



The Phantom Child

Chapter 2: Reflections



Chapter Two: Reflections

He stood outside the strange bulbous doorway, wondering why it had not automatically retreated into the wall as it had done before when he had last been here, creating his clones.

And as he thought about it, more memories flooded his brain...

He did not know anything about this world where humans and pokémon lived together, nor understood what pokémon really were; and the fact concerned him. But how could he know? He was the strongest, and so when he had been under the command of Giovanni, he had only needed to focus his will slightly before the strange assortment of opponents had screamed and started writhing in pain. No time to really study, or even understand what he was going up against, only that they were all so different... and could be all captured by humans who used those strange spherical pokéballs.

The idea of owning his own pokémon had come to him when he had been resting one night at New Island. At first, it had only been a niggling need -

“Wouldn’t it be helpful if I could really take the time to study one!” - but had throughout the night grown into a plan to create more clones like himself; super clones, their powers enhanced until they were invincible like him.

But to do that... he needed to create his own laboratory. And to do that...

After attempting to repair a little of the twisted metal and debris that lay scattered all over the earth, he realised there was no way he could possibly fix it on his own. But he needed to rebuild. This island was his now, he owned it, and so could not stand the sight of the ruins, all burnt and charred. And so he found a means to an end. After much thought - and anger at himself for once more bringing them into it - he decided to use humans to build his palace.

Casting his mind so far away to the north was difficult, but he had been trained once to tell when any were thinking of entering Giovanni’s Gym, and so it was not hard to differentiate between those humans who could build things to those that could not; and those who could design such a building to do him proud.

Leaving them to their own devices for the moment, he practised teleportation. He started with small things; bits of metal, broken shards of glass. Then, he tried himself. After that, he knew he could manage it, so with excitement in his chest, he sought those with the most experience and know-how on that other island he had only known only for a few weeks, and - gathering his power

and will - surrounded them with psychic energy, grasping them tightly so they would not implode in mid-transfer, and brought them to him.

They had panicked, of course, so he had had to brainwash them quickly, focusing all their attentions to the task at hand. Attending to their various needs by merely moulding their minds to his, he waited for the day when it would be finished.

Till as last... his palace finally was done; all three stories of it. He had put the remaining electronic technology from the destroyed laboratory downstairs in the basement, in preparation for creating more clones. The ground floor was left practically empty save for the enormous dining table in the centre. Upstairs was his domain, with his chair, constructed specifically for those with a tail.

Upon its finish, he had come across a problem with what to do with the architects and builders. Finding no rage in him to kill them, he sought to erase their memories and sent them back with no indication of where they had been for the past few months; hoping they would not remember their large grey coloured employer in the slightest...

That night he had gone down to the basement and watched for the first time the only surviving video footage of his past. The crackly voice had filled him with contempt and loathing as he recognised the speaker as the cold-hearted

human who had proclaimed Mewtwo's status as nothing but a laboratory experiment.

"I haven't got much time; I pray this record of our experiment survives!"

<Indeed it has, doctor,> Mewtwo had growled.

"A year ago we found the fossilised remains of the ancient pokémon: mew! There was sufficient genetic material in the fossilised eyelash to replicate mew. But Giovanni, who funded our project, insisted we try to design super-clones, more powerful than any living pokémon. Many attempts failed, but finally; from the gathered components we created a living pokémon with this machine! We called it Mewtwo. But for some reason the creature's anger is out of control. It is displaying un-measurable violence. With its psychic powers it is destroying our laboratory! Our goal and dream was to create the world's strongest pokémon with our hands. And we succeeded-"

The video had ended with a flash of static, and with it Mewtwo's interest. The 'world's strongest pokémon' - what did that matter now he had dreams to be the world's strongest pokémon trainer? He had already proven his worth as a pokémon, now it was time to prove his worth as somebody on the same level as a human - and better.

<What a waste of time,> he said. <I ignored that which was much more important - my history before the memories begin. Because that exists somewhere - it *has* to - and I need to find it.>

He raised a hand and concentrated. With a sound like scraping metal the doorway finally retreated into the wall, the screech grating upon his sensitive ears. Rusted, perhaps, unused for months after all.

