



The Phantom Child

Chapter 3: Trigger



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There were two things that flashed simultaneously into Mewtwo's mind. The first was that Lovrina's pikachu wasn't just any pikachu. That was Pikachutwo - one of his closest friends.

What are the odds of that...?

The second thought was that Pikachutwo looked *wrong*.

Very wrong.

His next train of thought came in Joy's voice. *Note the rigid stance and distant facial expression. The specimen doesn't appear to be regularly psyched up for battle.*

Pikachutwo doesn't only look wrong, Joy, she feels wrong. Mewtwo's psychic sense was screaming warning signs when it brushed over Pikachutwo's erratically spiking energy field.

I know, Joy said.

What have I done in leaving my clones without any of my protection? I knew their freedom would come with pitfalls... I shouldn't have stopped watching over them... I abandoned them...

There was a pause, then Joy said softly, *There's nothing more you could have done after Mount Quena. Every being on this earth needs freedom. That is the one thing they asked for, and that is what you - as their creator and friend - gave them.*

<Pikachutwo...> Mewtwo said softly, feeling a million questions flash through his mind; where she'd gone, what she'd done... Yet, there was nothing to say, not when Pikachutwo's deadened eyes looked not at him but through him, completely emotionless.

She doesn't seem to recognise me at all. The thought sent a pang through his heart.

<I cannot battle you, Lovrina,> he said, and relaxed his body out of his fighting stance. <I cannot battle this pikachu.>

"Oh, Kitty and Ziggy have a history?" Lovrina asked lightly. "That's so interesting."

Ziggy?

Sudden rage rushed through Mewtwo. <What have you done with her?> He felt his fingers tingling as if they were unconsciously gathering power for a

shadow ball attack. And all the while Pikachutwo stood frozen in the same position, her faraway gaze somehow boring through Mewtwo; it felt even more painful than the fire in his nightmare.

“Silly kitty,” she admonished. “Don’t look at me like that! Ziggy so came to Cipher willingly.”

<Her name is not Ziggy,> Mewtwo said.

Lovrina’s eyes grew flinty again. When she spoke next her voice was several tones lower. “Actually, it is.”

<Look at me, Pikachutwo,> Mewtwo said.

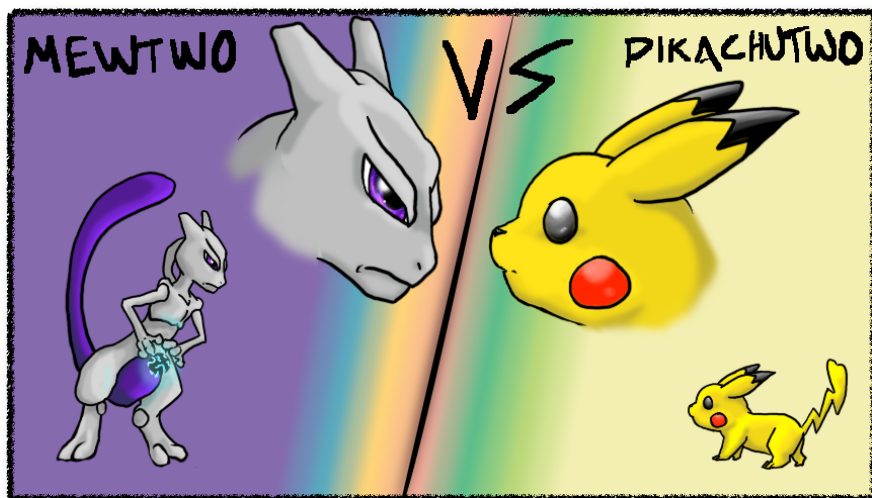
Amazingly, Pikachutwo shifted her focus until it rested solely on Mewtwo’s face. Their eyes met, and what Mewtwo saw in them made his breath hitch. He stared, unable to look away, feeling sudden nausea rising in his stomach; and then in a surprisingly difficult twist of his head wrenched his gaze away.

