



# cedar's journey

#1

IT'S BLACK AND WHITE  
AND READ ALL OVER

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## Chapter One

### Alan

The day when Cedar's older brother died for the first time started out like any other.

Stirring at barely-there dawn; the young girl grasped the ends of the crisp bedsheet and held them to her chin in solemn wide-eyed silence. Through the open window - curtains billowing gently in the blissfully cool breeze - she heard the first morning calls from the more optimistic bird pokemon.

*Starly*, Cedar thought absentmindedly. *Maybe pidgey, too*. She wriggled her toes and threw back the sheet, easing onto the carpet and heading for her parent's room.

Her mother - Jo - opened an eye when Cedar padded into the room. "Hmm? Oh, hey honey. Nightmare?"

"No."

"Just excited about today?"

"Mm-hm."

"C'mon then," Jo said, inching towards the middle of the bed and giving Cedar's father, Scott, a pat on the shoulder. "Move over; we've got company."

Scott grunted and shuffled, and two became three. Cedar dozed, head resting on her mother's shoulder, until the sky lightened enough to stir awake at the sounds of her twin brother and sister staggering blearily out of their own rooms to start the day.

All five eventually convened in the kitchen for a pot of coffee and breakfast.

"Alanna, can you feed Prim?" Jo asked, munching on toast, her eyes much more alert after her second cup.

"I did it yesterday, it's Alan's turn today!"

"Nuh-uh."

"Can someone just feed the darn skitty?" Scott said over his newspaper, and giving it a reinforcing shake.

Prim was already winding about everyone's ankles whilst they ate, plaintive mewls louder than the sporadic human conversation around her. Cedar abandoned her Ralts Bubbles and tossed some pokechow in Prim's bowl to calm the situation.

Once breakfast for all was done, Jo recalled Prim and everyone bundled in the car with already packed bags of beach picnic supplies. Scott set his sights and GPS on the highway towards Fuschia City.

"And no *are we there yet*s, alright?" he said with a smile, casting his warm gaze on the rear vision mirror at the three squished in the back seat; cradling the plastic castle moulds and spades that hadn't fit in the picnic bags.

"Yeah, *Cedar*," Alanna said, and gave her little sister a nudge on the arm.

Cedar giggled and elbowed back but thankfully that seemed to be that. The three quieted down and looked out the window at the ever changing scenery as they moved from quaint village to bustling highway road. Cedar kept her ever increasing stomach butterfree to herself as they drew closer and closer to the coast. She loved seeing the ocean every time they visited; loved feeling the ebb and flow of the moon's pull on the tides and immersing her body in the gentle surf and drifting along with it. In fact, she wondered why they didn't go all the time when it felt so amazing. Maybe none of her family liked the feeling quite as much as she did.

"Hey, look, pidove!" Alan said, half his face mashed against the window as he craned his head up at the flock wheeling directly above them.

Jo and Scott stole a few quick glances upwards as well. "I spy something with my little eye, something starting with U," Jo said.

"Unfezant?" Alan smacked the window button with a finger in haste to poke his head out into the wind and search the skies for the evolved form that would be leading the flock. "It's a girl one!"

Scott chuckled. "Put your head back inside, mate. Pidove are rattata with wings. They're everywhere around the big cities."

"When I get my license I'm gonna train one anyway," Alan said with a sniff. "Then I can fly around the whole region."

"Birds don't get big enough to fly on," Alanna replied.

"Do so. Michael's dad has the biggest fearow in the *world*."

"Wild birds might not," Jo said, "but I've seen a pidgeot so big it could support a full grown man."

"So there," Alan whispered, and got his elbow's worth of the car drive.

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The beach was pretty quiet when they trekked down to the start of the sands. A few other families sunbaked and splashed in the surf, some parents giving them a casual wave. Wingull bobbed on the more gentler waves out past the rock outcropping, squawking to each other.