How do you know it exists? came a thought. *How can you possibly have existence before you have memories of it?* The idea made him sag as he stood, staring at the ruin of the cloning machine in despair. <How so?> he said sadly. <Perhaps I am in fact chasing nothing but a dream...>

With nothing else to do, he stepped forward into the room.

“Good evening, Master.”

Joy stood close to the dusty conveyor belt, poised for service, her delicate hands folded at her front. Demurely she curtsied, never lifting her eyes to his own.

<You’re down here too?> Mewtwo asked in surprise. *I can see her far more clearly now.*

“Of course, my Master,” Joy replied. “I am always by your side, ready to serve you.”

<Then serve,> Mewtwo said, allowing a little of his desperation to seep into his tone, <by helping me remember.>

“As you wish,” Joy said, then paused. “You have reached as far and as deep as you can on your own. You are even having doubts about whether this is a futile task you have set yourself.”

<Is it?> he asked. <Am I chasing after the memory of a girl who does not actually exist beyond my dreams?>

Joy took a while to answer. “Not exactly.” She smiled. “You are on the right track to uncovering everything. You just need time.”

Silence fell. In the large echoey room his breathing seemed unnaturally loud, yet even though he never took his gaze off Joy he could see no sign of her own respiration. *That’s because she’s not really there.*

“How can you possibly have existence before you have memories of it?” Joy asked, echoing his own question of a few moments before. “How indeed?”

Mewtwo felt anger not for the first time with this spectral woman. <If you won’t tell me-> he ground out, but was interrupted.

“I cannot tell you, because I do not know myself,” said Joy, the pain in her voice obvious. “You are right - I am merely a memory of your own making. I am for the moment your muse, a creature of mere guidance towards resolution of your faded past. I am a part of your subconscious.”

She turned her face away and put her hands to her eyes, shaking slightly, her voice unsteady. “It was me who sent you the image of that girl in the dream, I did not know it would turn nightmarish-”

Stunned, Mewtwo could say or do nothing in return. He waited until Joy - or at least his subconscious mind in the form of Joy - had recovered from her emotions and was ready to speak again, and did not try to interrupt as the hidden part of his mind worked to impart knowledge to his consciousness.

“She exists,” said Joy adamantly. “I know she does. And you have but one fragmented memory of her to go upon... and the words: 'life is wonderful'.”

<Is it enough?>

“Yes,” said Joy. “Think about it. Life. What a wonderful, amazing thing. As a phenomenon, as a miracle of nature, as a series of experiences documented by memory. We are born, we grow up, we mature, and grow wise with each experience granted to us by life itself. We-”

<Wait,> said Mewtwo. <You once explained to me the miracle of birth...>

“Your knowledge of pokémon physiology proved useful for my plan,” recited Joy. “Do you remember saying that?”

<I do now,> admitted Mewtwo with a tinge of guilt at how little he had cared for another living thing. As far as he had been concerned back then, Joy had been his walking, talking encyclopaedia: merely property.

He'd psychically wrenched her away from the counter of the pokémon centre one late night after finding her knowledge-filled mind amidst so many others close by who did not know as much. And he had justified himself in doing so with the argument that the humans had viewed him as merely property to begin with.

Joy had been terrified - hysterical. She had screamed. None of the others had screamed. In sudden doubt and perturbation Mewtwo had brainwashed her so much her eyes had completely clouded over and her face had sunk into dull impassiveness. She never smiled after that.

"I also imparted my knowledge of human physiology and cloning techniques," said Joy, snapping Mewtwo out of his memory. "Yes?"

<Yes,> said Mewtwo. <It was... very interesting to say the least. I had not been conceived or born naturally - I had been cloned, *created*. It was very interesting to know just how the humans had done it, and such an odd feeling to find I could replicate the feat.>

"But only with pokémon," said Joy, stressing the last word. "Your clones were all pokémon."