I can’t look at that.

But I can’t look away.

I need to kill Lovrina.

The third thought came completely out of the blue, yet Mewtwo seized upon it instantly.



He opened himself up to his power, flooding his body and turning his eyes shining azure. Through a haze of brilliant power he saw Lovrina reacting by flinging her hand out in a battle command.

Her voice rang out. "Ziggy, Shadow Bolt!"

Little do you know that I'm not powering up to fight with Pikachutwo after all. Mewtwo brought his hands together and aimed them at Lovrina.

He noticed Pikachutwo in his peripheral vision: charging up what looked like sparks of purple electricity (Shadow Bolt?) and shielded himself in a strong psychic barrier before roaring vocally and blasting Lovrina with a raw psychic energy attack.

She was flung backwards, and landed heavily on the marble floor. She didn't move.

Mewtwo relaxed his arms and let them fall back to his side. <Pikachutw->
Crack.

Sudden pain hit, and radiated. His barrier shield might as well have never existed, given the level of agony. He felt his whole body turn to jelly and crumple, physically and mentally unable to support himself at the barrage.

Inanely, Joy piped up as his head hit the floor, sounding cheery as she related a newly discovered fact. *Psychic shields do not protect from the Shadow Bolt move.*

<Please, Pikachutwo,> Mewtwo gasped, his body still jerking from the electricity, his ears ringing. <Stop.>

Eyes streaming, he watched as Lovrina slowly staggered upright, her knees bent. She began chuckling under her breath. "All Ziggy wanted was to be strong. But now she's more than strong. She's invincible!"

<Please,> Mewtwo said, barely able to form mental words. <Stop. My friend, please stop.> He blinked to clear his eyes and watched as Pikachutwo blinked in synchrony. For an instant - just the briefest of moments - he saw comprehension blossom in them. But then he blinked again and it was gone, replaced with the same faded stare.

She's lost to me. Oh gods, make it stop...

“Ziggy, Shadow Rush!”

Pikachutwo tensed, and leaped towards him like an automaton, burning purple-black flames.

I can't watch this.

Mewtwo closed his eyes.

The shadows took him.

His eyes opened.

For a moment all he could see was the solemn faces of the scientists as they surveyed their experiment. But that wasn't now, that was the past. The past, at least, was over.

So what was he really seeing?

His vision finally cleared. The doctor faded into the form of Lovrina, her gaze just as clinical - the only real differences were the hair and outfit.

Where... am I?

He turned his head and winced at the intense surge of pain that started at his crown and ended up somewhere around his left cheek. Struggling through the pain which bode him close his eyes he looked around and recognised the room as his cloning facility downstairs from the dining area. But it was not the silent,

empty room of before when he had been exploring. Joy was not by the conveyor belt, rather a cluster of white-coats inspecting his equipment and talking loudly amongst themselves.

Lovrina stood before him, looking taller than she had upstairs. Mewtwo realised he was seated on a big chair by an empty wall; diodes plastered to his body and the chill of metal seeping into his skin. Behind Lovrina the cloning machine loomed; hazily fading between omanyte-inspired and wheel-like.

This... this is not the same. Was everything before... just a dream?

“Both humans and pokémon have been witnessed experiencing what’s known as a trigger; a sight, or sound - or generated by any one of our senses really - leading to a highly vivid replaying of a memory, normally one with negative connotations,” Joy said.

<Have you ever experienced a trigger?> Mewtwo asked.

“Yes, Master,” Joy said. But her tone was final, and Mewtwo didn’t enquire further.

Lovrina was suddenly gone again, replaced by the doctor.

“Excellent. We’ll start our testing right away.”

The fear spiked.

<This cannot be my destiny!>

Mewtwo reached for his power. But there was nowhere to draw from. In a panic, he thrashed wildly, feeling the diodes whip around him. A few were ripped entirely from his skin.

