked around.

"Yo, loser! You left your damn kid behind!" She yelled.

No answer. Nobody else was around.

"What the hell is wrong with you?!" She kept yelling. "You can't abandon a kid like this! Take responsibility!"

Still nothing.

"Last chance, or I'm taking it!" She warned.

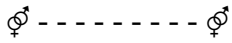
Silence.

"Damn it. Well little buddy, it looks like you're coming with us." She sighed.

She picked up the egg and set it beside her own. It rocked in response.

"You two better get along, or I'll make sure you hear about it." She chuckled.

Venusaur continued her walk. Despite everything, she felt a little better.



The whole world shook. Braixen was knocked to her knees.

She violently threw up a gallon of black sludge, but once she did, it was over.

Her mind was back. Some of the colour had returned to her body. The commanding voice that controlled her was gone.

She struggled to her feet, looking up at the cacophony coming from above.

An Arceus was blasting at something with divine light. Yveltal was locked in a fierce battle far above that with Rayquaza.

She stumbled away from it, following the rest of those cured of their zombification as they fled to safety to the close by town, where an army of guild members took them in.

There were many happy reunions. Azumarill Jr cried into his freed father's arms. Feraligatr picked up his son.

Braixen tripped, falling into the arms of an old friend. Blaziken caught her and carefully held her.

"It's okay." He said. "It's okay. It's over. You're free." Blaziken comforted her.

"How long was I gone?" Braixen asked.

"....Twenty years." He answered.

"I don't feel any older." She smiled.

"I do." Blaziken said, sliding an arm around her shoulders to help her walk. "Come on. Let's get you home."

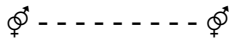
"I was gone so long..." She muttered.

"Don't worry about it." He said.

"Thank you." She said, leaning against him as she struggled to take each step.

"What are friends for?" He said. "It's what Arcanine would have wanted."

Blaziken led her away from the crowd, away from the noise and light of the ongoing battle.



Arcanine woke up in a strange realm.

The world was an endless ocean, but one that he could stand just on the surface of. It reflected the sunny sky, and him.

It all came back to him upon seeing himself. Rayquaza, getting ripped in half, dying in Azumarill's arms.

He looked around. Nothing for as far as he could see in any direction.

"Ah. Guess I'm dead then." He said, circling the area he woke up. "Some kind of heaven. But I guess if I'm the only one here, that means they aren't dead yet."

Something changed in the air. He whipped around to see someone had joined him.

A brilliant dark god stood before him.

An Arceus, but one far different looking from any of the legends. It was fluffy and kind looking. Its very presence felt calming and serene.

Arcanine grinned.

"What's up, Arceus?" He said. "Did I do good?"

The dark god smiled in return, and spoke.

The End.