Mewtwo blinked, nonplussed. <Of course they were. Did you expect me to clone humans? Create more of the one species I had sworn to annihilate?>

“So why would humans clone pokémon?” asked Joy, her voice slightly raised. “Why would they create you?”

The questions resonated deeply in Mewtwo's mind. He knew they were important, that somehow the answer to the missing memories lay in the answer to these. <The - the humans were greedy,> he said, trying to come up with justification. <They created me for money, for vainglory, so they could boast. They created me *because they damn well could!*>

“Really?” asked Joy coolly. “Are you that sure there was no other motivation? Are you prepared to dismiss all the humans that quickly? Think deeper. Think harder. Remember, 'there was sufficient genetic material in the fossilised eyelash to replicate mew. But Giovanni, who funded our project, insisted we try to design super-clones, more powerful than any living pokémon.' By all means, Giovanni shows his greed and aim for more power here. But does the doctor? It seems to me that the doctor had different ideals for this project when he uses the phrase ‘*but Giovanni*’.”

<You-> Mewtwo said, then paused. <You mean the doctor didn't plan to create me as a super clone? So the doctor wanted to clone mew simply to create another mew. Is there anything else you can surmise from his words?>

“There were others created,” Joy said. “You know it's true. Many of the doctor's other clones were failed attempts before you were created. You remember the lab. Yours was not the only one tube.”

<So clones of the DNA of mew need some tampering with before they survive, what of it? Perhaps the only reason I survived is because of Giovanni's push to improve the mew DNA.>

Joy sighed audibly. “It could be possible that not every clone was of Mew,” she said. “It is a possibility and nothing else. I am just making it clear to you that there was perhaps some other 'two, or 'three - or even 'four - in existence before it died.”

Suddenly, Joy's eyes widened, and her hands flew up in reaction. There was a flash of bright light, and she was suddenly gone from the room. Mewtwo jumped backwards in surprise, and felt his vision and hearing fading. <Am I fainting?> he thought.

One, two, three... f-four... five, six-uh, seven... eight, nine... ten!

The counting words reverberated somewhere in the depths of his mind, spoken by a very, very young voice, joined by another about the number eight. The voices simultaneously reached the number ten and broke into giddy, joyful laughter together.

Suddenly, Mewtwo felt like he really was about to faint. He stumbled once and then lowered himself carefully onto the floor into a seated position. <Those voices... who are they?> he asked himself, hoping for a bit of solace from his subconscious.

“I remembered something!” Joy said from nowhere. “The counting! I remember it now! You were learning about numbers and counting up to ten!”

<That was me?! Then who was the other voice?> Mewtwo demanded. <Who was with me back then? Why can't I remember?>

There was silence. Joy did not speak or appear again.

<Damn you! Why did you leave? Just when I need you the most!> Mewtwo cried. He staggered upright, pacing out of the room and levitating back up onto the ground floor, level to the sea. What he saw there made his heart skip a beat.

An adolescent human female with pink pigtails was standing next to the dining room table, looking curiously at him.

Mewtwo's right hand whipped up blindingly fast, creating an invisible barrier between him and the human. He quickly extended the barrier around to enclose the human inside an entire spherical shield, thickening it so they could not escape.

Is she really there? Or is she another facet of my subconscious mind?

Unsure, he lowered his hand, holding the shield with his mind only. <Who are you?> he demanded. <How did you find this place?>

“I’m Lovrina,” she said with a smile. “I’m a Cipher Admin.” Her smile widened, turning into a sickly-sweet beam. “Who are you, big boy?”

She must be real. Because I’ve never seen her before in my life - not even in my dreams.

<Answer my question,> Mewtwo said. <Was it by chance?>

She giggled. “Ooh, you’re so serious. As it happens, Cipher has been looking so hard for a new base of operations. An hour ago our pretty submarine picked up a radar signal of this nice little island, which was *soo* not on any of our maps.” She looked around slowly. “It’s perfect. But it’ll probably need a little redecoration.”