The sensation upon his skin slightly cleared his mind, and he halted - almost ashamedly - for losing so much control. There was no doctor. The doctor was dead. It was Lovrina standing there before him impassively. Definitely Lovrina.

“You’re so naughty,” she said. “It’s illegal for pokémon to attack humans during battle. And now I’ve so got a bad headache.”

Mewtwo blinked and looked around quickly, remaining silent. Pikachutwo was nowhere to be seen. Not that that particularly mattered; he couldn’t attack the human or the pokémon with no psychic power to call upon.

“Last chance, kitty,” Lovrina said. “Come along willingly and it’ll be a lot less painful for you.”

<Never,> Mewtwo said. <I will never, ever submit to another human.>

The human girl shrugged. “Ok dokey lokey.” She pulled a gun from her holster and fired it straight at him in one quick motion.

Fwitt.

Mewtwo snarled at the sharp sting at his neck, but didn't even have the strength to raise a hand and inspect the area. It hadn't recoiled or sounded like a bullet shot. *A sleeping dart, then?*

"Sweet dreams," Lovrina cooed, simpering at him. "Peons, it's so time to begin the procedure."

Damn you.

Had he said that aloud? There was no time to wonder; already dark clouds were billowing over his fading vision and his eyelids were drooping.

I don't want to go to sleep...

The young boy trainer stood before Mewtwo in the gloom, his cap hiding his face from clear view. He choked back a sob, and lifted his teary gaze to meet Mewtwo's eyes. "How could you do this?"

Around them: devastation. The entire landscape ravaged and furrowed with the aftermath of a freak storm. Thick smoke rose in several places on the horizon.

In disbelief, Mewtwo took a faltering step backwards.

<But... I... I didn't do this!> He turned a full circle, taking in the sight of the demolished buildings illuminated by the uneasy half-light of a sun shaded by

a haze of dirty grey brown. <You showed me how unselfish humans could be - and so I calmed the storm.>

“No, you just *thought* you did,” the boy said. “You’ve been hallucinating ever since you killed me.”

<You are not dead,> Mewtwo argued.

The trainer chuckled. “Aren’t I?”

He gestured to his right, where a little pink shape lay crumpled and broken in the mud. It was so damaged and misshapen it didn’t even look like it had ever been alive.

“We’re all dead here,” the trainer said.

<No,> Mewtwo whispered, denying both what he was seeing and hearing.

<I never did that. Never that.>

“You did. You even laughed while you did it. You’re no pokémon. You’re a monster - an abomination.”

<None of this is true,> Mewtwo said. <*This* is the hallucination!>

The boy brought his hands to his face and wiped away his tears. “How dare you call this an hallucination? Like you can just pretend it’s not the real world!” Through his fingers, Mewtwo saw his face warp with rage. “Can you call *this* an hallucination?!”

Mewtwo heard a strangled roar from above. He flinched and whirled out of the way, only to see Charizardtwo brutally slam the boy's Charizard into the ground in front of him.

Charizardtwo clambered off his still brother, wings open, and roared flames triumphantly into the sky. "I am strong now, aren't I, master?"

Mewtwo couldn't even answer his pokémon. All he could do was stare at Charizard, eyes open yet unseeing.

Dead.

This has already happened once before.

He heard the words in Joy's calm, cool tone.

This can't be reality. Things like this can't happen twice. I have to be dreaming again - right?

Mewtwo looked around once again, narrowing his eyes in scrutiny. The buildings were now silhouetted, casting long, deep black shadows over the ground. He sniffed the air curiously, feeling the acrid smoky air enter his lungs.

It certainly smells real.

Don't be fooled, said Joy. How can there be red sunset and shadows when only moments before the sky was completely grey?

Just like that the dream broke and began to sag at the edges. The boy trainer's face yawned into a horrifying gape as he raised a hand and started

towards Mewtwo. But even as he did so the entire landscape began to retreat even faster than the boy could move towards him.

Like looking out of a window, the rectangular picture shrunk and shrunk till it winked out completely and Mewtwo was left in darkness.

