



The Phantom Child

Chapter 1: Aftermath



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Mewtwo awoke with a violent jerk, his eyes burning a frantic blue as he tried to reorientate himself as quickly as possible. He straightened, and eased his aching back into a sitting position, muscles quivering with the effort after so many long days of inactivity. His throat felt very hoarse. Perhaps he'd been screaming physically, too.

I am hate.

The words made him shiver.

<A dream,> he said. <Just a metaphorical dream. But that girl! Who was she in my real life?> It had been a very long time since he had felt such a rush of adrenaline through his body. Surprised at how shaken up he felt, he struggled to get his mind working at speed as it ran through his most recent memories.

In his dream he'd been very young, younger than he had been when the memories started. And the light was the girl, but then the light had turned to white-hot fire and he had burned. *I am hate.*

This can't be the first time I have seen her, he thought, *but I can't remember!* The word made him recall more of the dream. *What is a remember place?* he wondered.

He glanced down at his hands and fingers. They were skeletal at best now; the thin bones clearly visible through his pale smooth skin. Lifting a sinewy arm, he surveyed it, noting the similar symptoms.

<And so,> he murmured, turning his attention to the rest of his food-starved body. <Am I a pokémon after all? I certainly dehydrate like one.> His body, so unused for a long time, was now besieging his mind with cramps of want. His stomach... how it protested at him!

As he struggled upright, his bones creaked and ached with disuse. <How long have I been here?>

More to the point, he thought, *where am I?*

Soon after laying suspicious eyes upon the dripping rock walls surrounding him, he realised he must have chosen this spot specifically. The only reason, he supposed, was that it was the one place he knew of that was safe and didn't remind him of his cruel ex-trainer Giovanni.

He was never your trainer! You are your own master, and always have been!

<It is a sad day indeed when you must talk to yourself instead of your friends,> he chuckled dryly, well aware he was not feeling all that sane and balanced after the horribly vivid burning sensation which his mind refused to forget, and the malnutrition of his physical body to go alongside it. <The human, of course, has received the better deal: at least he doesn't have to remember chaining a pokémon to psychic shackles and torturing it until near-death because it wouldn't submit.>

More flashes of memory came to him. Other humans - mere youths yet all confident in their abilities to face the world and its many dangers - had helped him. Those same humans he had invited to his island of clones months beforehand, his main goal of striking back against them in retaliation... only because they had belonged to the same species as those that had created him. It seemed ironic, really, particularly since they didn't remember any events from the first time they had met.

<Which is probably the only reason they did lift a finger in aid,> he sighed - a tinge of humour lacing the sigh - and stood up, ignoring the dizzy spell that hinted at an imminent headache.

<So.> Was the girl before all that? Perhaps even before he opened his eyes to the cold gazes of the scientists as they silently surveyed their living, breathing clone? Before that... there was nothing; no memory, merely hints of past dreams;

as intangible as his cryptic thoughts which occurred just before the unconsciousness of sleep. All he was able to conjure up in his mind as he strained for any other clues of her identity was strange random images of a far-off snowcapped mountain - a pale coloured creature twisting through the sky towards it - and strange leafy silhouettes upon the multi-hued water of a sunset.

<She is real,> he spoke, trying to prove it to both himself and the silent darkness of the cavern around him. <She has to be. Never before have I ever dreamed of a human - any human, let alone one this specific.>

You are ignoring the plain and simple fact that she ate you in your dream... came a dry, intellectual voice. *To go searching for her, or more memories of her, may well mean your death.*

<I, and you, know very well that this is something which I must do.> Serious now, Mewtwo reached for his power, feeling it surge through his eyes in an iridescent blue colour. The pangs of hunger and thirst disappeared. <To try and dispute the fact within me will surely destroy me quicker than she may.>

He stepped off the dirt-coloured ledge, and before his knees could collapse with the effort, his psychic energy filled the air and supported his weight easily. <I remember you, now,> he said, determinedly. <And so I come.>

The fierce glow of blue within the deep of his eyes blazed forth, and he was gone; the cave once again silent and empty, the only faint echoes now being the plinking sound of dripping water.

A few seconds later he stood in midair over the ocean, a dark smudge of land just visible in the distance. The cold wind tickling his velvety grey fur, he sought another glimpse of her face in his mind's eye, but with frustration found out that as he tried to recall more of her features - her eyes, her hair - they lost their clarity.

With only a tenuous destination in mind, he flew through the air towards the land in the distance. He remembered flying this way once in anger; in rage even. There was no rage now, but his destination was the same.

