

Blood Red

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The sound of waves crashing against the shoreline slowly roused Red from unconsciousness. His vision was still blurry, his ears pulsating with a deafening ring. Every wave that slammed down felt like war drums pounding beside him. After a moment of lying on the sand, tried to sit up, only to have his body scream in agony as a burning pain shot through his arms, chest and back. He fell back against the sand, breathing heavily while staring up at the clear night sky: The moon was full, illuminating the canopy of stars with a grayish hue. Suddenly, and vividly, images of what had transpired just a couple of hours earlier engulfed his mind and vision:

He was running down the shoreline as shouting voices and battle cries erupted behind him.

Moments later, he was being pummeled by fists, boots and the flat of sword blades from every direction. After what seemed like an eternity, the beatings ceased at last, leaving him lying on his side in the sand.

Red struggled to glance up at his attackers, even though most of them were shrouded in shadow. What he saw made his stomach lurch... and shattered his heart to splinters.

Adria Dubh, Percy the Abjurer and Will Spellworthy were standing over him, as well as other members of the Twisted Claw. After a few seconds, all of them started to disperse except for Adria who lingered for one last agonizing moment.

The next- and last- thing he remembered was the swordmistress raising her boot and slamming it down on his head.

Red's entire body jerked back against the sand as the painful memory ended. His mind couldn't stop asking why, as tears of anguish formed in his eyes. The people he called friends in this universe suddenly betraying him... He couldn't wrap his head around the notion. Just as his body began to relax, he started to hear a strange, gentle sound amid the roiling sea. Working to focus in spite of the pain, he recognized at last a soft singing coming from the water. His eyes grew wide as he struggled to lift his head before turning toward the mesmerizing sound.

The three beautiful Sirens were there, their eyes cast on him as they drifted to the shore. The shredded remains of their clothing rustled gently with the current as they walked with ease, almost as if the strong tide had no effect on them. Red summoned his remaining strength and started pulling himself away from them with one arm. Although he trusted them in the past, the most recent terror he'd suffered now fueled his instincts. His gaze fixed on them as he felt their song pulling at his mind and heart. Only his exceptional willpower kept him from crawling towards them as he focused all his thoughts into surviving this encounter... however, it was futile.

One Siren knelt down next to him and placed a hand on his chest, which brought a wave of soothing warmth over him. Red stopped struggling and settled back onto the sand, staring up at her as the other two Sirens knelt down next to him.

So this is how it ends? He thought, *I will die by the hands of the very people I saved.*

They slowly started reaching their hands towards his chest, preparing to extract his soul from his body.

“(Leave him alone!)” Only Red would comprehend the shrieking cry as a bolt of lightning struck two of the Sirens from out of the night air.

The impact jettisoned them straight back into the sea about, fifty-two meters away from the shore. The last Siren quickly looked up, her eyes wide with shock as a ball of lightning slammed into her chest, catapulting her back to the sea to join her sisters. Red immediately recognized the voice and quickly sat up again, ignoring the pain that burned in his chest. Pika (a Pikachu, but known to Bristol locals only as a magical beast with command over the power of lightning) stood between him and the sea, his short yellow fur bristling at the back of his neck. His tail was raised in an aggressive stance as sparks branched out from the red electric sacks on his cheeks. After a moment, the Sirens recovered from the attack, unscathed but remaining at a distance as Pika continued hissing at them. Red slowly got to his feet, standing in a straight, challenging posture; his gaze never leaving the Sirens until they retreated back under the water.

Pika gave a slight sigh of relief before immediately running to Red, climbing up his leg and standing on his shoulders. The creature rubbed his head against Red's left cheek, and though it stung slightly, it was nothing compared to the pain he felt moments ago.

“(Are you okay, Red?)” Pika asked.

“I'll live,” Red replied coldly.

Pika knew immediately what he meant, electricity beginning to crackle from his cheeks once again as his anger grew.

“(Who did this to you?)”

“The Band of the Twisted Claw.” Pika looked to him in shock as Red turned to face the town of Bristol.

“(Are you sure?)”

Red placed a hand on his right cheek, vividly remembering the brutal strike of Adria's boot.

“I know what I saw, Pika...” He trailed off, his thoughts interrupted by a sudden wave of apprehension.