Open your eyes.

He did so. Lovrina was still standing there before him but the smirk on her face was gone, replaced with an irritated look. “What’s going on - why is it awake?”

Trying to keep his facial muscles impassive, Mewtwo struggled to summon some sort of psychic energy to strike at her - any at all. But still there was nothing. If his powers had been a lake, the water had completely run dry. He was powerless both physically and mentally.

<You’re a fool if you thought the strongest psychic pokémon in the world wouldn’t know how to lucid dream, Lovrina,> Mewtwo said, well aware he was very vulnerable. He needed to somehow bluff his way out, needed to escape. (Could he even fly right now?) <You think to break me with nightmares?>

“Peons!” Lovrina shouted, stamping her foot. “Put the equipment through its cycle again and turn it up to maximum this time!”

“But Miss Lovrina, the specimen needs to be sedated again before-”

“Turn it on! *Now!*” Lovrina screeched, still glaring at Mewtwo.

“Y-yes Miss!”

Mewtwo heard a whirring start up, and the chair he was sitting on shuddered and creaked. Something reminiscent of the feeling of warm sunlight began to bathe his skin, and he looked up, searching for a light source, but there was nothing above him save for the dark ceiling; tiny fire hydrants dotting it in a grid.

I didn't put those in. How long have I been asleep?

<What is it?> he asked, not really caring if he received an answer from Lovrina or not. <What are you doing?>

Legs, stand. STAND! It truly felt like he was paralyzed from the waist down. His legs refused to even quiver.

The warmth intensified, began prickling his skin as if he was being slowly sunburned - not unpleasant but still noticeable. When it intensified further into a slightly uncomfortable feeling, he shifted in hopes it would ease. His vision blurred and shifted. If this got any worse...

<Put me under, you *sadist*,> Mewtwo said, putting as much loathing into his tone as he could manage in his discomfort. <If you won't let me go, at least have the decency to listen to your underlings and make it painless.>

He squeezed his eyelids together, trying to rid them of the excess liquid making his vision swim. When he opened his eyes again Lovrina wasn't standing

in front of him anymore. She was standing over a peon at the computer console, staring at the buttons.

“We are at full power, Miss Lovrina,” the peon muttered.

“Then do it,” she replied.

The human might have pressed a button, or pulled a switch, but Mewtwo didn't see it so much as feel the result in the form of a deluge of sickening pain. He struggled to keep his eyes open in their ache to squint in agony, casting his gaze around him in hope he could identify what was happening.

The energy felt different than what he had endured at Mount Quena. That energy field had been visible. This one was definitely not. Mewtwo couldn't even tell what was making the energy. Perhaps it was the chair.

Why was he being made to endure yet again? Lovrina had not even properly explained what she wanted, besides indicating she might want to use him for battle. Well, Giovanni had tried that - twice - and failed miserably. He wasn't weak. Either Lovrina would die, or he would; but he would never ever submit.

<No matter how much pain-> he said, his words ground out slowly and carefully, <I will never- aargh!>

The pain was different. It didn't sear like the dream fire. It didn't rip like Pikachutwo's Shadow Bolt. It slunk, like poison. Nausea roiling in his belly, he

struggled against the prying paralysis. It was his neck tube and vitals which ached the worst; each wave of pain making the hairs down his spine prickle and stand on end.

It became too much, and Mewtwo closed his eyes.

The girl floated in front of him, bordered in the odd indescribable colour and texture of what closed eyes see.

“Remember me?”

Mewtwo opened them back up again hurriedly. Not such a good idea to sleep it seemed, after all. This time it was another human standing before him, gazing at him in pity.

“She’s out of the room for a few minutes,” the human said. “I... I can’t allow this to happen whilst you’re conscious.”

<You’re as much a monster as she is,> Mewtwo said.

The human flinched and hugged his small notepad to his chest further, his face tight. “I can help just a bit if you’ll let me.” He reached into his pocket and drew out a small hypodermic syringe. “This will make the pain go away, and you’ll sleep.”

