

“OH!” said Laventon. “Captain Cyllene!”

“Do you need something?” said Cyllene.

“Oh no,” said Laventon, “I was just on my way out. I simply didn’t expect you to be here.” It was late, after all.

“Is that why you’re leaving through my office?” Cyllene suggested.

“Ah,” said Laventon, “that would be ... I mean to say, no. I’m ...” He sighed. “My office door is ... out of action. There was an incident with the little Cyndaquil, and ... I’m afraid it scorched off the door handle completely. I’ve requested a repair, but it’ll be a few days, so I’m having to use the connecting door instead.”

“Is the Pokémon all right?” said Cyllene.

“I’m sorry?” said Laventon.

Cyllene frowned a little. “The Pokémon. Your Cyndaquil. Is it all right?”

“Oh,” said Laventon. “It’s fine. It was just a little startled – I now know not to attempt that particular kind of investigation. At least not indoors, at any rate.”

“Good,” said Cyllene. “Well, see you tomorrow.”

“Yes,” said Laventon. He paused briefly, and then added, “I’m just surprised you’re still here. I thought you’d have finished by now.”

“I’ve got work to do,” said Cyllene, gesturing vaguely.

“Would you like some mochi?” said Laventon.

“I’m sorry?” said Cyllene.

Laventon suddenly felt embarrassed. "I was planning to stop off at the Wallflower," he said. "I could bring you back some, if you're staying late. Or you can come with me, if you like."

"I can't leave my work, I'm afraid," said Cyllene, and she lowered her head and started writing something on the paper in front of her, very quickly.

"Well, I'll see what I can get you, then," Laventon mumbled before hurrying off.

He had left the office a little later than he meant to, and typically brief though the conversation with Cyllene had been, by the time he arrived at the Wallflower there was only one portion left.

"Sorry," said Beni, "those kids were real hungry tonight."

Laventon looked towards the tables, and he saw Akari and Rei; the latter had the good grace to be embarrassed by his gluttony, but Akari was waving at him shamelessly.

He could make something for himself at home, he decided; Cyllene seemed in greater need if she would be working late. He suddenly wondered how often she had to. Her house was near his own, but he rarely saw her in the neighbourhood. It seemed that she always left for work before he got up.

He paid for the single portion of mochi and went back to the hall. Cyllene seemed surprised to see him.

"Your mochi," he said.

“Oh,” she said. “You actually ... right. Thank you.” She took it and placed it in one of the few spaces on her desk.

“Do you always stay this late?” said Laventon.

“Look,” said Cyllene, “I’ve got a lot of work to do.”

“It’s not good for your health,” Laventon blurted out.

She met his gaze. “What?”

He could feel his face getting hot, and wondered if he should maybe try to get out of the habit of wearing his hat indoors. “I’m a scientist. I know about this sort of thing. If you spend all the time working, you’ll run yourself down. You need to take breaks ... er, so they say.”

Cyllene seemed lost for words for a moment, then made a strange noise, and eventually said, “There are more important things than my health. We’re trying to get this operation off the ground, aren’t we? We need to understand the Pokémon so we can learn how to live in harmony with them. My health is a lot less important than the success of this project.”

“I disagree,” said Laventon.

She looked straight at him, unblinking. “Do you?”

He nodded.

“Professor Laventon,” she said, slowly and quietly, “think about this carefully before you answer, if you would. Are you saying that you ... care about my wellbeing?”

“I,” said Laventon, “yes, I suppose I am.”

“And why is that?”

“Well,” he mumbled, “I care about ... about you, Captain Cyllene.”

She sighed. “I’ve heard this often happens in small communities. People can’t choose who they’re working with, and then they attach themselves to the first person they get to know, and ...” She lifted the mochi from the desk and took a rather aggressive bite. “Hmm. Delicious. It does work out sometimes, though, they say.”

“I don’t quite understand,” Laventon admitted.

“Yes, these feelings are new to me as well,” she said. “Now. I do have to stay late tonight, and tomorrow will be the same, I expect, but I should have a window the day after. So. Shall we go to the Wallflower that evening?”

Laventon was speechless. He removed his hat. It didn’t seem to make his face feel any less hot.

“I think the two of us may be developing feelings for each other,” she explained. “It would seem a wise idea to go out and spend some time getting to know each other. Professor, you look as if you’re about to explode. If you’d like a glass of water –” She gestured towards a jug hidden among the papers on the desk.

Laventon leapt for it. “Yes, thank you,” he mumbled, pouring a glass and gulping it down quickly. “I wasn’t aware you saw me in that way, Captain.”

“I rarely show my emotions,” she said.

“I suppose not,” he agreed.

“So, shall we test this hypothesis?” she asked. “I’ll take an evening off in two days’ time, and we can go out for some mochi and see how things proceed from there?”

“Goodness,” said Laventon. “I mean to say ... yes. That sounds splendid, er, good, yes.”

“Excellent,” said Cyllene, and she smiled. “It’s a date. I look forward to it.”