Why he felt pulled towards this place, Mewtwo could not guess, but a niggling memory of the old lab, and a memory of a glass cylinder, empty and cold, visited him time and time again as he soared. Perhaps his birthplace would gift him with more fleeting memories, enough to go on and continue searching. Hopefully, it would not distract him with bad memories from his distant past. But then again, perhaps both good and bad were wrapped inexplicably; of the same vine.

New Island. Here, he had been created. Here, he had struck back for the first time. Yet after the young, newly born pokémon had learnt that the world

outside was as cruel and cold as the minds of his creators he had returned to make it his own. And his own it remained - no human knew of (or remembered) its existence now. Yet might it have been rediscovered?

He reached the place, watching as the surf repeatedly battered the rocks, circling down past the still blades of the fans and below the silent hall; eventually lowering himself onto the mossy and very unstable wharf. It seemed what had once been his palace was now a crumbling ruin, yet it looked as untouched as it had been since he had flown away with Mew. *Good*. Better a ruin than a restoration.

Slowly and carefully he padded up the stairs leading from the wharf, feeling strength returning to his muscles with every step. Eventually he stood facing the grand door of the main hall. At his arrival, it slowly creaked open, allowing him to step inside cautiously; his padded feet making barely any sound on the dirty floor.

The great chamber stood dead - its once shining yellow pillars dusty, the chairs strewn and broken about the floor, and some even spinarak-webbed. Occasionally a stray breeze from the now open doors gusted in, causing a brief flurry of movement from the natural refuse on the floor, but apart from that; the silence was oppressive. Even as close as the great hall was to the sea, the sound of the surf was inaudible.

As Mewtwo reached the middle of the spacious hall, his quicker footfalls began echoing eerily from wall to wall. As he grew closer to the podium memories started to surface again, and he grimaced - remembering a glimmer of pink. Irritated, he cast it from his mind. Mew was the last thing he needed on his mind. He'd spent enough time obsessing over his rival to last his entire life.

He stepped further away from the table, noting with curious acceptance that there was still untouched food here from all those months ago. The bread that wasn't dehydrated was covered with colourful fungus; scattered along with the also horrible looking fruit and broken crockery scattered all over the floor. *I'll have to find something fresh to eat pretty soon*, he decided. As bad as the sample looked here, just the idea of food was making his stomach rumble.

“Master?” came an ethereal voice, drifting from nowhere and yet echoing as any other sound would. “You look hungry, shall I lay out the luncheon?”

<Shut up,> Mewtwo growled in reply, kneading his forehead. <Go away. I have no need of *that* memory either.> He needed to go further into his castle, and reunite himself with things he had never wanted to see or hear ever again; not bandy words with a phantom voice of his human servant from before.

Yet, again it came, closer and louder this time. “Very well. Will there be anything else before I take my leave, Master?”

Ignoring it, trying to banish all thoughts of her, he padded further into the room, levitating up onto the podium - the moat now dry, and also dusty - where he had once fought off a charizard and a rhyhorn, and slowly rose further into the air, his eyes again glowing an eerie blue.

As he entered his control room, his psychic energy lifting him fully out of the spiraled entranceway and onto the floor next to his chair, he noticed that the multi-image screens were black and dead from lack of energy and a power source. Yet, they should have activated once he had drawn close. Perhaps the desperate psychic blasts at the end of his struggle with Mew had short-circuited them like the spotlights on the stadium.

Paused here, Mewtwo wondered where his old friends - the ones that had not been clones: the fearow and the dragonite - were now. Perhaps their own enmity of humankind had diminished somewhat, and they had found themselves worthy trainers. <Whatever their chosen path, I hope they are happy.>

There was a sultry breath at his neck tube, and a swish of material upon the obsidian floor behind him. "Master? Shall I prepare the dragonite messenger once again?"

Unable to contain the bestial shriek of surprise that roared from his unused vocal cords, he spun to face... nothing. Nothing but the gloom of a long

unused computer system, smaller pillars - similar to the ones downstairs yet somewhat more reminiscent of his broken birth tube - supporting the high roof.

<Memories,> he sighed, unable to believe that phantom voice had uprooted his confidence so much; feeling his body once trembling violently after the scare. It seemed his sleeping *and* waking minds were now both unable to differentiate between reality and memory; he could still feel the tickling sensation of her warm breath on his fur. <You aren't real,> he said, and swiped roughly at his neck to allay the tickle. *Gods, am I going insane? Perhaps I already am...*

"My Master always liked his little games," came the warm confident voice, this time to his left. He jerked his head quickly towards the sound but again only shadows greeted him. "Are we pretending I'm not really here now? That's a funny game; you know I'm always here by your side. Waiting. Watching..."