“Pika, where's Pichu?” he asked, deeply concerned for the younger of his two electric rodent companions.

Pika immediately looked away and hopped off of his shoulder onto the sand.

“(Pichu is dead, Red.)” Pika answered coldly as he looked out towards the sea.

Red's growing fury smoldered within him as he stared back in the direction of Bristol- the city he had tried so hard to protect. He remembered Pichu wiggling out of his arms when they were running through the forest as they were chased by the Twisted Claw. He had hoped that Pichu had made it out alive...

“Where's his body? I need to bury him... perhaps in the fairy glade.” he said softly while turning back to Pika, “They loved him... I'm sure he would be happy there.”

Pika again looked back towards the sea.

“(I brought him here),” Pika explained, “(When the Sirens came, they were sad when they saw his body, Red. They took his soul with them and assured me that they would watch over him).”

Red listened numbly to Pika's words, looking out towards the ever-shifting sea. Knowing this made it difficult to stay angry at the Sirens even in spite of what they'd nearly done.

Just when he was about to walk back to town, he froze.

There, he saw Pichu. Standing there atop the waves as though they were solid ground.

Slowly, the small creature began walking toward the shore. Without hesitation- without thinking- Red started running forward to meet him, sliding onto his knees just before the waterline and holding his arms out for him... But, just as Pichu leapt toward him, his body dispersed into tiny fragments of glowing yellow energy that crackled like miniature fireworks.

Red felt his heart drop as the minute spheres floated around him, weakly holding his hand out to catch one in his palm. He held it close to his heart before releasing it; watching it float away into the endless sea. Red slumped his shoulders and felt tears welled up in his eyes... but even as they mingled with the ocean mist, something else appeared in the corner of his vision, riding the waves before it came to rest beside him.

Red picked up the item- a piece of shredded blue cloth, the likes of which the Sirens garbed themselves.

He turned it over in his hands, and on the back was a message written in some sort of white ink.

We did not wish to take him,

Forgive us.

Next to the message were three crystals, each seemingly filled with liquid that swirled with tiny trails of light. They were as captivating as the song of the Sirens themselves.

Are these... tears? Red thought, noting the shape of them. He tuned back once more, quickly scanning the sea, wondering if the Sirens were watching him... but there was nothing around for miles but churning water. He took the cloth and wrapped it tightly around his right wrist with the message against his skin. As he double-checked to be sure the knot was secure, another surge of waves cascaded onto the shore. This time the water line flowed past him, drenching him up to the knees.

Red gasped... but not from the cold seawater seeping against his skin through his jeans and shoes.

What had caught his attention was a faint red glow coming from his reflection in the water. He quickly looked closer as the water started to recede and realized that his irises were glowing a piercing, vibrant red, and that it seemed to be getting stronger.

He stood as the water retreated from the shore, Pika climbing up onto his shoulder again.

“(I thought Celebei fixed your eye color so the citizens here wouldn't think you were possessed)?” Pika asked as he stared at him for a bit.

“Celebei told me that the spell might not hold up through ‘intense emotional states’,” Red explained bitterly, giving Pika a reassuring pat on the head, “Besides, I hated hiding my true eye color.”

“(But, won't they try to kill you now: The Twisted Claw)?”

“Haven't they already tried?” Red muttered. Pika emitted a low growl as streams of lightning started to flow from his electric cheek sacks, the lightning stemming out to almost thirty meters in length. “But what I don't understand is *why*...”

“(What if it wasn't them at all)?” Red gave him a quick glance and started walking towards Bristol. “(What if they're only being framed somehow)?”

“... Then whoever *did* will see the side of me that Lance, Giovanni and Green have learned to fear.”

From a distance, the lightning crackling from Pika's cheeks and the crimson glow of Red's eyes were but a hint of the rage that built within.

A Pokemon trainer- beloved by the citizens of Bristol and trusted friend of the Twisted Claw- now sought answers to a conspiracy that almost left him dead along the shore. While his heart told him that the Twisted Claw was not responsible, the memories that were burned into his mind and even now haunted his dreams did not lie. They had betrayed him, wanted him dead; he was not going to rest until he discovered the truth and unleashed a hell the likes of which this age had never witnessed before.

“I was a warrior who dreamed he could bring peace.

Sooner or later though, we always have to wake up.” -Jake Sully, Avatar-