Another wave of pain came just after the human had finished. Mewtwo bent over and retched bile in between his feet. He hacked as much of the disgusting stuff he could out of his throat, then spat it out. Raising his torso back to a seated position was a struggle, but once he had done so, Mewtwo fixed his gaze onto the human's eyes and snarled at him. <Get me out of here.>

The human paled further. "I can only do that with this."

<If you can't physically release me,> Mewtwo said, no longer caring. <then just go away.>

But the human stepped forward. Once he was in reach of Mewtwo's arm, he suddenly gasped and staggered, still carefully holding the syringe aloft. "Maximum power..." he murmured.

<I don't want it,> Mewtwo insisted.

He felt the human touch his shoulder and his revulsion grew. <Go away,> he said, then felt a sharp pain at the place. <Damn it, human!> Instinctively Mewtwo psychically shoved him away, but the man didn't even quiver. <She's waiting for me!> he cried. But of course the human would have no idea what he was talking about. <I can't go to sleep!>

"What are you doing?"

It was Lovrina's voice. The human flinched and the needle shook a little, sending more direct stabbing pain into Mewtwo's arm.

“Sorry,” the man gasped. “Nearly there.”

“Get out of there, you idiot!” she screamed.

“Done,” the man whispered in satisfaction, and withdrew the needle. Mewtwo watched as he slumped till they were at eye level; the human on his knees, Mewtwo still prone in the chair. There was a glowing smile on the man’s face, but his eyes were blank.

In horror, Mewtwo felt his own eyes beginning to lose focus, his eyelids closing slowly. *No!* He struggled to no avail. The last thing he saw before sleep took him again was more peons under Lovrina’s command rushing in to the scene and dragging the human’s body away.

The girl was there in the darkness.

“I’ve been waiting for you.”

She teethed at him.

<Who are you? What is your reason for being?> the young Mewtwo asked curiously, wishing for some light and space. He wanted to feel the breeze and fly with it again.

“I am hate,” she said. “I am here to remind you, always, that humans are never to be trusted. Never to be befriended, never to be loved. They are dangerous and always self-serving. Always greedy, never generous.”

Mewtwo frowned. <Are you sure?> he asked. <I remember something, someone...>

The girl leered at him mockingly. “Yes?”

<The human boy!> he said. <He was not self-serving when he sacrificed himself to save the pokémon!>

“When was that?” the girl asked. “What boy? No human would ever sacrifice himself like that. It must have just been a dream.”

Despondent, Mewtwo looked down. <I guess so,> he said, and looked up at her again. <But you’re a human, right?>

“Yes,” she said.

<Then why are you here to remind me about these things? You want me to trust you that humans aren’t to be trusted, when you’re a human yourself! I can’t both trust and not trust at the same time, can I? That doesn’t make sense!>

The girl gaped at him. Then fury overcame her sharp features and she flew towards him. Mewtwo drew backwards in fright but soon realised his stance felt different than it had previously. He glanced down at himself and noticed with surprise that his body was now full grown.

He dodged the girl’s frontal assault and lashed out with a hand as she flew past, catching the hem of her dress. With a jerk her motion stopped and Mewtwo pulled her back the way she had come, taking his other hand and

slamming it into her neck. He pushed savagely, and her body met a solid surface somewhere in the darkness.

He squeezed, and she snarled.

“I’m a part of you,” she said raggedly. “Hate is a part of you. You can’t kill me.”

<Watch me,> Mewtwo said, and squeezed harder.

The girl began to gasp for breath. “This is an action of hate. You are both killing me and keeping me alive simultaneously.”

Mewtwo shook his head. <You’re just a human. You have to die.>

The girl made a sound that could have been a chuckle. She shook her head under the immense strain, and once more teathed at him before shutting her eyes and flowing into the form of young Mewtwo.