The family made their way down the beach line, setting up the picnic blankets and towels. Whilst Jo slathered sunscreen on the three children, Scott cracked a beer and lay down on his towel to relax.

Cedar wriggled and scrunched up her face at the treatment. Jo was muttering something about neglecting to reapply and ending up red-as-a-corphish last time as she kept a firm grip on Cedar's wrist; so the girl couldn't writhe away before she was done. Alan and Alanna were meanwhile seeing to each other's backs and necks.

Their trial over, the three ran - shrilling at the excitement and the cold shock - right into the surf. Cedar dove in the rest of the way once she was up to her hips. The water's temperature contrasted perfectly with the hot day. She surfaced at the sand's drop-off, feeling the tips of her toes just able to graze the last of it before another step would find her treading water. *This is the best...*

"Don't go too far out!" Jo called from their vantage point, waving at Alan and Alanna who had already broken into a splashing mess of a freestyle race. Cedar waved back at her mother, and moved a bit closer to give her limbs a rest from having to keep her head above water; then played at submerging and opening her eyes under water. All was a fogged-up blur of indistinct blue.

She stood up, frowned, and made her way out of the crashing surf towards her parents. "Did you bring my goggles?"

Back under the water with goggles was as much a treat as it had been the last time they'd vacationed to the beach. Schools of tiny remoraidd battled mini currents around the safety of the rocks, turning as one as they nibbled the algae. Cedar chased them about the place, wishing she could turn just as swiftly around in the water and not have to come up for air.

She was just growing bored with this latest game and deciding to make a sandcastle instead when she saw a powerful flash of light from the beach side. Curious, she broke water and took her fogged-up goggles off, squinting.

Jo was flailing - near fully clothed - right into the surf, screaming. Cedar had never heard her mother sound like that. She grabbed at the rock-face and watched Jo rip off her t-shirt and pound further in.

A blastoise was already well in front, churning out to sea. Cedar watched it mutely, hardly realising when her father approached and hoisted her back to land, almost robotic in his speed.

"Stay here," he said tightly, and ran back.

"What's going on?" she asked to the teenager holding an empty pokéball at the water's edge.

"Someone's in trouble out there," she replied, a hand to her eyes. "I told them Shellie could handle any rips or wilds. They shouldn't have gone in too!"

"I don't..." *I don't know what's going on... Alan? Alanna?*

They waited. Cedar fidgeted. Her parents finally swam back in frantically, followed by the blastoise with two motionless figures draped over its shell.

"Mum... Dad?"

Scott picked Alanna up from the blastoise who remained on all fours, and lay her down; getting right into CPR. "Jo, keep this going." His voice cracked and he stared at the people already gathering to the sides. "Get an ambulance!"

A few ran off to their bags and phones as he stood aside so Jo could continue on Alanna, and grabbed Alan the same way. Shellie the blastoise stood up once he'd done so and gurgled deep in her throat in worry. The trainer motioned her away from them.

Cedar walked towards her family and Jo noticed with a quick glance upwards. "Don't look, Cedar," she said, huffing each breath in rhythmic exertion.

"What are you doing?"

"Just leave it!"

Cedar retreated, sniffled once, and began to wail to the sky.

The trainer took her hand. "Your brother and sister have water in their lungs. Mum and Dad are trying to get it all out so they can breathe. It'll be all right."

Cedar's crying gradually subsided at this, and after a few hiccups she focused hard on her siblings from where she was. "The-there's still water there."

"I think so."

"There is." Cedar squeezed her hands in frustration. Alanna's lungs felt full of brine, and soggy in a way they shouldn't have been. *Get out*, she thought, a little frown appearing on her face, hating the water there and wanting it back in the ocean. *Get out!*

Alanna lurched and spasmed to the side, vomiting the contents of both her stomach and her lungs onto the wet sand, taking a loud, harsh first breath and hacking out a violent coughing fit.

