Despite Ash’s excitement to start his journey, he wasn’t without the foresight to pick up some things that he might need before leaving Pallet Town. He stopped into a local store that specialized in that which fledgling young trainers needed before starting their journeys, and got some pokémon food for when they couldn’t forage and a tent large enough for a single adult, which meant plenty of space for Ash, since he barely stood at about four-foot, eight-inches.

Leaving Pallet was an especially hard thing to do; he had no regrets, though. Throughout Kanto, and for that matter, most of the regions of the world, there were specialized foot paths that connected each of the major areas and population centers, with each one dubbed a Route. No two Routes had the same number, and the one connecting Pallet Town to Viridian City was known as Route 1. The winding path was sparsely populated by pokémon, with the usual faire being Pidgey and Ratatta, but neither of these was Ash truly looking to find; in fact, he wasn’t looking for any pokémon yet, as none of the stores in Pallet sold pokéballs (an oversight Ash actually believes is intentional, to allow a new trainer to bond with his starter before being distracted by catching more pokémon).

They went about the winding trail, though only ten minutes had passed before Ash got distracted by a memory of years passed when he came this way one hot summer’s day. A sprawling lake could be found surrounded by a thick copse of trees, and after a few minutes of wandering, he managed to find it.

An idea popped into his head at that point, and Ash looked to his partner before asking, “Do you know how to swim?” Getting an affirmative response, Ash shrugged off his backpack and dug through until he found what he was looking for: a pair of trunks. He stripped out of his clothes before donning the trunks and, with one last nod to Sparkster, he jumped into the lake in a location he knew was somewhat deeper than the rest.

Ash could only hold his breath for about a minute, but by then they had made it to the middle of the lake, pointing out schools of goldeen and remoraid, as well as a couple of krabby and poliwag under the water. He took a deep breath and kept going, stopping at the other side to ponder the strange figure on the end of a line wire. The figure looked like the image of a young girl in jeans and a yellow shirt with red suspenders; she had red hair tied in a side ponytail and her right hand was up at an angle making a peace symbol. He saw a hook coming out of the bottom of the figure and deduced it was a fishing lure; giving Sparkster a sideways look, he reached out for his partner to grab hold before grasping the lure and giving it a tug. Soon he found himself being pulled up and out of the water.

“Hey, that’s not a pokémon; you’re just a boy!” A girl bearing a striking resemblance to the girl depicted on the lure was at the other end of the line; she seemed somewhat upset at him. “Oh, but you have a pokémon with you; is that a pikachu?”

Ash ignored her at first as he climbed out of the lake; he found a patch of sun on the grass and collapsed backwards to allow himself to dry out. She was getting impatient with him, though he didn’t see since his eyes were closed. Finally, he answered, “Yep, we just met each other a few hours ago; his name’s Sparkster.” She just stared at him after this declaration; the pikachu laid back next to the boy, calm as can be. “I’m Ash Ketchum, just out of Pallet.”

She blinked a couple of times, then shook her head to make sure she heard him right. “Um… I’m Misty… Waterflower. From Cerulean City.” She sat down nearby, facing him. “So… what were you doing in that lake? Most new trainers are in a rush to get on to the next town.”

Still basking in the glow of the late morning sun, Ash continued to lounge as he dried off. “I’m in no hurry to get to Viridian.” He opened one eye to study her seated form; sitting up, he said, “So… Junior Gym Trainer and youngest of four Sensational Sisters? Whatcha doing all the way out here?”

Her eyes widened perceptibly at that. “H-how did you know that?”

Ash gave her a sideways look. “You can find a lot of information in the archives concerning all of the official league gyms; from there it’s a matter of searching for additional information.”

Misty nodded, but looked sad all the same. “You’re right about the Gym Trainer part, but according to *them*, there’s only three Sensational Sisters and one *runt*.” She spat that last word with enough venom to smother a poison-type. Her eyes looked far away off in the distance as her face looked somewhat pained. “According to *them*, I’m just an ugly, scrawny runt who’s no good as a trainer or a battler…” She looked back at Ash and found him looking at her with a single raised eyebrow; she realized what she said and blushed harshly before turning her head away.

Ash looked over to Sparkster as if asking if she was serious, but found that he looked to have fallen asleep. Turning back, he took a deep breath and said, “Okay, them being your older sisters I can imagine why you might believe them, but let me tell you this: you are ten years old, almost eleven here in another month, as such you aren’t a runt, just younger than them; scrawny falls under the same category; they are adults, so basing your current looks against them just doesn’t work right now, and besides, you’re pretty in your own right; as for battling and training, I couldn’t say as I’ve only just met you.”

She gaped at him after he finished his diatribe; he looked to her with a look that clearly said that he meant what he just told her. Shaking herself out of it, she said “Um, that was… That is… You aren’t like any ten year old I’ve ever met before.” She thought about it again and remembered something he said. “Wait, how did you know I was turning eleven next month?”

“The archives, again; their gym info is pretty complete. As for being unlike other ten year olds, I like to think I’m unique.” He ended that statement with a smirk.