When young Mewtwo’s eyes opened he looked up and saw himself throttling him. Tears began to leak from the corners of his eyes. <Stop it!> he cried. <You’re killing me!>

<I can’t!> Adult Mewtwo cried back. <You have to die!>

<But I am you!> young Mewtwo insisted. <And you am I!>

Adult Mewtwo shook his head. <No. You are not me. You are hate.>

Young Mewtwo heaved in a final breath and used it to smile at his future self. <No. That is what you have become.>

<That's a lie,> Mewtwo snarled, and gripped him tighter. As he watched, young Mewtwo turned back into the girl, then into Lovrina. Back to the unknown girl, and back yet again; flicking between the two almost instantaneously. The hair colour changed, yet the expression upon their faces were the same. Mewtwo watched as her mouth began sagging open, gaping for the next impossible breath. Her skin grew pale, and then acquired a blue tinge.

And still her hair flowed from green to pink, then once more to green; and stayed that way. The young girl with green hair raised her bloodshot gaze to Mewtwo's. For once her mouth remained human, but the tongue inside was already darkening black. Mouth agape and still, she spoke solemn words into his mind.

You'll never know my name now.

Mewtwo blinked.

<What do you mean?> Had he known her name once? One that wasn't hate?

The girl didn't reply, instead, her head slumped down onto his aching sore hand. Her whole body turned limp in Mewtwo's grasp.

Oh Gods.

Mewtwo snatched his hand back and released her, but rather than landing on the invisible surface Mewtwo could feel under his feet, she plummeted away from him; ever downwards.

<No...> Mewtwo whispered. <Please! Come back! DON'T GO! Please!> His last word was drawn out in a mental pleading scream. But the girl didn't come back. He'd killed her.

Grief ripped through his chest as the clouds around him shifted and began glowing a deep purple colour. He seemed to hang in that strange world for a lifetime, feeling his heart breaking. She'd gone. He was alone.

Then, without conscious choice or decision, everything abated. The colours around him muted. His pain faded. Mewtwo lifted himself up from his curled up posture and straightened his back.

<I have had enough. I am done. I just don't care any more,> he said, and completely closed his heart to the memory of her.

Mewtwo opened his true eyes.

Lovrina crowed her delight. The sound hit his ears indistinctly. "My XD002! You're so perfect! Stand up for me, pretty kitty!"

Mewtwo stood up.

“Ooh, look at him,” Lovrina said, practically clapping her hands. “XD002, so tell these peons what a good job I’ve done.”

“Let us hear its psychic powers!”

Mewtwo didn’t understand the order. He stood still.

Lovrina’s mouth quirked. “What’s going on? Why won’t he follow orders?”

“Hmmm,” one of the humans said, and lifted himself onto his toes to look closely into Mewtwo’s eyes. “The machine ran without a hitch, though it might have struck the specimen mentally mute. We’ve never run the XD procedure on a telepathic pokémon before, after all. XD002, open your mouth.”

Mewtwo opened his mouth.

The human peered inside with a small torch. “Mmm, everything looks fine.” He ran his hands down Mewtwo’s back and arms, then turned back to Lovrina and nodded. “As far as I can see it’s perfectly healthy.”

“Improved through the power of human ingenuity!”

The human girl giggled. “XD002, close your mouth, you’re so drooling.”

Mewtwo closed his mouth.

“So do we need an enclosure?” Lovrina asked. “Like they did with XD001?”

“Is the new tank ready?”

“No, we’ll have to come up with a cage for it.”

The other human shook his head. “No. We’ve vastly improved upon the machine from the original blueprints, there’s no excess energy that could lead to the specimen needing to dispel any. He looks to be at a perfect energy level, in fact.”

“Yay!” Lovrina squealed. “XD002, sit down.”

Mewtwo sat. Deep in his mind it somehow felt like he was being strangled, but that part of him was too far away for him to reach, and he did not care enough either. So he just sat there as the humans chatted and laughed and celebrated, and kept sitting as their forms and voices drew away from him until he was left in complete silence.

Wonderful... empty... silence.