TMNT and the Legendary Creatures

by hummerhouse

Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
Word Count: 97,658
Rated: PG-13 2k3
Summary: A 100 Theme Challenge multi-part series. Based on the ghosts, demons, yōkai, obake, yūrei, and other legendary creatures of Japanese folklore and mythology. Very much inspired by shows like Supernatural, X-Files, and Night Stalker. Credit goes to Yokai.com, and Wikipedia which were used as references.

Please note: while there are many images of yokai on the internet, I have only used those that are in the public domain, listed as free to share and use, or have been commissioned by me or gifted to me.

!!~~Winner in the TMNT Universal Reader’s Choice Awards 2017: (Mature Ballot) Most Interesting Original Character (Mr. Hidesato) 1st Place~~!!

Notes

~This wonderful preview image was created by the very talented PowderAkaCaseyJones It was commissioned specifically for this fan fiction.
“How much of this junk do we gotta go through?” Casey asked, lifting a brightly colored vase out of a curio cabinet.

April came up next to him and took the vase from his hand, carefully returning it to its shelf. “Just this room,” she answered. “The job is to catalogue, not to touch.”

“So why am I here?” Casey wandered over to the one window in the room and looked out at the garden. Dusk made it difficult for him to see more than a few feet outside.

“I told you,” April said. “There are some really valuable things here and I don’t want to be by myself at this time of night. Mr. Hidesato’s passing was in all the papers and there are thieves who can actually read.”

“The way this room was locked up, I don’t think a thief could get in here,” Casey said, tapping the glass with the knuckle of one finger. “I’m pretty sure this is that bullet proof stuff and it’s double paned. Hidesato, isn’t that the name of the guy who hired you?”

“His attorney hired me,” April said, correcting him. “The deceased Hidesato was the new owner’s uncle.”

“This is boring,” Casey said, turning around and making a face at his girlfriend.

“You’re being paid for your time,” April said as she typed information into her tablet. “Branching out into this field helps me pay my bills too. Why don’t you sit down and read a magazine or a book?”

“They’re in Japanese,” Casey said, strolling over to the large desk that sat on one side of the room. He pulled the leather upholstered chair back and collapsed into it, reaching over to take the letter opener out of the desk set.

“If you drop that and damage the furniture, it comes out of your pay check,” April said, though she wasn’t even looking in his direction.

Grimacing, Casey tossed the thin blade into the air and then caught it. Placing it back into the desk set, he looked over the slightly scarred wooden desk top, seeing nothing of interest. Curious, he pushed the chair back enough so that he could open the center desk drawer and began poking around.

“You’d think a guy with so much money would have a nicer desk,” Casey said, closing that drawer and opening one on the right hand side.

“That’s an antique,” April told him. “Most of the things in this room are antiques.”
“Ain’t that just another word for old?” Casey asked with a grin. He shut that drawer and opened one beneath it.

“No, it’s a word meaning old and valuable,” April said.

“Yeah, well the desk has to be more valuable than the crap in it,” Casey said, moving to the left hand side. “All I’m finding here are papers. Don’t ask me what any of them say ‘cause they’re in Japanese.”

“Too bad Master Splinter isn’t here,” April replied. “He could read them.”

“I have a feeling it ain’t nothing very interesting,” Casey said, tossing a handful of folders back into the drawer.

“Try not to make a huge mess of those things,” April said. “Mr. Hidesato is supposed to be here at eight. I’d like to be finished by then so we can leave him in peace.”

“Good, we can go get something to eat then,” Casey said. “I’m starving.”

April set her tablet down and approached a wooden black lacquer cabinet. The front was covered in hand-painted cranes and pine trees, and there was a brass lock keeping the cabinet securely fastened.

Pulling a ring of keys from her pocket, April found one that fit the cabinet’s lock and opened the doors. On the shelves inside were boxes of various sizes and April opened each, finding miniature figurines in ivory and jade.

One box she could not open. It was a domed coffer, a strongbox, decorated in gold hiramaki-e and inlaid in mother-of-pearl on a black lacquer ground. There was a thick hasp keeping the box closed and April did not have the key to it on the ring that the attorney had given her.

“This is curious,” April said, taking the coffer over to the desk and setting it down. “It’s heavy and there are odd symbols drawn into the leaf and flower designs on the box. The design is everywhere, including the underside. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“Can’t ya’ get it open?” Casey asked, leaning forward to examine the coffer. “If it’s heavy it’s probably full of gold.”

“I haven’t a key,” April said. “I’m sure this coffer is sixteenth century Japanese and quite valuable. Perhaps Mr. Hidesato has the key with him.”

“That means we don’t get to find out what’s inside,” Casey said, sounding disappointed. “This is the only interesting thing I’ve seen all night.”

“It’s only interesting because we can’t open it,” April retorted.

“I bet I could pick this lock,” Casey said, once more reaching for the letter opener.

“Absolutely not,” April said, plucking the opener from his hand. “The attorney told me if I didn’t have a key to something that was locked, I wasn’t to attempt to open it. Those instructions were from Mr. Hidesato himself.”

Casey grumbled something under his breath and sat back with his arms crossed. After ensuring herself that he wasn’t going to mess with the coffer, April went back to her inventory of the other items in the cabinet.
“It doesn’t make sense to have a treasure chest and not have the key to it,” Casey complained. “If the attorney had it he’d have given it to you.”

“I have enough to do without worrying about one coffer,” April said.

“We should look for the key,” Casey insisted.

“Where?” April asked, glancing at him over her shoulder. “This house is huge and I was only asked to catalogue this one room. If I don’t finish on time I don’t get paid and by the way, neither do you.”

“So we’ll look in here,” Casey said, the excitement of a hunt pushing his boredom away. “The chest is in this room and if it was mine, I’d have the key nearby.”

“I’ve been through the room without finding any keys,” April said. “You went through the desk and didn’t find one. It’s not here.”

Casey stared at the coffer and then his eyes drifted to the desk. Snapping his fingers, he start feeling around the edges of the desk top.

“What are you doing?” April asked, turning around to watch him.

“Don’t ya’ remember those treasure hunting movies? Old desks always have hidden drawers, ya’ just have to press on the right spot,” Casey told her.

“Good luck with that,” April said with a hint of sarcasm.

Happy that Casey had something to occupy his time, April returned to the job of listing the contents of the cabinet. She could hear him muttering to himself and at one point noticed that he’d crawled under the desk.

A few blissfully quiet moments passed before April heard a click and then Casey shouted triumphantly, “I found it!”

When she looked over, April saw a small drawer protruding from the underside of the desk. Casey stood next to it, holding an intricately designed metal key in his hand.

“It’s got the same design on it as the lock on this box,” Casey said, spinning the coffer around to face him.

April took a few steps in his direction. “We shouldn’t open it. The attorney said Mr. Hidesato’s instructions were specific; do not open anything we haven’t got a key for.”

“But we’ve got the key,” Casey argued, inserting it into the lock despite April’s protests.

“Yes, but it wasn’t given to us,” April said. “The intent of the instructions still stand.”

“That’s nitpicking,” Casey said as he turned the key. The hasp immediately popped loose and Casey lifted the coffer’s lid.

“What’s in there?” April asked, now overcome with curiosity. She couldn’t see into the coffer because Casey’s body was in the way.

He turned towards her, holding something aloft. “It’s full of coins,” he said, displaying the one he’d extracted from the box. “They’re all nestled in their own little slots.”
“That looks like a Wado Kaichin,” April said, examining the coin as Casey held it. The coin was round with a square cut-out in the center that had been sealed up. “I believe it’s made of silver.”

“Not as cool as gold, but still pretty nice,” Casey said, “except that all of them have this stuff that looks like red wax filling up the middle.”

“Perhaps it’s a ceremonial thing,” April said. “Put it back and close the box, I’ll make a detailed inventory of the contents when I finish with the cabinet.”

She moved back to the cabinet but Casey continued to look at the coin, holding it up to the light. “Hmm, ya’ know, it looks like there’s something inside the wax.”

“Those are probably impurities,” April said. “Just put it back Jones.”

Her use of his last name was a good indication that she was serious, but Casey wasn’t really listening. Using his thumb nail, he began to chip the wax seal off of the coin.

The sudden silence alerted April and she turned in time to see the flakes of red wax drifting to the floor.

“Casey, no!” April called out in alarm. “What do you think you’re . . . ?”

Before she could finish the sentence a high pitched wail reverberated through the room and then a bluish mist sprang out of the center of the coin. It hung in the air for a moment, becoming a wispy shadow that quickly formed into the shape of a horridly grotesque face.

In the next second it dove at Casey. Crying out, he dropped the coin and flung himself sideways, landing on the desk and striking the coffer. The box slid across the desk top and over the edge, landing with a crash on the floor.

Coins scattered everywhere, the wax seals breaking loose on contact with the hard wooden floorboards.

“Look out!” Casey yelled.

His warning wasn’t necessary, April had already thrown herself down behind the sofa. The pair watched in horror as the clouds of smoke mingled overhead, covering the ceiling, and then separated into individual columns before disappearing through the exterior wall.

The wailing sound left with the smoke. As silence settled on the room, April and Casey slowly sat up, both wide eyed with disbelief.

Suddenly the double doors at the end of the room burst open, making the pair jump. Standing in the entrance was an elderly Japanese man, looking greatly alarmed.

“What have you done?” he demanded.

Striding into the room as April and Casey stood up, the man’s eyes landed on the coins that were scattered on the floor all around the desk.

“Mr. Hidesato?” April asked.

“No, oh no,” Mr. Hidesato moaned, ignoring April’s question. He cautiously approached the
desk and went around to the working side where he gingerly lifted the coffer. Turning his head, he told the pair, “You should not have opened this. You let them escape.”

Casey sheepishly scratched at his neck and said, “That’s my fault, sir. I, uh, found the key and got curious. I couldn’t resist taking a closer look at one of the coins.”

“Did you also feel the need to remove the wax seal that kept them bound?” Mr. Hidesato asked angrily. “Do you have any idea what you have unleashed upon this city?”

April walked over to the desk to join the men. “What were those things? What was released?”

Placing the coffer on the desk, Mr. Hidesato examined it for damage as he answered. “Those were the Legendary Creatures. The responsibility for capturing and keeping them imprisoned was entrusted to my family centuries ago. My uncle should never have left the coffer where a heta could lay hands upon it.”

“How does one become a Warder?” April asked.

“Unskillful, awkward,” Mr. Hidesato said.

April cast a sharp look in Casey’s direction. “You’re right on both counts.”

“Hey!” Casey protested.

“What will happen now that they’ve gotten out? How can we get them back?” April asked.

“They will cause much suffering and death,” Mr. Hidesato said as he began gathering the coins from the floor. “Our only good fortune is that this city is large enough to satisfy their hungers. They will remain here; an entire country will not have to be searched as my ancestors were required to do.”

“Then we can catch them,” Casey said. “Tell us what to do and we’ll stick them all back in this box.”

With a frustrated huff, Mr. Hidesato straightened up and planted his fists on the desk top. Staring at Casey, he said, “You cannot recover them. Only a Warder can capture and imprison the creatures. I am too old for the task and I am the last of my family.”

“How many do you require?” April asked.

Mr. Hidesato shook his head. “Warders are trained to the job almost from the womb. They must have studied the tenets of Bushido from birth. Their training must include the study of martial arts under at least two different Masters. They must be physically exceptional and they must also be warriors. Where would one find such a person in New York City?”

April and Casey exchanged knowing looks. Smiling, April said, “Actually, we know of four who fit those requirements exactly. They’ve already saved this city more times than I can count. I’m sure that if you tell them what to do, they can recover these creatures.”

“Four?” Mr. Hidesato asked, looking astonished. He appeared to think about it for a moment and then finally sighed. “It must be so since it appears that I am called upon to uphold my family’s legacy once more. Can these four be reached tonight? They must meet us here as quickly as possible.”
April walked over to the couch where she’d placed her backpack and extracted her shell cell. “I’ll call them right now. They, um, won’t want to be seen entering the house. Is there another way inside?”

“What type of warriors are they?” Mr. Hidesato asked with a frown.

“They’re ninjas,” April said. “Very well trained ninjas. They are also . . . rather unusual in appearance. They don’t show themselves to all that many people.”

Perhaps it was because Mr. Hidesato had seen many unusual things in his life that he did not push for more answers. “Upstairs you will find a terrace attached to my uncle’s bedroom. It overlooks the garden. These ninjas may enter the house through there without anyone observing them.”

“I’ll give them directions,” April said, walking out of the room to place her call.

Mr. Hidesato returned to retrieving the spilled coins and Casey helped him. Once the coins were on the desk, Mr. Hidesato began to return them to the slots inside the coffer, carefully matching each to a symbol marked in the leather alongside the slot.

“This mess is my fault,” Casey said, breaking the silence. He wasn’t the best at sensing what people were feeling, but he could guess that the Japanese man didn’t care for him. “I want to help make it right. I’m going to help make it right.”

Pausing in his efforts, Mr. Hidesato studied Casey for a moment and then said, “I can see that you are a good man. Perhaps overly curious and a tad impatient. Can you follow directions I wonder?”

“He’s good in a fight, if that’s what you’re asking,” April said, coming back into the room. “I reached the guys. It won’t take them long to get here, so I’ll go upstairs and wait.”