Irked by her pretentiousness, Mewtwo did not answer straight away; deep in thought. *Cipher? Could that be another Team Rocket? They could be dangerous. What should I do? I swore I’d never erase another’s memories ever again - how can I now that I am so struggling and frustrated with the task of regaining my own? How could I wish that on another? But... I don’t trust her. She’s seen me now. What will she do?*

Mewtwo straightened himself and lashed his tail once or twice, hoping to intimidate her slight form with his bulky six feet of height. He put on his best

glare. <This island belongs to me. You cannot have it.> He took a step forward. <You have to leave right now, and never return.> *And consider yourself lucky that I don't simply teleport you out of here myself and wipe your memory of this place completely away. And destroy your 'pretty' submarine.*

“Oh, how mean!” Lovrina squealed, putting her balled fists to her face. “You’re so not being nice to me! I want this island *now* - why aren’t you cooperating with me? Can’t we so make a deal? Pretty please?”

Ugh, stop talking... Mewtwo groaned. <No,> he said shortly. <No more deals with humans. Leave this place.>

The girl stuck out her tongue at him. “Bully to you, meanie.” Then, as if her personality had just switched in a moment, the hands were down back at her side - one already clutching a minimised pokéball - and her face deadly serious. Had her immaturity simply been a mask, then? “A little hurt could be *so* persuasive,” she said in a low voice, her eyes glittering.

Mewtwo had not noticed the pokéballs at her waist but now couldn’t take his gaze off them. He had completely forgotten about his own ones after capturing all those pokémon. Joy had supplied him with blueprints of trainer pokéballs, which he had vastly improved on and created from scratch. His pokéballs were all psychically linked to him and to each other, they were able to hone in on a pokémon’s life energy and gravitate towards it; making capturing far

easier. Moreover, they were not only able to capture pokémon, but pokéballs containing pokémon. Where had they all disappeared to? Maybe they were still down in the destroyed cloning machine.

“Kitty?” Lovrina said, tilting her head at him. “Are you listening?”

<I will not battle you either,> Mewtwo said, trying to put as much foreboding rumble in his mental voice as possible. He couldn’t really read her, didn’t know what she was going to do or say next. Her high-pitched, cutesy voice was alarmingly off-putting as well, for some reason. <Must I take matters into my own hands and remove you myself?>

Lovrina pouted, the pokéball still dwarfed by her fingertips but the high affectation in her voice back. <Oh, boo. Look, you are being so rude to me and I’m a guest in your house. Please, have a battle with me, and if you win, we’ll leave. Promise.”

Mewtwo felt he had agreed to enough deals with humans to last his entire lifetime already. They always had their ulterior motives, and normally were lying about the terms anyway. Still, the question had to be asked.

<And if I lose?>

Lovrina grinned. “You’ll so like that even better - I’ll make you the strongest pokémon in the world.”

Mewtwo could only blink at her, completely taken aback. Then, unable to stop himself, he burst into hysterical laughter. *Oh, so that's what it feels like*, he thought, a small corner of his mind able to ward off the hilarity simply enjoying the physical sensations of an uncontrollable laughing fit.

“That’s so not funny,” she said as his laughter began to finally subside.

<*I am the strongest pokémon in the world!*> Mewtwo said, still gasping for breath. <That’s what I was created to be! An emotionless fighting machine!>

Lovrina’s mood flipped again. Suddenly she was glaring at him, her eyes intense. Her finger tapped the pokéball’s button lightly - it maximised and she drew back to throw it.

Will I be the pokémon, or the trainer? Mewtwo wondered, the last vestiges of his hilarity still lingering. *Well, as I have no pokémon of my own any longer... Mewtwo, I choose you!*

He removed the shield around Lovrina to allow a proper throw and stepped a few paces back, gearing up as best he could in his state. *I don't need toned muscles for psychic attacks*, he reminded himself.

“You, emotionless?” Lovrina asked. “A fighting machine? Let me so show you what that *really* looks like!”

She threw the ball towards the ceiling. It sailed over the table and burst open in midair, revealing the diminutive shape of a pikachu, who as soon as it had fully materialised bent down and poised for its first attack command.

Its black ear-tips were zigzagged.