<You do not belong here any more,> he ground out, steadily becoming more furious and yet inwardly terrified. <Go away, Joy!>

A giggle. "As you wish, Master. You still look hungry. I will go downstairs and prepare dinner."

Mewtwo turned his attention to the screens again, focusing his will. After a brief second, there was a loud buzz and a flicker of picture, which zapped out again a second later. "Muu," he grunted vocally. <Damn you. Work!>

Another zap of light across the screen, and he was suddenly greeted with the bright view of fluffy clouds as they drifted close by outside the control room, above the placid ocean. Seating himself in his chair, he felt a sudden temptation to raise a hand and quicken the cloud's pace. Smiling ruefully, he shook it off. He was here for answers, not cheap thrills.

Who is the girl?

He thought for a moment. After destroying the whole laboratory in a violent rage, and Giovanni's gym soon after, he had returned; renamed his place of birth to New Island, salvaging what technology he could, and in a sense replicating it for his own purposes. In the meantime he had also salvaged a video tape and restored it as best as he could; even though watching and listening to it made him angry enough to want to destroy New Island all over again.

Had there been any *other* recording technology at all used by the scientists, any electronic notes taken with further clues about his childhood, or had it only been cloning equipment?

That girl... she must have been from before my birth. I cannot remember anything clearly before I was ready to be, apart from her - and also some words...

<Life is wonderful...>

But... why?

Focusing his will once more, he switched the screen displays. Now, they showed multiple images of crackling static - it appeared that the camera on the fearow had either fallen off or been removed.

After rewinding the whole tape, which had been recorded automatically, Mewtwo scanned past the many images of trainers and their pokémon winning heated, fast-paced battles, until he had reached the very last case study; that of a young boy and his three pokémon. Apart from that, nothing. No clues as yet. No sudden flashes of inspired memory. This footage was too recent.

He switched the images again. More cameras; this time showing the underground cloning facility, looking ruined by a blast. In desperation, he flicked past more and more, all of which was no help. <Is there any data on the years of my creation at all? I... think I must have destroyed it all - if there was any extra besides that one tape at any point in time...>

Flick. Flick. Flick. Past the weathered stadium, the thick-bladed fans where the innocent mew had once played - Mewtwo watching this past footage with a look of amazement on his face - past even the camera overlooking the wharf.

Flick. Flick. Flick. *Fli-zzzzt!*

The monitors shorted out again with a loud zap of static, and Mewtwo flinched backwards in surprise. Reflecting in their black dead sheen was his own

face and torso, and close behind that the distorted silhouette of a woman in a maroon dress.



Mewtwo felt his heartbeat surge to an almost painful rate as he swung around in his chair, dreading what he was about to see yet unable to stop himself.

Nothing. Nobody. He was alone.

Or was he?

He swung back towards the monitor. There, the woman's reflection was still present. When he saw her take a step closer towards him he looked around his chair - still nothing.

A reflection. A memory. Not real.

She took another step. Mewtwo stared intently into the monitor, wishing her reflection was clearer yet unable to truly believe he was still seeing her.

“Master,” she said, and Mewtwo distinctly heard the sound from behind him. He resisted the temptation to look backwards a third time in hopes she’d be there: a solid, logical proof to the existence of the reflection.

She doesn't exist in reality. She's not here - by now she's back at the Old Shore Wharf pokémon centre maintaining the front desk. You don't have a human servant any more.

Then what is that in the monitor?!

<Yes, Joy?> he said.

“You are looking in all the wrong places,” she said firmly. “You must go elsewhere to find what you need to know.”

<Elsewhere? Where could anything else be? I built over the old lab.>

A sly smile graced her shadowy face. “And yet, it still exists. Go below. Rely on your oldest memories and do not push them away like you have done before. They will be the ones to assist you in recalling those memories that were taken away from you without permission.”

Half rising from his chair, Mewtwo leaned forward towards the reflection of the wraithlike shape still standing calmly. <So you are a memory as well? If not, what are you?>

“Does the fact that you are being instructed by an seemingly outwards source - that does not really exist - make any difference to how you will act? That is the question you should be asking,” she chided softly, stepping slowly backwards, back into the gloom of the shadows. “You know what I say is right. Go down, go below all this... all these structures and complications. Go to where the memories are at their weakest, and you will find further help.”

She disappeared. Mewtwo swiveled in his chair, wanting her back, to hear more of her words, but again there was nothing to see.

So he stood up, determined to do as Joy had advised, and disappeared likewise.