“Just a moment,” Mr. Hidesato said. He quickly scribbled some numbers on a piece of paper and handed it to her. “This is the code for the alarm system on my uncle’s room. There are several zones within the house, each with their own separate security.”

“Thank you,” April said.

Casey and Mr. Hidesato continued their task while they waited for her to return. When the coins they’d piled on the desk had been placed into the coffer, Casey asked, “Did we get them all?”

Mr. Hidesato quickly surveyed the box’s contents and nodded. “Yes, all of the coins are here. Would you be so kind as to retrieve my bags from the foyer? I dropped them there when I heard the noise of the escaping creatures.”

Though Casey didn’t much like the idea of being treated like a man servant, he went out to collect the bags without a word. He wouldn’t have been in this predicament in the first place but for his own bad judgment.

There were only two suitcases and a garment bag. One of the suitcases was fitted with an intricate lock and was quite heavy, making Casey reevaluate how strong Mr. Hidesato really was.

Upon seeing Casey return with the bags, Mr. Hidesato appeared relieved. He took the heavier bag from Casey and placed it on the desk next to the coffer. “Ah, thank you. I had not planned to stay overly long, but I am glad I had the foresight to bring this with me. I must have sensed that I would be needing it.”
Casey wanted to ask what the bag contained, but the sound of April’s voice stopped him. When she came into the room, she was alone.

“Your friends?” Mr. Hidesato asked, looking puzzled.

“They’re here,” April told him. “I need to prepare you before they enter. Our friends are very . . . unique.”

“So you have said,” Mr. Hidesato replied. “Please, we do not have much time. The sooner we begin our preparations, the sooner we can begin to recapture these monsters.”

“All right,” April said. Stepping into the doorway, she signaled that it was all clear and then stood aside.

Leonardo entered the room first, followed closely by his brothers. They spread out to either side of him and faced Mr. Hidesato.

Eyes widening, Mr. Hidesato exclaimed, “They are Kame!”

“Mutant ninja turtles,” Casey said, crossing his arms. “There ain’t nobody better than these guys at taking on monsters.”

“We’ve faced our fair share of them,” Leo said. “My name is Leonardo.”

“Raphael,” Raph said next.

“Donatello,” Don said with a slight bow.

“I’m Mikey,” Mikey said cheerfully. “I hope we’re not freaking you out dude.”

“Mr. Hidesato. My uncle owned this home,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Has Miss . . . .”

He paused to look at April, realizing that they had never been introduced. “My name is April O’Neil and that’s Casey Jones. Your attorney hired me to catalogue the items in this room and Casey was supposed to be my bodyguard.”

His eyes on Leonardo, Mr. Hidesato continued, “Has Miss O’Neil explained the situation to you?”

“Some,” Leo said, moving up to the front of the desk. “Apparently Casey opened a box and released some sort of creatures into the city.”

“Smooth move Case,” Raph said.

Casey shot him a dirty look. A glance from Leo quieted them both and he went on. “From what I gathered, the things that escaped were Japanese legendary creatures, captured by your ancestors and held in that box under the watchful eye of your family for centuries. It is my understanding that only those who have received certain training are able to capture these creatures.”

Switching to Japanese, Mr. Hidesato asked, “Do you understand my language?”

Leo answered in Japanese. “Yes. All four of us are fluent. Our father is from Japan and is a Ninjitsu Master.” Shifting back to English, he said, “April knows a little and Casey none at all, so we should speak in a language they can understand.”

“As you wish,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I ask about your fluency because the key to re-capturing
the creatures lies within the individual coins contained in the coffer. Each coin was designed specifically for the creature it will hold, each spell to bind that creature inscribed in Japanese upon the coin. Even the slots that the coins must be placed into is marked with the creature’s name. If you cannot read or speak the language, you cannot become a Warder.”

“Are there instructions on how to track these creatures?” Don asked.

“No, that knowledge was passed down through generations in verbal teachings,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I will have to assist you in recognizing their signs. Unlike my ancestors, today we have the news media and the internet to provide us with information.”

“That’s my department,” Don said. “If you can give me certain parameters to watch for, I can write a computer program that will continuously search for them.”

“Astounding,” Mr. Hidesato said, appearing impressed. “I must ask though; you said that your father, a Master ninja, trained you from birth?”

“From the time we were hatched,” Leo clarified.

“As I told Miss O’Neil, you must have trained under at least two Masters to become a Gokuri – a Warder, as was my uncle and I,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“We have,” Mikey said. “Master Splinter trained us, and we were also trained by the Ninja Tribunal.”

At Mr. Hidesato’s confused expression, Leo said, “The Tribunal is a group of four Ninjitsu Masters. My brothers have trained with five martial arts Masters, I have trained with six.”

“He’s an overachiever,” Raph said, nudging Leo with his elbow.

“Many of my ancestors were killed by these creatures,” Mr. Hidesato said. “This is not a matter to be taken lightly.”

“If these things are as dangerous as you say, then we ain’t taking it lightly,” Raph responded. “Go ahead and tell us how we start this hunt.”

“You prepare by learning how to be a Warder,” Mr. Hidesato said. Placing a hand on the suitcase atop the desk, he added, “This contains the tools that you will need. You must become adept at their use. Shall we begin?”

The turtles looked around at one another and then each offered a single nod to Leo.

“Yes,” Leo said. “We’re ready to be taught.”

End Introduction
"First Appearance" created for this chapter by the very talented Nei-Ning
Night of the Dodomeki

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
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Chapter Notes

~~This extremely lovely preview image was created by AlessandraDC on DeviantArt.
Preview art is a scene from this chapter and was created by the incredibly gifted How_do_you_do_fellow_kids
After receiving assurances that the turtles were serious about becoming Warders, Mr. Hidesato took a key that hung on a chain from around his neck and unlocked the heavy suitcase. It also required him to enter a combination, which he did after opening the lock.

It seemed rather heavy security for a suitcase and the turtles along with their friends waited with heightened curiosity to see its contents. Mr. Hidesato opened the suitcase fully, displaying several tools nestled into specially fitted spaces within its padded interior.
Rather than explain the contents right away, Mr. Hidesato looked up at those gathered around the desk and said, “Centuries ago, when the legendary creatures roamed Japan, there was magic. Real magic, not the kind practiced by entertainers in your Las Vegas. Through the years this magic faded because people were taught that it did not exist. Without belief, magic hides. It does not die however, and may be used by those who understand its power.

“The items in this case have been blessed with magic. It is old, old magic and very powerful. Bushido teaches us what we must know in order to harness this magic. Without enlightenment, the things inside this case are merely pieces of metal.”

“We’ve had some experience with magic,” Raph said with a slight sneer. “Can’t say it’s all been good.”

“As with everything, magic is balanced,” Mr. Hidesato said. “There is both good and bad magic. There is magic that is meant to be good but can be corrupted, and magic that is meant to be bad but can be purified. I explain this to you so that though you may not understand how the items in this case work, you must simply accept that they do. You will encounter magic as you pursue the creatures and without the protection of magic, you will succumb to evil.”

“Protection of what sort?” Leo asked.

Mr. Hidesato reached into the case and picked up an object with a slender metal handle. On one end more metal had been forged into the form of a pair of Japanese symbols.

“It reads ‘warder’ or ‘jailer’,” Don explained for April and Casey’s benefit.

Peeling back the sleeve from his right arm, Mr. Hidesato displayed where those symbols had been burned into the inside of his forearm. “It is a branding iron,” he said. “Only those bearing this mark may capture the creatures. Only those bearing this mark have the protection of magic and the ability to see most of these creatures.”

“We’ve got to be branded?” Mikey asked, his voice rising in pitch.

“I’ll do it,” Raph said. “Do we need to build a fire to heat that thing up?”

Shaking his head, Mr. Hidesato said, “No. Magic will provide the necessary heat. Extend your arm.”

Raph presented his forearm, placing the back of his fist on the desktop to keep his arm steady. When Mr. Hidesato brought the end close to Raph’s skin, the symbols began to glow red with heat.

Mr. Hidesato pressed the hot metal to Raph’s arm, which began to sizzle. The burning flesh was not a pleasant smell and Raph’s lip curled back in distaste, but otherwise he did not display his pain.

When Mr. Hidesato withdrew the branding iron, the mark it had left on Raph’s arm continued to glow red for several seconds. Then it faded, leaving a fully healed scar bearing the Warder symbols.

“Hey, it don’t hurt anymore,” Raph said wondrously. Tentatively placing the tip of his finger against the mark, he added, “Shell, this feels like I’ve had this mark for a long time.”

“The magic not only sears the mark upon your skin, but into your very being,” Mr. Hidesato explained. “Once the mark is in place, it no longer needs to be painful.”
Leo stepped up to where Raph had been and duplicated his brother’s actions. Once his arm was ready, Mr. Hidesato placed the brand upon his skin.

The turtle leader remained stoic during the process, nodding as he examined the finished product. Donatello offered his arm next, scrunching his beak as the scalding iron touched his skin.

When it was Mikey’s turn, he said, “You know, maybe three Warders is more than enough. Somebody should stay behind to count the coins, make a few lists, write the stories about your adventures . . . .”

“Get your butt over there, knucklehead,” Raph told him, giving Mikey a shove.

Mikey squeezed his eyes shut while Mr. Hidesato applied the brand. When it was done, Mikey said, “Easy as pie. No sweat. I feel like a new turtle.”

“Wish that meant we could’ve traded in the old one,” Raph muttered.

When Mikey stepped back, Casey walked up to the desk and held out his arm. “Do me too. These guys shouldn’t have to clean up my mess by themselves.”

“I cannot brand you,” Mr. Hidesato said. “You do not fulfil the requirements to be a Warder.”

“To hell with that,” Casey said. “I’ve been fighting against bad guys since I could walk. Just ‘cause I don’t know all that Bushi-doodle stuff don’t mean I can’t wrangle a few monsters.”

“You do not understand,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The power of Gokuri magic will not attach itself to those who have not been enlightened. Allow me to demonstrate.”

He brought the branding iron close to Casey’s skin. It did not turn red and when he touched it to Casey’s arm, the metal was cold.

“Well crap,” Casey said with feeling. “If I can’t catch them then I’ll be bait. I ain’t sitting on the sidelines.”

“I can help Don create an algorithm to track the creatures,” April said. “We almost always work as a team.”

“This will be a large undertaking,” Mr. Hidesato said musingly. “If we are to recapture creatures which took centuries to catch the first time around, then a team approach seems the most sensible. My uncle’s home will be our base of operations. Come, there are other things I must show you.”

Turning to the bookcase on the wall next to the desk, Mr. Hidesato pushed a set of books to the side, revealing a small panel containing a keyhole. The same key that he’d used to open the suitcase fit this keyhole as well. When he turned it and extracted the key, the bookcase slid aside to reveal a hidden room.

“Cool,” Mikey said with a grin.

The room was about twelve by twenty feet in size with a tall ceiling. One wall held a bank of computers atop one long workstation. Another wall contained several televisions, each tuned to different news outlets, the sound muted and the close captioning enabled.

On the third wall was a line of old outdated machines which still looked to be in working
order. Don recognized a telegraph, a mimeograph, an am/fm radio that appeared to date from the nineteen fifties, and a short wave radio amongst the collection.

There was also a crystal ball, a pair of Ouija boards, and a deck of fortune telling cards. However Mr. Hidesato’s uncle had chosen to pursue his creatures, his methods had not involved strictly Japanese magic.

“I’m guessing this is the war room,” Raph said.

“It is the central point for intelligence gathering,” Mr. Hidesato acknowledged. “I had intended to clear these things out and ship all of it overseas to my home in Japan, as well as the coffer for safekeeping there. Those plans will have to be delayed, along with the sale of my uncle’s home, until the creatures have been reacquired.”

“We’re not gonna catch anything by standing around talking about it,” Raph said. “Fire up those computers ya’ two whiz kids and let’s get this show on the road.”

For the next few hours Don and April sat side by side in front of the computers. While they worked, Raph sprawled in a chair watching the news feeds, changing stations periodically in an attempt to keep up with everything that was happening in the city.

Mikey had discovered a police band radio amongst the items clustered together along the third wall. While he listened to that, he also read an instruction manual on operating the telegraph and a book on Morse code.

In the office, Leo occupied the couch, on either side of him books from the elder Hidesato’s collection. He’d also found several journals that had been kept by the family Warders and was reading through them.

Mr. Hidesato took his personal belongings upstairs and moved into his uncle’s bedroom. He had informed the small band of fighters that there were spare bedrooms on the second and third floors of the home and that they were welcome to use them.

Casey was sent out with a shopping list. The kitchen had been stripped clean of food after Mr. Hidesato senior’s death and it needed to be restocked. Much like when he’d been sent after the luggage, Casey wasn’t thrilled with the job of gofer, but he figured it was what he deserved for having unleashed a multitude of hellish spawn upon the city.

Feeling stiff after sitting for so long, Raph finally got up and stretched. Scratching his side, he walked out to the office and went to stand in front of Leo. Yawning prodigiously, he glanced over the journals lining the couch around his brother and made a face.

“What the shell are ya’ reading?” Raph asked, noting the small Japanese characters covering each page.

“Quite a few members of Mr. Hidesato’s family kept journals,” Leo said. “Some of them contain very detailed accounts of their efforts in tracking down and capturing creatures. Did you know a lot of the creatures were just supposed to be bogey man tales that parents told their children to keep them in line?”