She heard her parents make different - yet just as strange as one another - sounds in their throats at this. Jo and Scott swapped places again: Scott slamming on Alan's chest in desperation and Jo taking Alanna in her arms just as Cedar heard the faint sound of sirens from the road nearby.

Emergency services raced down the beach towards them; human and machoke alike. Cedar cast her gaze their way, back to the still-limp form of her brother, then gripped her hands together, gritted her teeth and *squeezed* as she'd squeezed before. Shellie, close by, growled in surprise and swung her head around, fixing her with one eye.

Salt water bubbled from Alan's blue-tinged lips. Encouraged, Scott redoubled his last efforts just as the doctors reached them with breathing masks and stretchers. Jo picked Alanna up and put her on one stretcher, Alan the other: now with breathing mask fitted. The machoke hefted them up, one on each end, and coasted back to the road with an odd gait that kept the patients relatively still given the haste to get off the loose sand.

All the squeezing had given Cedar a sore head as she watched all these events unfold. She blinked her exhaustion and to her surprise had to sit down, then lie down; her eyes closing.

By the time Scott came over to pick her up so they could head to the hospital Cedar had already passed out.

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The day when Cedar's older brother died for the second time started out like they all had over the past few weeks. The long drive to the ward passed in silence. Jo and Scott looked even more pale and gaunt under the harsh lights of the hospital corridors as they were escorted to Alan's bedside. Cedar had nearly learned the entire way by now, warren-like as the building was.

Jo's voice echoed in Cedar's head as she approached. *The doctors can't wake him up. Nobody can wake him up, and nobody knows why. The machines are keeping him alive. They're breathing for him, and that keeps his heart beating.*

Jo's voice had been a monotone, almost as if she was reading off a script, and that had stopped Cedar from interrupting: *I know why he won't wake up. The lights have already gone out of him.* Except 'lights' wasn't the right word at all, but it was the closest Cedar could manage, because nobody else seemed to talk about these kind of things at all so she could learn the word for it. Ever.

Alan's lights had faded to near nothingness by the time they'd first rushed to the hospital and had him admitted and hooked up in emergency and then finally been able to go to his bedside. From then on it had been a long nightmare of a waiting game; day in, day out. He'd been treated as best as possible, lungs drained of excess fluid, given a brain scan, and by all rights - according to the medical staff - should have woken up within the hour of being treated.

Except he hadn't.

And nobody knew why.

Clustered about his pillow, the whole family stood and looked down at Alan's peaceful expression; his lips parted around the breathing tube and wrists to the ceiling, as if a puppet to the IVs attached on either side. The constant beeping barely noticeable now.

Jo stroked his pale forehead. "Hey, honey." She glanced around at her family and the doctor hovering in the background, and tried to smile. "Should we say g-goodbye together?"

"I don't want to," Alanna said.

"Please, Alanna," Scott said, his head down. "We talked about this."

"You said he might start breathing on his own again," Alanna replied.

The doctor shifted uncomfortably. "There's a slim possibility but we can't-"

"Right," Scott said loudly. "Come here; Cedar, Alanna."

The two children crept forward. Jo gave Alanna the hand she'd been holding, and, tentatively, Cedar took Alan's other hand on the other side of the bed. It was cool and dry to the touch; didn't feel like her big brother's hand at all.

They stayed that way, unspeaking, as the doctor and nurses switched off Alan's life support around them and then made themselves scarce. Minutes later, Alan's chest was still, the beeping noise - now subconsciously anticipated - silenced. Jo's and Scott's shoulders shuddering, little stifled whimpers from Jo as she bent low to the bed, and Alanna's eyes growing wider and wider as she let Alan's hand go and stepped away, her face held tightly then crumpling upon itself as she sobbed.

Cedar used her other hand to try and dash the tears away, then kept her eyes shut longer so she wouldn't have to see her parents trying not to cry; and felt (saw?) Alan's last lights drifting upwards, like golden dust motes catching the sun through an open window, and flickering out one by one.