“Tulpa,” Don said, entering the room. “The belief in them by the kids and probably some of the parents during a time when magic was prevalent no doubt resulted in the manifestation of these beings. A Tulpa is something created through spiritual or mental power alone.”

“Way to go mom and dad,” Raph said. “Look, I’m sure this is all fascinating stuff, but I
didn’t sign up for the job of sitting on my ass. What say we hit the streets before the sun comes up and see if we can’t lure a few of these creatures out of hiding?"

“If we did find one, how do you propose we catch it?” Leo asked, closing the journal he was holding. Tapping its cover he said, “According to these journals, depending on which creature you’re after, differing methods have to be employed.”

“I’m already starting to regret the good old days of just pounding someone into submission,” Raph groaned.

“Your brute strength will certainly become necessary,” Mr. Hidesato said, approaching on silent feet. “Many of these creatures will put up a fight.”

“You must have had some ninja training yourself Mr. Hidesato,” Don said, impressed that he hadn’t even seen the man come into the room.

Mr. Hidesato bowed his head in acknowledgement. “I have myself trained with a number of Masters. If not for my advanced age, I would relish the exhilaration that accompanies a hunt.”

“So how do we catch these things?” Raph asked.

“Just as your brother said, it depends on the creature itself. You must first know what you are after,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Unfortunately, you do not have the time to acquire all of the necessary knowledge. Since I have studied these creatures from the time I was a small child, I will tell you what must be done.”

“Master Splinter will have to know what we’re doing,” Leo said. “We’ll need to divide our time between here and the lair. It goes without saying that we can’t be seen by people.”

“But ya’ had to say it anyway,” Raph said teasingly.

“It is a good thing for us that most of these creatures prefer to appear at night,” Mr. Hidesato said.

Casey peeked into the room and announced, “I’ve got the groceries put away. There’s pizza if anybody wants some.”

As if pizza were a magic word, Mikey was suddenly in their midst. “Don’t let it get cold Casey, ‘cause I think I’ve got something.”

“From the cop shop?” Raph asked, knowing his brother had been listening to the police band.

“Yeah. A bunch of jewelry stores along Midtown East on Fifth Street got broken into about an hour ago. The alarms went off almost at the same time. The cops are saying that the only thing that shows up on the video cameras is an eyeball.”

“An eyeball? On all of them?” Don asked.

“Only repeating what I heard,” Mikey said.

April came rushing into the room. “The police just chased a female pickpocket along East fifty-seventh. They thought they had her surrounded but she just disappeared.”

Turning excitedly to Michelangelo, Mr. Hidesato asked, “Did they say what was stolen?”
“They said be on the lookout for someone trying to unload a bunch of gold coins,” Mikey answered. “Why would someone just steal coins from a jeweler?”

“And the woman,” Mr. Hidesato began, looking at April, “did they describe her?”

“Just that she was wearing a long gown and had a flowing scarf over her head,” April said.

“You know what it is, don’t you?” Leo asked, rising from the couch.

“It is a Dodomeki,” Mr. Hidesato told him. Striding to the coffer which still sat on the desk, he opened the lid and chose a coin from the box. “To contain her you must use this coin. Capturing the Dodomeki requires using her own greed against her. She must steal this coin from one of you kame; once she has it in her hand, the coin’s magic will pull her inside.”

“How do we keep her in there?” Raph asked.

To answer that question, Mr. Hidesato took another tool from the suitcase. This one had a thick, cylindrical hand grip, not unlike that of a pair of garden shears. The working end almost looked like cooking tongs, but the metal face on either side had a small box mounted onto it.

Pointing at the box, Mr. Hidesato said, “Do you see the opening here? This is where the red wax comes out so that a captured creature may be sealed into the coin.” He touched the bottom points on the handle. “These flip open so that solid wax bullets may be loaded into the device. Once you have pulled the creature into the coin, you must quickly seal it in with the wax. It is currently loaded.”

“How do we heat the wax?” Don asked.

“You do not have to, the tool is powered by magic,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Place the coin between the tips of the tool and squeeze the boxes together over the square opening in the coin for a slow three count. Wax will flow out to fill the opening and will then immediately harden.”

“I guess this is another thing that’ll only work for us?” Mikey asked, taking the tool from Mr. Hidesato.

“Yes, and do not lose it,” Mr. Hidesato admonished the brothers. “There are few people who know how to create another and they all reside in Japan.”

April had ducked back into the war room while they talked and she called out from inside, “She’s mugged someone else. I’ve pulled up a map of the area that she’s in and she seems to be moving in one particular direction.”

The group gathered inside the room to look at April’s map. Each of the places and people the Dodomeki had attacked were marked in red.

“Casey, ain’t there a coin dealership right about here on Forty-Seventh Street?” Raph asked. “I remember ‘cause we stopped some Purple Dragons from busting in there once.”

“There sure is,” Casey said. “It’s a big fancy place too.”

April’s fingers danced over the keyboard. In a second she had a street side view of the coin shop on her computer screen.

“That is where the Dodomeki will go,” Mr. Hidesato said.
“Tell us about her,” Leo requested.

“Dodomeki are cursed women,” Mr. Hidesato explained. “This supernatural creature, what we call a yokai, is a thief with a preference for stealing money. The curse attached because of the woman’s greed and wickedness. Someone who steals a lot in Japan is referred to as having ‘long arms’ and the creature you are after does literally have long arms. She is also covered in hundreds of tiny eyeballs.”

“That’s why the only thing on the security camera was an eye,” Don said.

“She can spew poisonous fumes, so you must surprise her,” Mr. Hidesato warned. “Do not cut her skin because her blood will likewise give off noxious gasses. If you place the magic coin into a pocket with other coins and jingle them, she will be attracted to the sound and be unable to pass without stealing all you have.”

“Once the coin’s in her hand it will activate on its own?” Don asked.

“Yes,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “She will be pulled into it. When the coin starts to fall after she is inside, catch it and quickly seal the center with the special wax.”

“Our disguises are in the moving truck,” Leo said. “Mikey can wear one of those. Because that area is patrolled by private security, we need to be inconspicuous, so we’ll go in April’s van rather than the moving truck. Casey can drive and get us a parking spot as close to the coin dealers as possible. Mikey will deploy to a spot between the Dodomeki and the coin shop.”

“Deploy,” Mikey repeated. “That sounds so much better than Mikey is the bait, which is what you mean. Why am I always the bait?”

“I’m pretty sure you’ve asked that question before,” Raph said.

“How did you answer it?” Mikey asked.

“I told ya’ to stop whining,” Raph said.

“Does everyone understand the plan?” Leo asked. “April, could you remain here with Mr. Hidesato and monitor any reports that come in? Relay any new information to us via shell cell.”

As they walked back out through the office, Mr. Hidesato handed the coin he’d taken from the coffer to Leonardo. “This is the coin created for the Dodomeki. It, like the wax sealing tool, cannot be duplicated here in the States. Take great care of both.”

“We will,” Leo assured him.

“Good luck,” Mr. Hidesato called out as the turtles and Casey ran upstairs and used the master bedroom terrace to exit the house.

While Casey drove April’s van to Forty-Seventh Street, Michelangelo sat in the back and pulled on his disguise. “I hope somebody thought to grab some coins so I’ll have something to jingle while I’m walking around,” he said.

His brothers looked at each other in dismay. “Oh crap,” Raph said. “Guess we should have taken care of that before we left Mr. Hidesato.”

“No sweat ya’ guys,” Casey said. “There’s a bunch of quarters up here in the ashtray. Ya’ can’t navigate the city if ya’ ain’t got coins for the tolls.”
“Ha! Now you’re finally being useful,” Raph said, leaning between the front seats to scoop out the coins from the ashtray.

“Jerk,” Casey said, making a sharp turn and tossing Raph back into his seat.

“Wack bag,” Raph retorted.

In the passenger seat, Leo pointed at an alleyway in the middle of the block. “Right there Casey. That spot will place us between the Dodomeki and the coin dealership. If she’s still moving in this direction, that is.”

“She is,” Don said, listening to April through his headset. “She’s getting close too. She attacked a man walking his dog three blocks from here.”

Casey backed the van into the alley, making sure that the shadows hid the vehicle. The group disembarked and Raph stuffed the coins into Mikey’s pockets.

“Here,” Leo said, handing the trap coin to Mikey. “Put this in with the rest of the coins. Walk up and down the sidewalk and make sure to jingle those coins. The rest of us will remain hidden nearby, so if you have any trouble, we’ll be with you in a second.”

“Make that half a second,” Mikey said, placing the trap coin into his pocket.

“Let’s go, we don’t know how fast that thing is,” Raph urged.

Casey and the three older turtles spaced themselves out along the street, remaining out of sight in the shadows. Pushing his hat down low to hide his face, Mikey began strolling along the sidewalk, jiggling the coins in his pocket as loudly as possible.

He walked up to within half a block of the coin dealership, crossed the street, and made a return trip. Mikey passed the others’ hiding places, going two blocks up before crossing over again and moving back towards his starting point.

Mikey had just crossed the street for a third time and was nearly opposite the alley where the van was parked when a little over a block ahead of him an old homeless man staggered out of an areaway.

“She took my money!” the old man shouted piteously, waving an empty tin can in the air.

Almost before Mikey could process that the man had been robbed of his coins, a woman appeared in front of him. She wore a dark colored kimono along with a headdress that flowed down to mid-thigh and kept her face in shadows.

Mikey barely had time to yank his hand out of his pocket before she descended on him. One long, thin arm snaked its way towards him, the sleeve of the kimono blowing backwards to reveal dozens of small eyes covering the skin.

Pure reflex made Mikey jump backwards, emitting a high pitched shriek of surprise and disgust as he did so. Unfortunately, the back of his foot came down on the hem of his trench coat, yanking him off balance.

Arms pin wheeling, Mikey tried to regain his footing and only managed to tangle himself even further in his trench coat. As he fell, his hand clutched at the nearest thing to him, which was the Dodomeki.
Mikey’s fingers caught in her kimono as he went down and his weight and momentum ripped the garment off of her. Landing on his shell, Mikey stared wide eyed at the now nearly nude form standing over him.

From both shoulders, along her incredibly long arms, and down to the tips of her fingers were covered in eyes. On her face, where there were normally two eyes, the Dodomeki had three.

Her mouth opened and a gurgling sound emerged as she bent down to reach for Mikey. Completely freaked out, Mikey planted one foot flat on the sidewalk and shoved his body away from her.

At the sight of her prey attempting to escape, the Dodomeki pounced, grasping at Mikey’s pocket. Suddenly remembering what he was supposed to do, Mikey reached inside the coat, fumbling to extract the wax tool from his belt.

His movement pulled the edge of the coat away just as the Dodomeki’s hand slid into the pocket. The sound of the material ripping was nearly as loud as that of the coins spilling out of the pocket and rolling all over the sidewalk.

Strange gibbering issued from the Dodomeki’s mouth as she dove for the coins. Mikey watched in horror as each coin she touched was swallowed up by eyeballs.

“Get up, Mikey!” Raph shouted.

The sound snapped Mikey out of his daze and he scrambled to his feet as his brothers and Casey darted out of hiding. “Where is it, where is it,” Mikey muttered, looking all around for the trap coin.

He spotted it rolling down the sidewalk towards Don and Casey. “Grab it!” he yelled at them.

Before they could reach it, the coin bounced off the sidewalk, hit the street, and rolled into a storm drain.

“Oh shell! It went down the drain!” Don called out to Leo.

Running towards the Dodomeki, Leo pointed at Don and ordered, “Get the coin!”

“We’ve gotta stall her!” Raph bellowed, pulling one of his sai and running towards the nearest parking meter.

Leo immediately saw what Raph meant to do and unsheathed his katanas. “Incoming!” he shouted at Mikey before tossing one of his swords to his younger brother.

Mikey shrugged off the trench coat while the katana was in the air and deftly caught it when it reached him. Raph jabbed his sai into the coin box on the meter and wrenched it to the side, ripping the metal open. Coins began spilling out, hitting the sidewalk and bouncing in every direction.

Turning on his heels, Mikey raced to the next meter in line just as Leo reached his. A hard slice sheared open the metal coin box to send another torrent of coins onto the ground. In less than a second, Mikey had forced open a third parking meter.

In the meantime, Casey and Don were face down on the street, peering into the darkened storm drain. “Can you see it?” Casey asked.
“Hang on,” Don said, pulling his shell cell from his belt and activating the flashlight app. Pointing the light into the drain, he saw the coin glittering just out of reach.

“I can get it with my hockey stick,” Casey said, sliding it from his bag.

“Not unless you’ve got glue on the end,” Don replied. “Hey, do you have any gum?”

Casey’s eyes lit up. “Yeah, hang on.”

Quickly fishing into his pocket, Casey came out with a square of bubble gum. Peeling the paper off, he stuck the gum in his mouth and began to chew as fast as his jaws would work.

Meanwhile, the Dodomeki was jumping from place to place on the sidewalk, slathering and babbling incoherently as she scooped up coins. The three turtles kept moving, slicing open parking meters and tossing coins all around her to keep her pinned to one spot.

Slapping the masticated wad of gum onto the handle of the hockey stick, Casey slid it through the grate, using the light from Don’s shell cell as a guide. He was off target the first try and had to press his shoulder into the pavement to get the correct angle. On his second try he snagged the coin and hurriedly dragged it out of the storm drain.

As soon as the coin was free from the drain, Don grabbed it off the stick and tossed it onto the sidewalk in front of the Dodomeki. “Heads up!” he yelled at his brothers.

The sound as it hit the ground drew the Dodomeki’s attention directly to the coin. With a cackle, she snatched the coin from the sidewalk.

Rather than disappearing into one of the eyes, the coin seemed to stick to the tips of the Dodomeki’s fingers. The yokai bounded to an upright position and tried to shake the coin loose, but it stuck tight.

For a second nothing happened, and then her body started to shake. The Dodomeki screeched as her skin became transparent and then turned vaporous. Coins began cascading from the smoke to bounce in every direction.

“Mikey, wax!” Leo shouted.

Dropping the katana, Mikey yanked the wax tool from his belt just as the Dodomeki was sucked into the Wado Kaichin. Taking a running dive, Mikey slid forward on his plastron, his hand outstretched, and caught the coin as it fell.

Rolling into a seated position, Mikey shoved the coin between the tips of the wax tool and squeezed it shut.

“One thousand one,” Mikey counted, “one thousand two, one thousand three.”

His brothers and Casey gathered around Mikey as he slowly opened the tool and plucked the coin out of it. Holding it up so that the coin was illuminated by a street lamp, they could all see that the wax seal was in place and had hardened properly.

“Holy crap,” Casey breathed out, running a hand through his hair.

Raph reached down and helped Mikey to his feet. “Ya’ did it little bro’.”

“I think I wet my shell,” Mikey responded. “Did you see that?”
“Yeah,” Raph said, throwing an arm across Mikey’s shoulders. “That was one ugly bitch.”

The clang of something metallic hitting the sidewalk startled the group and they spun as one, all reaching for their weapons. All they saw was the homeless man, his can rolling to a stop at his feet as he gawked at them.

Casey reached down and scooped up a handful of coins. Approaching the man, he picked up the can and deposited the coins into it before returning it to the old man.

“Tha . . . that’s . . . those . . . are . . . are . . . . . .” the old man babbled incoherently, lifting a shaking hand to point at the turtles.

“Figment of your imagination,” Casey said. “Go buy yourself a cup of coffee as far from here as ya’ can get. The place is about to be full of cops.”

“Co . . . cops? I’m g . . . gone,” the old man stammered, turning away from Casey and shuffling off as fast as he could.

“Calling the police is a good idea,” Leo said. “Don, ask April to phone this in to them three minutes from now to give us time to clear out. They’ll need to recover these coins.”

“On it boss,” Don said, relaying the message to April.

Leo retrieved his sword from where Mikey had dropped it and the group made a beeline back to the van. As Casey drove around the corner, the sound of approaching sirens could already be heard.

The ride back to the house was without incident, though quiet. The group was still tense due to the stepped up police patrols all along their route. They didn’t begin to relax until after Casey had dropped the turtles off in the alley behind Mr. Hidesato’s garden.

Casey came in by the front door while the turtles once more used the upstairs terrace to enter the house. Adrenalin was still flowing through their systems and they finally let the excitement of a successful hunt overwhelm them. They were all talking at once as they walked into the office.

“Did you get her?” Mr. Hidesato asked, his hands clasped in front of him.

“We sure did,” Mikey said, producing the trap coin.

“Excellent!” Mr. Hidesato said gleefully, taking the coin to the coffer and placing it into the correct holding slot.

“Was there any trouble?” April asked.

The turtles looked around at each other and then glanced at Casey.

“Nah, it was a piece of cake,” Casey said.

“Mmm, cake. Did you get any cake?” Mikey asked.

“I got pizza,” Casey said with a scowl, “and it’s cold.”

“Not to worry Mikey,” April said, linking her arm with the orange banded turtle’s. “I’ll make us a cake. We should celebrate! The new Warders have been baptized, as it were.”

“We can warm up that pizza while we wait,” Raph said. “I’m hungry.”
“We’ll have to call it breakfast,” Don said. “It’s almost four in the morning.”

“I need to call Master Splinter and let him know we’re all right,” Leo said.

Mr. Hidesato walked back over to join them. “You should let him know that you will be staying here,” he said. “There is still much work to be done to prepare you for the task ahead. The Dodomeki was a minor yokai; others that you must face will be of far greater danger.”

His words were sobering as the group was reminded of the sheer volume of escaped creatures.

“Okay, well that’s one way to bring the party down,” Mikey said. “I vote we think about that after we eat and get some shut eye. Oh yeah, and one other thing . . . .”

“What Mikey?” Raph asked when his younger brother paused.

“I also vote that Raph is bait next time,” Mikey said. “After all, he’s not only a bigger target, he’s a slower one too.”

“Come here ya’ goofball,” Raph growled, chasing after Mikey. “I’ll show ya’ slow!”

Leo waited for everyone to clear out of the office so it would be quiet during his call to Master Splinter. Before doing that though, he picked up the journal belonging to the elder Mr. Hidesato and carried it over to the desk.

Taking a pen from the desk set, he opened the journal to a blank page and wrote “First capture; Dodomeki. Minimal property damage, no injuries.”

Closing the journal, Leo tapped the cover before releasing a deep breath. His brothers had no idea what the other journals contained and therefore no clue what was in store for them.

For now, he’d keep it that way. There was no point in all of them having nightmares.

End Dodomeki
Chapter End Notes

A scene from this chapter created by the very sweet Nei-Ning ~
Night of the Kuchisake Onna

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
Word Count: 6,924
Rated: PG-13 2k3

Chapter Notes

~~Preview art is a scene from this chapter and was created by the incredibly gifted How_do_you_do_fellow_kids
Following the capture of the Dodomeki, the group of Warders and their friends enjoyed a small celebration before separating to get some much needed rest.

April and Casey left Mr. Hidesato’s house to return to the apartment they now shared. She still had a shop to run and Casey worked part-time as an auto mechanic, making enough to pay bills and keep up with his mission to rid the city of the Purple Dragons.
After assuring Master Splinter that they were all safe and that their first mission had been a successful one, Leo had told him they would be spending a lot of time with Mr. Hidesato. Master Splinter had wanted a promise that they would remember not to let themselves be seen during daylight and that they would not forget where their home was. Leo gave his word on both counts.

The turtle brothers chose to occupy a pair of adjoining bedrooms on the third floor of the house. There were certain personal aspects of their relationship that they were not quite ready to share with Mr. Hidesato. Though they would not dishonor their host by engaging in bedroom activities that were normally shared in the privacy of the lair, they had become used to sleeping in close proximity to one another.

It was after sunrise when the four brothers climbed the stairs to their new part-time bedrooms. Each room was furnished with a pair of twin beds and the first thing the turtles did after closing the curtains was to shove the beds together. When Don went through the open passage between rooms, Leo followed him, leaving Mikey and Raph to share a bed that first day.

Leo had made the choice of sleeping companion purposely. He was feeling uneasy about the obligation they had chosen to take on, especially since they had done so, to all intents and purposes, blindly.

Though he hadn’t read all of the journals, Leo had read enough to know that when Mr. Hidesato had said they would face great danger, he had not been exaggerating.

Leo fully intended to apprise his siblings of the things he had thus far read, but he wasn’t going to burden them with the knowledge until they had slept. For himself, Leo knew that what he had read might haunt him in his sleep, and having Donatello next to him would stay the worst of his dreams. There was a certain tranquility about the genius that Leo counted on in times of great stress.

Don seemed to sense Leo’s unease and once they were in bed, he curled in close to his brother. The warmth of Don’s body against him and the comforting weight of Don’s hand on his chest helped Leo to fall asleep quickly.

When the bad dreams came, they were more disquieting than they were frightening. Random images surrounded Leo as he floated in a trance like void, coming and going too quickly for him to pin any of them down.

Winking eyes, hideous grins, claw like fingers, strange animals, skeletons, and spectral forms drifted close to him, dissipating beneath Leo’s sharp blade. As quickly as Leo could swing his sword, one apparition would vanish only for another to appear.

The feeling of a hand on his face pulled Leo from his slumber. Waking with a start, he jerked sideways to reach for his katanas, which leaned against the wall next to the bed.

“It’s only me, Leo. We’re not under attack,” Don murmured calmly, his strong grip on Leo’s arm keeping his brother in bed.

“What is it? Is something wrong?” Leo asked, rolling over to face Don.

“You were thrashing around and muttering something about demons,” Don said. “Bad dream?” He placed his hand against Leo’s cheek again, gently stroking his skin as he looked with concern into his brother’s face.

Leo sighed and closed his eyes for a second before opening them to bask in Donatello’s compassionate brown orbs. “Nothing as substantial as that,” he answered. “It was disjointed
images, a jumble of disconnected shapes that kept floating at me out of nowhere. Eyes.” He laughed. “To be expected after our first yokai encounter.”

“You knew your dreams would be haunted though, that’s why you chose to sleep with me,” Don said, as astute as ever. “It wasn’t because of the Dodomeki was it? We’ve seen oddities before.”

“The four of us need to talk first chance we have,” Leo said. “I didn’t want to get into anything when we were so tired.”

“To save us from having nightmares?” Don asked, and then chuckled. “Ever the big brother. We need heavier curtains in these rooms if we’ll be sleeping here often.”

Leo blinked at the abrupt change of subject and then realized that Don was facing the windows. Daylight brightened the room; something they were unused to seeing when they slept.

“Think you can go back to sleep?” Leo asked.

“Can you?” Don countered.

“Keep rubbing my face like that and I can,” Leo said, his eyelids growing heavy.

“I can do that,” Don said with a soft smile. “Be quiet now.”

Yet another reason why Leo had chosen to sleep with Don; the genius would not push to know more, understanding that Leo would explain everything when he was ready. This time when Leo fell asleep, he had no dreams.

It was mid-afternoon when Leo next woke. Don was still slumbering, so Leo slid silently out of bed, donning his gear and weapons before peeking into the next room. Raph and Mikey were sleeping soundly, the older turtle’s snoring muffled by his younger brother’s arm which was draped across Raph’s face.

Chuckling, Leo retreated back into his own room and exited into the hallway from there. Going downstairs, Leo went first to the kitchen, drawing the curtains across the windows before setting about brewing a pot of tea.

He had just poured himself a cup of the hot liquid when he felt a presence behind him. In one fluid motion, he set the cup down and spun around, blade in hand.

Mr. Hidesato stood a few feet from him, his hands up in a placating gesture.

“Forgive me,” Mr. Hidesato said, “I did not mean to startle you.”

Sheathing his sword, Leo said, “You’re very quiet.”

“I am getting old,” Mr. Hidesato responded. “In my youth you would not have sensed my presence.”

“Your skills are still quite formidable,” Leo said politely. “Would you care for some tea?”

“Thank you, I would,” Mr. Hidesato said.

Leo filled another cup and passed it to the man. Mr. Hidesato gestured towards the kitchen table, where they took seats across from one another.
After taking a sip of his tea and nodding approvingly, Mr. Hidesato said, “It is not necessary to pull the curtains unless you are attempting to keep the sun out. The windows throughout the house are made of one way vision glass. No one outside of the house can see through the glass, but our view from inside is completely unobstructed.”

“Your uncle took a great many security precautions,” Leo noted.

“In our line of work, it is necessary,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Our family business is antiquities. It is how we finance our true profession. Human thieves are often as much a danger as the creatures we hunt.”

“Is that why your uncle lived here?” Leo asked. “Why did he bring the coffer here rather than leaving it with you in Japan?”

“Each warder clan has its own coffer, which is passed down through the lineage,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Guardianship only changes hands upon the death of the primary warder. Business brought my uncle here and it was his duty to bring the coffer with him.”

“How long did he live in New York?” Leo asked.

“Thirty-seven years,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “My uncle was one hundred and eight years old when he passed. He informed me of his imminent death so that I could be here to receive the coffer from him, but unforeseen circumstances delayed my departure. It is the first time in several hundred years that a coffer was not personally handed off in my family. I can only believe that what occurred was a predetermined course of events. You see, I am the last of my clan.”

He was looking at Leo meaningfully. The full import of what Mr. Hidesato had said hit Leo and he set his cup down.

Wanting to make sure that he wasn’t misunderstanding what the man had just alluded to, Leo asked, “What were your ultimate plans for the coffer?”

Mr. Hidesato smiled slightly, as though he knew the path Leonardo’s mind was taking. “When a clan reaches extinction, it is the duty of its last living member to recruit another clan to accept the responsibility of becoming warders. Everything belonging to the first clan is passed to the new one. All holdings, all monies, all possessions, and all of the recorded history becomes the property of the new clan.”

“I see,” Leo said slowly. “I assume the new clan that has been chosen has the option to say no to this legacy.”

“Of course,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Unless the obligation is accepted of their own free will by the clan, the warder magic will not attach to them.”

Diplomacy was amongst the skills that Leo had acquired through training and natural inclination, but he often found it vexing. Still, he had to wonder why it seemed that he had to coax an answer from Mr. Hidesato when it must be clearly obvious to him where the young turtle’s concerns lay.

Perhaps a more direct approach better suited the situation. “My brothers and I accepted an obligation to collect the creatures who escaped,” Leo said carefully. “Warder magic has already attached to us. We were operating under the assumption that once everything was set right again, you would take the coffer, return to Japan, and that would be the end of our involvement.”

“You fear that I have not played fair with you,” Mr. Hidesato said, apparently tiring of the
verbal fencing as well. “The emergency which placed you and your brothers in this situation did not allow for the normal formalities accompanying the unification of clans. As such, I cannot in good conscience hold your clan to the obligation. All I can ask is that you help me recover the creatures that were lost and while doing so, think about truly accepting this lifetime responsibility.”

“Mr. Hidesato, surely you understand that our clan is quite small,” Leo said. “There is only my father, myself, and my three brothers. It must be clear to you that we will have no offspring. Turtles live a very long time and Donatello has theorized that due to our mutation we may live virtually forever, but our lives are very dangerous. We have enemies and our enemies would like nothing more than to dissect us.”

“I realized the probable complications as soon as I saw you,” Mr. Hidesato acknowledged. “If you were to all perish, the coffer would be left unguarded. The potential for such an occurrence lives with us daily. You have only experienced a single capture, but I am sure it brought about an awareness of just how dangerous this burden can be.”

“The journals were very informative in that regard,” Leo replied. “My brothers and I are not the type to turn our shells on those in need, but we would prefer to know as much as we can before stepping into danger. I haven’t discussed any of what I learned from those journals, but I’m not going to leave my brothers in the dark about it.

“Our decision as to whether we’ll accept this lifelong commission will be a joint one. If at any point during this current mission we feel that information is being withheld from us, we will cease our hunt for the missing yokai. I will not endanger my brothers’ lives due to bad or missing intelligence.”

“Mr. Hidesato, surely you understand that our clan is quite small,” Leo said. “There is only my father, myself, and my three brothers. It must be clear to you that we will have no offspring. Turtles live a very long time and Donatello has theorized that due to our mutation we may live virtually forever, but our lives are very dangerous. We have enemies and our enemies would like nothing more than to dissect us.”

“I realized the probable complications as soon as I saw you,” Mr. Hidesato acknowledged. “If you were to all perish, the coffer would be left unguarded. The potential for such an occurrence lives with us daily. You have only experienced a single capture, but I am sure it brought about an awareness of just how dangerous this burden can be.”

“The journals were very informative in that regard,” Leo replied. “My brothers and I are not the type to turn our shells on those in need, but we would prefer to know as much as we can before stepping into danger. I haven’t discussed any of what I learned from those journals, but I’m not going to leave my brothers in the dark about it.

“Our decision as to whether we’ll accept this lifelong commission will be a joint one. If at any point during this current mission we feel that information is being withheld from us, we will cease our hunt for the missing yokai. I will not endanger my brothers’ lives due to bad or missing intelligence.”

“You are a prudent and honorable leader,” Mr. Hidesato said. “In your position I too would be cautious. I will do my utmost to gain and hold your trust. As I said last night, I will be delaying my departure for Japan until all of the creatures have been returned to the coffer.

“While you slept, I was phoning my business associates to apprise them of the delay. Since we have a presence in this city, I can conduct my affairs from here. I also phoned my uncle’s attorney that I will be here for the probate of my uncle’s estate and to ask that he remove the house from the real estate listings.”

“There ya’ are,” Raph said, appearing in the doorway. He looked and sounded relieved, both of which told Leo that his brother’s sleep hadn’t been completely untroubled.

“Want some tea?” Leo asked.

“No,” Raph said with distaste. “I’ll make coffee. Don’s gonna want it when he rolls out of bed. Did Casey get milk and cereal?”

“He did,” Leo said. “It’s your brand, so you’ll have to share with Mikey. We’ll need to make a shopping list because Casey got the bare minimum. He was in a hurry to get back here.”

From the glance Raph shot towards Mr. Hidesato, it was clear there were things he wanted to say but wasn’t going to do so in front of the man. Instead, he asked, “Did ya’ get a chance to tell sensei what we’re doing over here?”

“I did,” Leo said. “I had to keep it brief but he knows enough. He said he’s familiar with some of the yokai tales and to let him know if he’s needed.”

“How did it occur that your father came to be your master?” Mr. Hidesato asked.
“Master Splinter adopted us when we were hatchlings,” Leo explained. “We had been accidentally dropped down a sewer grate and came into contact with an ooze that turned out to be of alien origin. The ooze is what turned us from ordinary turtles into mutated ones.”

Leo left out the fact that their sensei was a rat who had also been mutated by the ooze. There would be time enough for the lengthy explanation of Master Splinter’s background if he were to ever meet Mr. Hidesato.

“Food, must have food,” Michelangelo said as he dragged himself into the kitchen.

Donatello came in right behind him. “The quiet upstairs woke him up, believe it or not,” Don said, referring to Mikey. “Then he jumped on my bed to wake me. He was under the impression that the house had eaten you two.”

“Was not,” Mikey said, snatching the cereal box off the counter almost as soon as Raph had set it down. “I said that I was hungry enough to eat the house.”

“I’m glad that you’re all up,” Leo said. “We should get in some practice if only to stay limber. Maybe we can find a large room down here and move the furniture aside.”

“There is no need,” Mr. Hidesato said. “My uncle transformed the basement into a dojo. He practiced his martial arts there almost until the day he died.”

“At one hundred and eight? That type of vitality must run in the family,” Leo said.

“We have all enjoyed a long life,” Mr. Hidesato acknowledged. “My only regret is that I was unable to continue the family line.”

“Dude, that sucks,” Mikey said as he sat down at the table. “You still have a shot at it though. Heck, Mick Jagger’s still popping out kids and he’s in his seventies!”

“That is true,” Mr. Hidesato responded noncommittally.

Leo changed the subject when Don carried his coffee over to join the group at the table. “Don, could you text a list of groceries to April and ask if she’d pick them up for us? Are there still funds in our account?”

Don had his shell cell out before Leo finished speaking. As he began to text, he answered, “Yes. I repaired a bunch of laptops for the computer shop down the street from her just the other day.”

Mr. Hidesato looked impressed. “You have an ingenious way of making money and remaining unseen.”

“None of that would work if it weren’t for April and Casey,” Leo said. “They’re family.”

Raph finished his cereal at the center island and then carried his coffee cup, bowl, and spoon to the sink. After he washed them and set the dishes on a towel to dry, he said, “If we’re gonna do some training, let’s go. I’m stiff from sleeping in a strange bed.”

When all four of them were ready, Mr. Hidesato led the way downstairs to the basement. As he passed a sensor on the wall, the area was flooded with light. It revealed a large space with a padded floor and three padded walls, the fourth covered by a mirror.

In one corner were a treadmill and stationary bike, along with a punching bag and speed bag.
A good sized room next to that area contained many types of weapons, including guns inside of a locked case.

“I will leave you to your training,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I spent most of the day attending to business and funeral arrangements and need to sleep. The house is yours; please help yourselves to anything you may need.”

With a bow he left them. Once Leo was certain the man was gone, he turned to his brothers and said, “We need to talk.”

“Was this to be a private conversation?” Don asked meaningfully. His upward glance turned Leo’s head and the turtle leader immediately saw the camera mounted high up on the wall.

“It can keep until later,” Leo said, striving to sound as though the matter was trivial. “Let’s get started.”

The brothers practiced for three hours before calling it quits and heading back upstairs. There were three full baths on the third floor and two on the second, ensuring that no one would have to wait in line to clean up. Mikey however did insist on joining Don in one of the bathrooms and Leo made sure to remind them to lock the door.

It was nearly six pm when the brothers gathered on the ground floor. Leo asked Don for a layout of the house, including details of the security systems.

Raph leaned in close to Leo, keeping his voice down as he asked, “Ya’ got some reason not to trust Hidesato?”

“Once we’re away from the house, we need to discuss that.” Leo replied in a near whisper. “For now, let’s just say I have cause for concern. I think he’s holding back on us.”

“I don’t think I like the sound of that Leo,” Raph said.

“Let’s remain alert for now,” Leo told him.

Don separated from them to go into the war room and begin his study of the security systems. The remaining three turtles explored the ground floor. Besides the kitchen and office with its secret war room, there was a half-bath, a formal dining room, a formal sitting room, and a media room.

Mikey squawked his delight at seeing the huge high definition flat screen television and the wide, plush leather reclining seats.

“You two better take off your weapons before you sit down,” Mikey admonished them. “I don’t want to see any of these seats get cut up.”

“Bossy much?” Raph asked. “How about ya’ watch it with the snacks so ya’ don’t leave stains on the furniture.”

“I wouldn’t get all that comfortable with living like this,” Leo said. “Let’s not forget that we’re here to track down and capture yokai. We need to focus on that, not what we might perceive as perks.”

“There’s nothing to say we can’t catch the local news in here,” Mikey said, hopping onto a chair. Grabbing the remote, he brought the big screen to life and found a channel that broadcast an early news report.
“Leave him here,” Raph said. “We can go check in with Don.”

They found that Don was using his own personal laptop to create a floor plan of the house and the locations of the security features throughout. The wariness that Leo was feeling had obviously rubbed off on the genius, who was taking pains to ensure that Mr. Hidesato did not discover what he was doing.

A little after seven the brothers heard the sound of April’s voice and Raph and Leo left the office to greet her. Casey stood in the foyer with the woman, his arms laden with grocery bags.

“I still have the key that the attorney gave me,” April said. “I hope that it’s okay that I let myself in?”

“It’s fine,” Leo said. “We need to find a way in and out of the house that doesn’t involve going through Mr. Hidesato’s room.”

“I hope you aren’t planning to blow holes in the basement wall,” April said, half in jest.

“In case anyone’s interested, this stuff is heavy,” Casey said in a disgruntled tone of voice.

“Give me a few of those bags,” Raph said, removing some of Casey’s burden. “Let’s go put this stuff away and figure out what we’re gonna have for dinner.”

As they walked away, April fished a folded newspaper from her back pocket, opening it before handing it to Leo. “You know what’s sad? That there are so many murders in the city that they don’t all make the front page. I found this article on page three. It might be one of ours.”

Leo skimmed over the short article, noting that it reported the death of a young man in a neighborhood full of apartment complexes. He read over the details of the killing twice before looking up at April.

“Your instincts are good. I agree that this is probably the work of one of the creatures,” Leo said as he handed the newspaper back to April. “Would you take this to Don and see if he can find out any more information? He’s in the war room. I’m going to round up Mikey.”

“Will do,” April said and headed into the office.

It took Leo a few minutes to pull Mikey out of the media room. The younger turtle was no longer even pretending to watch the news; he’d found a movie channel and was enjoying a wild car chase that sounded very real thanks to the room’s enhanced audio system.

While guiding Mikey towards the war room, Leo saw Mr. Hidesato descending the stairs. “April found an article in the newspaper that we think might be yokai related. She and Don are in the war room.”

“Ah, let us see what your friend has discovered,” Mr. Hidesato said, accompanying the two turtles.

When they entered the war room, they found both April and Don seated at terminals, madly typing away. Don’s laptop was next to him and Leo sauntered over to block the screen as he retrieved the newspaper. When Mr. Hidesato’s eyes were occupied with the story, Leo closed the laptop.

Raph and Casey came into the room just as Mr. Hidesato finished reading the news article. “This was most definitely the work of a Kuchisake Onna,” Mr. Hidesato said, shaking the
“Another woman? Are they all women? What’s up with that?” Mikey asked.

Ignoring his brother, Raph pointed at the paper and asked, “What’s the story say?”

“A young man was murdered last night,” Leo answered. “He was walking to his apartment and witnesses say he was accosted by a woman who was wearing a surgical mask over the bottom half of her face. They appeared to be talking, so the witnesses moved on and didn’t see what happened after that. The man was found by a street cleaning crew several hours later. His mouth had been slashed open from ear to ear and he’d bled out.”

“The Kuchisake Onna was once a beautiful woman,” Mr. Hidesato said. “She was the wife of a powerful samurai and very vain. She often cheated on her husband, asking the young men she bedded if they thought that she was beautiful. When the samurai discovered her infidelity, he slit her mouth from ear to ear, screaming at her ‘Who will think you are beautiful now?’ The woman soon died and her ghost began to wander around, the lower half of her face covered. She would approach men and ask them ‘Watashi kirei?’”

“Am I beautiful,” Leo translated.

“If the man said yes, she would remove the covering to reveal her disfigurement and then ask if they still think she is; ‘Kore demo?’ If they say no, she slashes her victim so that he will resemble her. If he lies and says yes, she walks away, only to follow her victim home and cut him in half. It is nearly impossible to run away from her, as she will continuously reappear in front of her victim,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“You said ‘nearly impossible’. Does that mean there is a way to escape from a Kuchisake Onna?” April asked.

“When she removes her facial covering and asks the second question, if a man keeps his head and responds neutrally, as in ‘average’, ‘possibly’, or ‘so-so’, the answer will confuse the Kuchisake Onna,” Mr. Hidesato said. “While she ponders that response, a man may run away and not look back.”

“How do we capture her without getting sliced and diced?” Don asked.

“The Kuchisake Onna is a very dangerous vengeful spirit, but she does have a fondness for hard candies, especially those of an amber color. If you throw them at her, she will stop to pick them up. Since she will be holding a pair of large scissors in one hand, once she has filled her other hand with candies, place the trap coin on the back of her neck,” Mr. Hidesato said. “You must be quick, if she sees you coming she will either slash you or dematerialize, only to again appear behind you.”

“So the trick is to get her to pick one of us as her next victim and then give her a non-answer when she drops the face covering,” Raph said. “While she’s thinking about that, toss some candy at her, wait for her to stoop down, and stick a coin on her neck. Don’t sound too hard.”

“It will not be quite that simple,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The Kuchisake Onna will not approach a Kame. She is after young, virile men.”

Almost as a group they all turned to look at Casey Jones. “What?” he asked with incredulity. “Am I supposed to be the bait this time?”

“Looks that way Case,” Mikey said. “Cheer up, you did say you wanted to take an active part in these hunts.”
“That’s before I knew ‘active’ meant dodging a pair of giant scissors,” Casey griped. “The last broad was creepy enough and all she wanted was coins, not blood.”

“We’ll just have to make sure she doesn’t go near you with the scissors,” Leo said. “Having other people in the area doesn’t seem to dissuade her, and it sounds as if she focuses on lone men. We’ll all disguise ourselves and stay on the street to make sure that Casey is the only lone man wandering around. Once the Kuchisake Onna has latched onto Casey, we’ll all move in. Casey, as soon as you throw the candy, start running.”

“Why don’t ya’ let me drop that coin on her neck too?” Casey asked. “It’ll save time.”

“Because the coin won’t work for ya’,” Raph explained. “Ain’t that right, Mr. H?”

“None of the warder magic will work for someone who does not wear the warder brand,” Mr. Hidesato said. “If Mr. Jones is the last one to touch the coin before it is placed on the Kuchisake Onna, the coin will not activate.”

“I can go along and help with any other men who might be on the street while we’re waiting for her,” April said. “You guys can’t approach people but I can walk with them until they go inside someplace that’s safe.”

“Just make sure they don’t think they’re picking you up,” Casey said darkly.

“You should not be alone either, Miss O’Neil. On rare occasions, the Kuchisake Onna has been known to go after comely young women,” Mr. Hidesato warned.

“I’ll stay with Donny,” April said. “He can trail me if I have to play bodyguard for someone.”

“I’ll carry the trap coin,” Leo said. “I’m the stealthiest. I’ll make sure there isn’t much distance between myself and Casey so that I can reach the yokai when she bends down to pick up the candy.”

“Don’t get too close or she won’t take the bait,” Raph warned.

“The sun just set,” Don said. “Any idea when we should go out?”

“What time did last night’s attack take place?” Leo asked. “The news article didn’t say.”

“Sometime around midnight,” Don said. “There isn’t a whole lot more information on the internet.”

“If she gets another victim tonight there will be,” Leo said grimly. “The front page will be screaming about a serial killer.”

“Then we gotta make sure she’s a one-and-done murderess,” Raph said.

“The weather report says it’s going to be foggy,” April said after checking the forecast online. “That could be a problem.”

“Foggy evenings are a favorite of the Kuchisake Onna,” Mr. Hidesato said. “She may not wait until the middle of the night to attack if there is a thick enough fog.”

“Then we’ll have to go out earlier,” Leo said.

“It ain’t foggy yet,” Raph said. “We got time to eat. Casey brought over a couple of frozen
lasagnas and I stuck ‘em in the oven earlier. They ought to be ready pretty soon.”

April got up from her chair and made for the door. “I’ll fix a salad to go with it.”

It was a nice family meal which April insisted they share in the dining room. Casey appeared a little distracted and Raph worked to keep his friend’s mind off of the task he was going to perform later that evening.

“Master Splinter would like this,” Mikey said partway through the meal. “He’s at home by himself while we’re here eating in luxury.”

“Your father is most welcome to come and stay here,” Mr. Hidesato said.

Before Mikey could agree to that, Leo said, “Our sensei finds anything above ground to be disquieting. He would rather remain in our home.”

Mikey frowned and started to say something, but Raph gently kicked his brother’s leg to stop him. When Mikey glanced at him, Raph gave an almost imperceptible shake of his head as a warning to drop the subject.

The turtles had brought their human disguises into the house the evening before and after dinner they went up to their rooms to put them on. As they prepared to go out on their second hunt, Leo lamented the fact that he hadn’t had a chance to talk to his brothers about what they’d gotten into.

During the drive to the area where the Kuchisake Onna had been sighted everyone was quiet. Leo had gotten the trap coin and the wax tool from Mr. Hidesato before they’d left. Along the way they’d stopped at a bodega so that April could purchase two bags of butterscotch candies and the only sound in the van came from Casey, who kept crinkling one of the bags.

“Relax Casey,” Raph said. “Ya’ don’t ever get this nervous when we’re going into a fight with the Purple Dragons.”

“Dragons I can handle. Crazy ass ninjas I can handle. Even that psychopath Bishop I can handle,” Casey said. “Weird sliced up ghost chicks that I can’t hit are a whole other thing.”

“You’d better get it together quick,” Raph said, checking out the street signs they passed. “We’re almost there. Don’t forget that we’re gonna be practically on top of ya’ the whole time. Ya’ ain’t gotta deal with her for more than a couple of seconds.”

Leo parked the van in the first available curb space, which was near a small dog park. It was nearing nine o’clock when they piled out of the vehicle to find that the forecasted fog was beginning to descend.

Cutting open one of the bags of candy, Leo distributed the contents to his brothers and April, pocketing his share. “Just in case we encounter the Kuchisake Onna,” he said. “Casey, you should have your bag open and in your hands so you’ll be ready with the candy once she accosts you.”

“Oh. Uh, yeah, good idea,” Casey said, looking at the bag of candy as though he’d just realized he was holding it. Pinching opposite sides of the bag near the top, he pulled a little too hard and ripped the bag nearly to its center. Discs of hard candy popped out and hit the sidewalk.

As Mikey and Don stooped to gather up the candy, April stepped in front of Casey and took his face between her hands. “It’s just another hunt, Casey. She’s no more dangerous than Hun and you don’t think twice about charging at him.”
April’s touch seemed to calm him and Casey took a deep breath, releasing it before saying, “I got this. No sweat.”

When April released him and stepped back, Leo said, “Remember, she’ll either say ‘Watashi kirei?’ or the English translation ‘Am I beautiful?’ When she does, immediately answer ‘yes’ so that she’ll remove her face covering. When she asks ‘Kore demo’ or some version of ‘Do you still think I am?’ then say ‘possibly’. Do not say yes or no to the second question. As soon as she begins to look confused, throw the candy at her and run.”

“Say yes first then say possibly, throw candy and run,” Casey repeated. “Got it.”

“Off you go then. We’ll be trailing you and even though you won’t see us, we’ll be close,” Leo said.

Casey squared his shoulders, nodded once, and started walking. Raph and Mikey immediately disappeared into the shadows, staying within striking range of their human friend.

“We could be walking around out here for a long while,” Leo said, looking at April. “You good?”

April zipped up her jacket and looked around. “I’ll walk all night if I need to. That dog park is problematic. People could come out of their apartments at any time if Fido needs a potty break.”

“It’s probably what drew the Kuchisake Onna to this area,” Don said.

“If I see someone walking their dog, I’ll ask if they’ve seen mine,” April said. “People with dogs are very sympathetic to someone who’s lost theirs. They won’t be suspicious if I walk around with them.”

“Don’s focus will be on you so anytime you’re not with another person, he’ll walk alongside you,” Leo said. “We don’t want the yokai to fixate on anyone but Casey.”

“Stay near him,” April said. “He’ll put on a good front, but he doesn’t like ghosts. I think he was secretly relieved when he had to stay behind to watch my back during the fight against the Tengu Shredder and his undead minions.”

“We’ll keep him safe,” Leo promised before speeding off to catch up to his brothers and Casey.

For the next two hours the group of yokai hunters walked and the fog grew thicker. The dog park drew a few people out, but they were rarely alone. It seemed that dog owners formed little cliques and either went to the park in pairs, or met up with friends once they were there.

Twice April had to employ her lost dog pretense, once with a man and the second time with a young woman. Neither displayed the slightest suspicion at her story or at having her walk with them practically to their doorstep.

The constant walking didn’t seem to relax Casey at all, if anything, the heavier the fog became, the tenser he grew. After a while the streets became deserted as the dog people, having made a final run with their pets, drew back into the safety of their homes.

It was still short of midnight and Casey was walking along the sidewalk next to the dog park, when the mist ahead of him seemed to part and a woman in a buttoned down trench coat appeared. She had long dark hair, bright eyes, and a surgical mask covering the lower half of her face.
Casey immediately froze as he watched her approach. She took her time, moving gracefully towards him, her eyes flashing an invitation. When she stopped directly in front of Casey, she took a moment to appraise him, looking him up and down as though having found a prime cut of beef.

Leo slid behind a tree just to the right and only a few feet away from the Kuchisake Onna. He silently slipped out of his coat and held the trap coin at the ready.

From his position, Leo heard the Kuchisake Onna ask in a sultry voice, “Do you find me beautiful?”

Swallowing heavily, Casey stammered, “Y . . . yes.”

Stepping nearer the man, the Kuchisake Onna slowly lifted a hand, almost as if she was reaching out to touch Casey. At the last second, her hand changed course and she swiftly snatched the mask from her face.

A long, twisted, and bloody gash ran across her face, distorting her visage horribly. Her mouth opened into a gaping maw full of jagged teeth and a bright red tongue.

“Do you still think I am?” the Kuchisake asked, her voice now a rasping nightmare.

Leo braced himself, ready to jump as soon as Casey answered. Unfortunately, his human friend seemed to have lost his voice.

“Uh, uhh, umm,” Casey hummed, his eyes wide in terror as he stared at the mauled features of the spirit before him.

The Kuchisake Onna’s right hand came up and in it was a huge pair of bloody scissors.

“Come on Casey, say it,” Leo murmured under his breath.

“I . . . uh . . . .” Casey stuttered.

With an unearthly screech, the slit-mouthed woman slashed at Casey with the scissors. Years of fighting had honed his reflexes and Casey pulled his head back, but not before the sharp end of the scissors caught him across the throat.

“Possibly!” Casey shouted as she came for him again.

Scissors lifted, the Kuchisake Onna paused, looking confused. That’s when Casey tossed the entire contents of his bag of candy at her face.

Leo was moving as soon as the candy bounced off of the yokai. Casey saw the turtle and seemed to remember that he was supposed to be running, which he did, backpedaling for a couple of steps and then turning to sprint away from them.

The Kuchisake Onna bent down to pick up a piece of candy and Leo bounded into the air, soaring over her and planting the trap coin on the back of her neck.

As soon as it touched her skin, the Kuchisake Onna straightened and spun towards Leo, her scissors cutting a deadly arc right towards him. A back flip took him out of range, but she moved just as swiftly, her feet hardly touching the ground as she darted after him.

From their hiding places behind a bush and a parked car, Raph and Mikey jumped forward, coming down on opposite sides of the Kuchisake Onna. As one they threw candy into her face.
When the candy pelted her, the Kuchisake Onna froze, looking at the golden disks on the sidewalk. Her upper body jerked forward, but the lower half of her form would not move.

Looking up at Leo, her mouth opened in a wide, silent scream, her jaw seeming to dislocate and hang in that position. Then her entire form shifted, turning into a blood red mist that rained upwards into the trap coin.

Leo pulled the wax tool from his belt as Raph leaped forward to catch the coin before it could hit the ground. He tossed the coin to Leo, who deftly caught it and planted the coin into the wax tool, squeezing it closed.

While Leo silently counted off the seconds, his brothers, April, and Casey gathered around him. With a sigh of relief, Leo displayed the coin, its wax seal firmly in place.

“Casey! Oh my god, your neck!” April exclaimed, suddenly noticing the blood staining Casey’s throat.

“It’s nothing,” Casey said, dabbing at it with the back of one hand. “Just a scratch.”

“You’re damn lucky that’s all it is,” Raph said, sounding angry. “Why the hell didn’t ya’ answer that bitch and run?”

“Ya’ weren’t the one looking down a mouthful of bloody teeth,” Casey snapped back. “I freaked out for a second, okay?”

“Enough,” Leo said sharply. “It’s done, we’ve got her. We need to leave before someone spots us. Don can see to your wound when we get back to the house.”

“Yeah,” Casey replied shortly.

As they walked back to the van, Raph reached out to grab Casey’s shoulder. “Sorry, bud, it’s the adrenaline, ya’ know?”

“Same here,” Casey said. “This is all my fault anyway, I shouldn’t be acting like an ass.”

“Shit happens,” Raph told him. “Don’t dwell on it. We’re gonna get all them creatures back again, no problem.”

Leo wished he felt as optimistic as his brother sounded.

End Kuchisake Onna
These beautiful scenes between Leo and Don were created by the very gifted Nei-Ning for this chapter.
Think you can go back to sleep?

Can you?

Keep rubbing my face like that and I can do that.
Night of the Teke Teke

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
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Chapter Notes

~This incredible preview image was created by the very talented AlessandraDC. It was commissioned specifically for this fan fiction.
See the full sized version here http://archiveofourown.org/works/10445292
“I don’t understand, why didn’t she stop as soon as the coin touched her?” Raph asked.

The group was seated in the office of Mr. Hidesato’s home, watching Don tend to the thin cut on Casey’s neck. Mr. Hidesato sat in the chair behind his uncle’s desk, having placed the coin containing the Kuchisake Onna into the coffer.

“Every creature reacts differently to its trap coin,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Some are powerful enough to fight the coin’s magic for a time before they succumb to its pull. Until they are fully entrapped, they are still dangerous.”

“That would have been handy to know ahead of time,” Raph grumbled.

“There is much you have not learned about your responsibilities,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Unfortunately you four were not born into your roles as were most warders. You are having to learn ‘on the job’ as you Americans say.”

“I think we’d all rather not learn by one of us dying,” April said bitingly, her fear over Casey’s near miss still palpable.

“My apologies Miss O’Neil,” Mr. Hidesato replied, appearing unflappable. “I did not mean to sound irreverent. I had hoped that I had already conveyed just how grave a situation this is.”

“Leave it be April,” Casey said, sounding a little hoarse. “I got this little neck souvenir ‘cause I froze up. That’s on me, not Mr. H. All of this is on me ‘cause I let the damn things out in the first place.”

“That doesn’t mean you have to die putting them back,” April snapped.

Casey reached over and took her hand. “I ain’t gonna die. I got a plan. What I need to do is look at some pictures of these things we’re hunting so they don’t surprise me next time. Ya’ got any drawings or pictures in that office, Mr. H?”

“One of my ancestors was of an artistic nature,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I believe he rendered some drawings of a number of the creatures. They should be amongst the things in the office, Mr. H?”

“The internet has information on yokai as well,” Don said. “We should probably be doing as much research as we can during down times.”

Leo was watching Mr. Hidesato and though the man had perfected a look of inscrutability, he did seem to take on a more guarded expression when Don mentioned the internet.

“I must warn that you do not put your entire faith in what you discover online,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Much of that information is based on myth and erroneous information. Some of the images can be helpful though, if what you seek is visual forewarning of the creatures you will face.”

“We normally form our own conclusions from the information we gather,” Leo said, “and we never rely on a single source for that information. We can’t afford to make those types of errors.”

There was a subtle underlying message in what Leonardo said and it was aimed at Mr. Hidesato. That the man understood the meaning was clear in the way Mr. Hidesato’s sharp eyes focused on the turtle leader.

Raph caught the cautionary tone in Leo’s voice as well and he frowned. Looking from Leo
to Mr. Hidesato, he sensed something very akin to a war of wills going on between them. The two of them had been deep in conversation the previous day before Raph had come into the kitchen, and Leo had later said he needed to talk to his brothers about something.

Whatever it was, Leo hadn’t wanted to discuss it while they were inside Mr. Hidesato’s house. Leo had told Raph that he thought Mr. Hidesato was holding back on them. If that was really the case, then Raph wanted no further delay in learning what else Leo knew.

“If we ain’t got any more hunting to do tonight, we ought to go home for a little while and check on Master Splinter,” Raph said. “He’ll be wanting to see us and to know exactly what we’ve gotten ourselves into.”

“Casey and I both need some sleep,” April said, hooking her arm through Casey’s. “We can meet you guys back here tonight.”

Mr. Hidesato straightened in his chair as the human couple left the room, but he refrained from saying anything until they’d heard the front door close behind the pair.

“Delays of any sort during a hunt could prove disastrous,” Mr. Hidesato said. “You should not leave here while there are creatures roaming the city.”

“We won’t be that far from here and I’ve got my laptop synced up to your computer,” Don told him. “If any alerts come through on the program April and I wrote, I’ll be notified immediately.”

“This undertaking should be your top priority,” Mr. Hidesato insisted.

“It is,” Leo assured him, “but we still have family obligations as well. We’ll remain here as much as possible, but we will have to go home periodically.”

“We could use another way inside this mansion,” Mikey said. “Coming in through your bedroom window is kind of awkward.”

The change in topic redirected Mr. Hidesato’s attention, for which Leo was grateful. He did not want to quarrel with the man, at least not until he fully understood Mr. Hidesato’s motivations.

“There is a secret passage into the basement,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Unfortunately, it requires that one traverse the city’s sewer system in order to use it.”

“Those tunnels are our own personal highway,” Raph said with a slight grin. “We grew up in ‘em. Show us where that passage is located.”

Mr. Hidesato took them down into the basement, through the dojo, and into the weapons room. On the back wall was a collection of maces all of varying shapes and sizes. One of the shorter ones, gold in color, rested in the center of the collection. Mr. Hidesato grabbed hold of that mace and pulled it towards him.

Rather than coming loose, the mace swung on a hinge and released the lock on a section of the wall. That section rotated at its center, revealing a tunnel.

“There is a pressure pad on the other side, to the left of the opening, which will open or close this entry,” Mr. Hidesato explained. “Use this mace to perform those functions when you are in this room. Turn left as you exit into the tunnel. After you have gone fourteen paces you will reach another door which will take you into the sewer system. Access is via key code. If the incorrect code is entered twice, alarms sound throughout the house.”
“This is better than creeping through the garden,” Raph observed, thinking how he preferred this mode of entry because they wouldn’t have to be under Mr. Hidesato’s constant scrutiny as they came and went.

“The access panel for the key pad is well hidden on the sewer tunnel side,” Mr. Hidesato warned. “I will have to draw you a map of that section of tunnel showing the route you must take to reach it. I will provide you with the access code as well.”

“We have to take the truck back to the lair,” Leo said. “It’s too conspicuous to leave parked near the house. Donny, are the new shell sleds operational?”

Don nodded. “I finished the enhancements last week. It’ll certainly be faster if we use those to travel beneath the city in our quest to recapture the yokai.”

They trekked back upstairs after Mr. Hidesato closed the hidden wall panel. Back in the office, Mr. Hidesato made a quick but detailed diagram of the section of the sewers that ran past the secret entryway. He included the access code on the diagram before handing it to Donatello.

“I am still averse to your leaving when another creature could appear at any moment,” Mr. Hidesato said as the turtles prepared to make their exit. “However, I understand your concern for your father. Should something arise while you are gone, how may I reach you?”

Leo glanced at Don who dug around in his duffel bag before bringing out a shell cell.

“Touch the center with your thumb to activate the cell phone,” Don said as he passed the shell cell to Mr. Hidesato. “One of us will answer.”

“If you should need my assistance at any time during the remainder of this night, do not hesitate to wake me,” Mr. Hidesato told them. “I am a very light sleeper.”

“We will,” Leo assured the man. “Come on guys, let’s go home.”

For what they hoped was their last time needing that exit point, the turtles left the house via Mr. Hidesato’s terrace. Don slid in behind the wheel of their moving truck and drove directly back to the lair.

No one tried to talk during the ride, knowing they’d just have to repeat themselves once they were with Master Splinter. Leo could see that Raph had a million questions racing around inside his head and knew he should offer his brother some reassurance. Leaning over, Leo lightly touched the back of Raph’s hand, earning a small smile of acknowledgment.

After parking the van in the service bay, the brothers went in search of Master Splinter, finding that he had anticipated their return and was waiting up for them. As they approached the living area where he was seated in front of the entertainment array, their father turned off the television and looked at them expectantly.

“We had another successful capture, Master Splinter,” Leo said, taking a seat on the couch near his father. “Though it didn’t go as smoothly as we would have liked.”

“Please, explain to me in more detail this undertaking to which you have consented,” Master Splinter said. “All I know is that Mr. Jones inadvertently released creatures into the city and you have been tasked with recapturing them, due to your unique upbringing and talents.”

As his brothers made themselves comfortable, Leonardo launched into a detailed explanation of the circumstances which had led to them becoming warders. When he reached the part in his story where he and his brothers had been branded, they each held their arms out so that Master
Splinter could see the mark.

It did not take long for Leo to spin out the entire tale, including how Casey had been injured during their second hunt. He also told Master Splinter how Mr. Hidesato had so emphatically expressed his desire that they not leave his house.

When Leo was finished he waited for his father’s reaction. For several moments Master Splinter sat in contemplation, looking nowhere in particular. Then he sighed and glanced around at his sons.

“This is an enormous endeavor you have taken upon yourselves,” Master Splinter said. “Have you considered all of the ramifications?”

“That’s why we came home sooner than we’d originally planned,” Leo said. “We want to have a frank discussion about the situation, but doing so privately was something of a challenge.”

“Mr. Hidesato’s uncle installed practically every security device known to man,” Don explained. “We’re not sure yet how much of what we do or say is being monitored.”

“In other words, you have not come to fully trust this Mr. Hidesato,” Master Splinter said. “Is this based upon instinct or facts?”

“For me, it’s partly due to a conversation I had with Mr. Hidesato that I haven’t had the opportunity to share with the rest of you,” Leo said. “The job of warder is passed down through the lineage of a clan. Mr. Hidesato is the last of his and it falls to him to find another clan who is willing to take on the responsibility of protecting the coffer. It’s a lifelong commitment for a clan.”

“Wait,” Raph said, jumping up quickly. “He branded us already. He made us warders. He didn’t say a damn thing about us being stuck with that fu... frigging coffer forever.”

“Language, Raphael,” Master Splinter said automatically, though his son had censored himself.

“We still have the option to say no,” Leo said. “We agreed to this job under emergency circumstances. Since Mr. Hidesato did not follow the normal protocols for a unification of our clans, he can’t hold us to this obligation.”

“But he wants to, doesn’t he?” Mikey asked. “He’s hoping that once we capture all of the creatures we’ll say okay to safeguarding them forever.”

“Probably,” Leo admitted. “I might do the same if the positions were reversed.”

“I don’t like it,” Raph said. “I feel like he ain’t playing fair with us. Don’t it seem a little convenient that April gets the job of cataloging the dead uncle’s crap, brings Casey along, and they happen to find that coffer practically sitting out in the open? If that thing is supposed to be guarded so carefully, why wasn’t it locked up in the war room? How come Casey could find the key and open it?”

“You’re saying that it sounds like a set up in order to recruit a new clan to take over warder responsibilities,” Don said. “That’s pretty elaborate. It’s presupposing that Mr. Hidesato knew about us and was willing to risk lives by allowing the creatures to be released. He seemed genuinely upset by what Casey did and honestly surprised by our appearance.”

“Ya’ wanna know what else I think? I think he thinks that Casey is expendable,” Raph said gruffly. “He ain’t been cordial to Casey since this whole thing got started.”
“Possibly because Casey started it,” Don said, and then rushed on quickly when he saw Raph’s expression. “What I mean is, I can understand Mr. H being chilly towards Casey, but surely he wouldn’t try to get him killed.”

“No? Well it was Mr. H that suggested Casey be bait for that Kuchisake onna and then didn’t tell him what he was in for. Seems damn fishy to me,” Raph asserted belligerently.

Leo rubbed his chin. “I’d like to give Mr. Hidesato the benefit of the doubt; after all, he has been a contributing member of a clan that has been tasked for centuries with imprisoning untold evil. Perhaps it’s the fact that he’s been around all of this since he was born, but in my estimation, he really skimmed over the amount of danger these creatures present.”

“My Master Yoshi did not speak much of the legendary creatures of Japan,” Master Splinter said. “Never when he was in the presence of Tang Shen. We had our own evil to deal with in the Shredder. I can offer you some assistance though my knowledge is limited. Do you feel that this man has misled you?”

“I think he needed our help so badly that he didn’t give us the amount of information most people need in order to make an informed decision,” Leo said. “I started to read some of the Hidesato clan journals. They are filled with stories of yokai captures but not all of those went smoothly.”

“Is that the reason for your bad dreams?” Don asked. “You knew the contents of those journals might give us nightmares, that’s why you didn’t tell us about them until now.”

“Those journals talked about family that got killed, didn’t they?” Raph asked astutely. “Mr. H said he had ancestors that were killed by the creatures. Ya’ worried he ain’t gonna give us enough information and end up getting one of us killed, Leo?”

“It wasn’t just the reminder that we could die during one of these missions,” Leo said, looking troubled. “We face that possibility every time we go into battle. What we’re stepping into here is a world of magic and monsters; there are worse fates than death.”

“Like one of us turning into a creature?” Mikey asked. “Is that what the journals said?”

“There were warders who simply vanished,” Leo said. “Others who had to be destroyed by their own family members. I haven’t read all of the journals, but I feel that I need to do so. Somehow I don’t think Mr. Hidesato is going to be overly forthcoming on those subjects.”

“We sure signed up for a boatload of crap without knowing what the hell we were getting into,” Raph groused.

“Then we should find out,” Leo said. “Donny, Mr. Hidesato said his family business had to do with antiquities. See what you can find out about them.”

“Yes boss,” Don said. “I still have work to do on those floor plans and the location of all of the security features, but I can’t do much on that unless I’m in the house.”

“When we go back there tonight we should all focus on getting that done,” Leo said. “You can ask Mr. Hidesato to give you the information, but we’ll verify its accuracy for ourselves.”

“Good,” Raph said. “I don’t much like being spied on. How about we call Mr. H’s place HQ instead of house or home? This is our home, that place is just our temporary headquarters until we finish this mission.”
“I’ll vote for that. We should try to get as much sleep as we can while we’re home,” Leo said. “That means you should limit your research time to a couple of hours, Donatello. Remember, you were the one who pointed out that there was too much daylight coming into our rooms at the house, so I’m certain you didn’t sleep well.”

“Hey, I’m pretty sure there’s a bolt of thick, dark colored fabric left over from Halloween,” Mikey said. “I could turn it into curtains for our rooms.”

“Ya’ gonna be okay with us being gone so much, Sensei?” Raph asked, looking at their father.

“I will be fine,” Master Splinter said. “Please try to come home every now and then so that I can see for myself that all of my sons are still in one piece.”

“We’ll make sure you’re stocked up on food too,” Mikey said. “I’ll make a few meals and put them in the freezer. All you have to do is heat them up.”

“You won’t be too lonely without us will you, Master Splinter?” Don asked.

“It will be difficult having to watch my shows without constant interruptions, but I will muddle through,” Master Splinter said with a smile as he stood up. “On that note, I shall retire. You should all do as Leonardo suggested and sleep while you can. This hunt of yours will be a marathon, not a sprint. Rest is important.”

A chorus of good-nights followed Master Splinter as he entered his bedroom. While Leo’s eyes were turned away from them, Don gave Raph a meaningful look before rising from the couch.

When Raph nodded his understanding, Don said, “I’m not tired yet and I’d like to get that research started. Mikey can work on those curtains and then come get me off my laptop so we can sleep. Leo, there’s no reason why you and Raph can’t head off to bed now.”

As Don reached out to give Mikey a hand up from his spot on the floor, Raph turned to Leo and said, “I guess I’m tagged with making sure ya’ don’t have any more nightmares.”

Leo’s eye ridges lifted. “I suppose that’s your way of saying we’re sharing a bed?”

“Ya’ catch on quick,” Raph told him with a smirk.

“I’ll take care of Donny, let Raph take care of you,” Mikey said.

Leo took a deep breath and then exhaled. “Very subtle. All right then, I’m off the clock for a few hours. Wake me if something comes up.”

Placing a firm hand on the back of Leo’s carapace, Raph propelled him towards the stairs. “How about ya’ follow my lead while I help ya’ relax? You’ll be asleep in no time.”

Once they were in Leo’s room, Raph hastily removed his things, letting them drop where he stood, while Leo put his gear away tidily. Plopping down on the bed, Raph’s eyes roamed appreciatively over his brother’s body while he waited for Leo to complete his bedtime ritual.

Before sitting on the bed, Leo placed his shell cell on the nightstand. “In case Mr. Hidesato calls,” he said by way of explanation.

Raph caught the top edge of Leo’s shell and pulled him down, rolling over to keep him pinned. “It’s time to forget Mr. H and all of his baggage and focus on me for a while. Think ya’ can
Leo grinned up at him, his pulse quickening at the challenge in Raph’s voice. “Don’t worry, I can keep up with anything you can dish out.”

Hours later Leo woke with a start. He was on his side, wrapped in Raph’s arms, and turned his head against his brother’s shoulder. Breathing deeply, Leo inhaled Raph’s scent, taking comfort in its familiarity.

“I love ya’ too,” Raph murmured sleepily. “What woke ya’ up?”

“Dream,” Leo whispered.

“Wanna talk about it?” Raph asked.

Leo burrowed in closer to his brother. “It was ugly. You don’t want to hear it.”

“To hell with that,” Raph fussed. “Tell me anyway.”

Grimacing, Leo said, “Something was chasing you. I couldn’t see it but it was fast and it had some sort of bladed weapon. I woke myself when I started seeing too much red.”

“Probably just my mask,” Raph said, squeezing his brother reassuringly. “Go back to sleep.”

“I’m getting hungry,” Leo said.

With a snort, Raph lifted his head to catch a glimpse of Leo’s bedside clock. “It’s after two,” he said, lowering his head again. “Guess we could get some lunch.”

“Let’s not wake Don and Mikey if they’re still sleeping,” Leo said, reluctantly leaving Raph’s warmth and rolling out of bed.

They both hit the shower before gearing up and heading to the kitchen. Mikey had roasted a couple of chickens while they slept, and the pair tore into one of them, enjoying their quiet time together as they ate.

Don and Mikey rose a couple of hours later and the four brothers met Master Splinter in the dojo for training. Afterwards, Raph joined Don in the service bay to help him get the shell sleds ready for use while Leo gave Mikey a hand in the kitchen. Together they prepared dinner and a few backup meals for their father.

Before they sat down to eat, Leo asked Don to call April and tell her to stay home with Casey for the night. Leo knew how upsetting it had been for April that Casey had been injured; giving them the night off would be good for both of them.

Sharing a meal with their father raised everyone’s spirits and all four of the brothers were in a more positive frame of mind when they said their good-bye’s and hopped on their shell sleds. With Don in the lead, the turtles skimmed through the sewer tunnels. In record time they reached the section where the secret entryway into Mr. Hidesato’s house was located.

“This area of the sewer system isn’t on any maps,” Don said after they parked the shell sleds. “Mr. Hidesato’s uncle brought engineers and workers in from out of the country in order to construct it without the city’s knowledge.”

Don located the hidden panel and opened it to find the security key pad. He entered the
access code and a well-disguised section of wall slid open.

After they entered the tunnel beyond the opening, the wall closed behind them. Don pointed up towards a motion detector. “It closes the wall after entry or exit,” he explained. “It’s also part of the security system.”

“Having cameras on me all the damn time makes the back of my neck itch,” Raph groused. “Mr. H’s uncle must have been paranoid as shit.”

In fourteen paces they reached the spot where the rotating wall entrance was located. It was so well masked that an intruder would have a hard time finding it. To the left was a small pressure pad under the dirt floor and when Don stepped on it, the wall silently pivoted open.

After his brothers were inside the weapons room with him, Don pushed the mace flush against the wall and the panel swung shut. When they reached the main floor of the house, they found Mr. Hidesato waiting for them.

“Have you seen the evening news?” Mr. Hidesato asked excitedly.

“No, we were preparing things at home in advance of an extended stay here,” Leo said. “Was there a sighting?”

“In Central Park,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “Last night a jogger was cut in half. There were no witnesses to the event, but it was a yokai.”

“Which one?” Don asked as they followed Mr. Hidesato into the office.

Mr. Hidesato went straight to the desk and extracted a coin from the coffer. Holding it up, he said, “It is a Teke Teke. A very deadly creature.”

“Aren’t they all?” Mikey asked rhetorically. “What kind of name is Teke Teke anyway? That’s not very scary.”

“It is named for the sound it makes as it pulls itself along pathways on its hands,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Teke Teke are almost always women, as is the one who escaped. She has no lower half as the result of being hit by a train while committing suicide. The Teke Teke was the victim of assault by an attacker who went unpunished. Now she chases victims down dark roads or paths and exacts her retribution upon them by cutting them in half with the sickle she carries.”

“Okay, that’s scary,” Mikey conceded.

“If she’s pulling herself along on her hands, does that mean she doesn’t have any legs?” Raph asked. “How fast could she be?”

“Very fast,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Victims cannot outrun her, even if they are in motorized transport. Once she slices them in half, she steals their legs. They only recovered the upper half of last night’s jogger.”

“How do we capture her?” Leo asked.

“You will have to lie in wait for her,” Mr. Hidesato said. “She will not chase you because you are Kame. Perhaps Mr. Jones . . . ?”

“He ain’t available tonight,” Raph snapped, interrupting him.
Mr. Hidesato gave him a searching look before continuing. “Then you will have to wait for someone else to lure her out into the open. Get between the Teke Teke and her victim. She will stop to ask you ‘Do you need your legs?’ You must reply ‘I need them right now’. The Teke Teke will then ask ‘Who told you my story?’ to which you must respond ‘Kashima Reiko’.”

“Mask death demon ghost accident,” Don translated.

“It is imperative that you answer her in exactly this manner,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Some say that doing so may cause her to let you live, but that has not been my clan’s experience. She always kills. All you are doing is delaying her; holding her attention so that one of you can shove the trap coin inside of her body.”

“Where? In the sliced open part?” Mikey asked in disgust, his upper lip curling back.

“Yes, and it requires split second timing,” Mr. Hidesato said. “If she sees you approaching, she will use her sickle on you.”

“Where exactly was she seen?” Leo asked. “Will she remain in that area?”

“A Teke Teke will not stray from the hunting grounds it has chosen once they prove fruitful,” Mr. Hidesato told him. “The unfortunate jogger’s remains were found on the path that runs alongside East Drive. There is a section of the path that veers away from the road and is both dark and secluded, which she prefers.”

Donatello set his laptop on the desk and pulled up a map of that area of Central Park. Leo studied it for a moment, and then pointed to a section of the walking path. “We’ll deploy at thirty yard intervals along this route,” he said. “We can’t risk being any farther away from each other because we don’t know which of us will see her first. I’ll hold the trap coin and Don will hold the wax tool. If either of us is the one who stops her, we’ll throw our trap device to someone else.”

Digging into his duffel bag, Don extracted headsets which he handed out to each of his brothers. “We can stay in constant hands free communication with these,” he said.

“It’s after ten,” Mikey said as he put on his headset. “We should probably go while there are still joggers using that path.”

“Be safe, warders,” Mr. Hidesato called after them as the turtles left the office.

Using the basement exit, the brothers hopped onto their shell sleds and made their way through the tunnels to Central Park. They stopped near one of the service entrances beneath a walkway bridge and after verifying that the coast was clear, stepped out onto a walking path.

After getting his directional bearings, Don indicated which direction they should go and they soon found the section of the path they meant to stake out. Leo dropped off from the group first, finding a tall, sturdy tree in which to hide. Raph chose a similar spot thirty yards away, his spot overlooking a pair of benches and the only light pole for a mile.

Don found a hiding place behind some bushes and Mikey took the last spot, staying at ground level as well within a thick growth of trees.

The four settled down to wait, remaining watchful but neither too relaxed nor too tense. They were experienced at stake outs and knew that stress could be overly tiring.

In the next forty minutes three joggers passed their hiding places, but none had a vengeful creature chasing them. Another hour went by with no sightings of anyone at all.
“This is so bor~ing,” Mikey complained. “Anyone want to play a word game?”

“Shh Mikey,” Leo whispered. “We’ll probably hear her before we see her.”

“If she shows up at all,” Mikey muttered.

The words had barely left his mouth when a sound reached them. Looking down the path in the direction they’d come from, the turtles could see a bicycle patrolman approaching.

“Police,” Leo murmured.

As he rode past Leo’s hiding place, another louder sound came out of nowhere. The Teke Teke suddenly appeared on the path, sliding past Leo’s tree so fast he didn’t have time to react.

The policeman heard her too and slowed down to see what was following him. As soon as he saw the bloodied upper half of the ghoul he let out a shriek of surprise and put on a burst of speed.

Eyes on her prey, the Teke Teke began to drag herself even quicker, one hand clutching a gore spattered sickle as she left a bloody trail behind her. Even before the policeman had fully barreled past his location, Raph leaped out of the tree and darted onto the path in front of the Teke Teke, his sai already in his hands.

The Teke Teke pulled up for a millisecond, then came at him. Raph braced himself, arms out and sai at the ready.

When the yokai saw the warder symbols on his arm, she came to a stop and hissed at him.

Afraid she’d disappear, Raph decided to goad her. “Got anything ya’ want to ask me?”

From behind the matted hair covering her face, the Teke Teke’s eyes glowed with an evil blue light. Her voice was both hoarse and wet sounding as she asked ominously, “Do you need your legs?”

Though he was watching her closely, out of the corner of his eye Raph could see Leo stealthily stalking the Teke Teke. “I need them right now,” Raph replied, keeping her attention focused on him.

“How?” Raph yelled back, struggling with the yokai. There was no way he could slide his weapons off of her sickle and get away before she swung the blade at him.
Mikey and Don ran up behind Raph and grabbed hold of his carapace. “Get ready to let go of your weapons!” Mikey shouted at his brother.

Raph took two deep breaths and then exclaimed, “Now!”

As he let go of his sai, his brothers yanked him backwards with as much force as they could. All three flew several feet, landing hard on the paved path.

Once more the Teke Teke screeched, flinging Raph’s weapons aside and then rushing after him. Catching Raph underneath his arms, Mikey pulled his brother back as the yokai’s sickle came down, sending up sparks as it hit the path right next to Raph’s ankle.

“Shit!” Raph yelled as her sickle came up again.

Before another blow could land, the Teke Teke’s body suddenly flattened and began to fold in on itself. Blood splattered the road with each fold, until her entire body vanished inside the trap coin.

On his feet, Don raced forward and swept up the coin, placing it into the wax tool and sealing the Teke Teke inside the coin.

Leo walked over to where Mikey and Raph still lay on the path. Mikey worked his way out from under his brother and Leo reached down to help Raph to his feet.

Still breathing heavily, Raph bent over with his hands on his knees and took a moment to slow his fast beating heart.

“You okay?” Leo asked, placing a comforting hand on Raph’s shoulder.

“Yes, I’m good,” Raph said, straightening up and accepting his sai from Mikey, who had retrieved them. “That bitch was strong as hell. Funny how Mr. H forgot to mention that.”

“Maybe he was so anxious to send us after her he didn’t think to tell us,” Mikey said, though he didn’t sound convinced.

“I’ll talk to him about it,” Leo said, looking resolute. “I want to gauge his response to that and a couple of other questions I have for him. I’m not sure what we can do if we learn he’s keeping secrets because these creatures have to be hunted down by someone.”

“How about I punch him in the face and knock some of them secrets loose?” Raph asked.

Leo shook his head. “I doubt that would actually work on Mr. Hidesato, he’s much tougher than he looks.”

“Then what, Leo?” Don asked as the brothers started back to where they’d left the shell sleds.

“I don’t know,” Leo answered grimly. “It depends on what he says. I’ll think of something though. He is not going to get my family killed.”

End Teke Teke
This fight scene between Raph and the yokai was wonderfully captured by the ultra talented How_do_you_do_fellow_kids.

This comic created for this story by the very imaginative Nei-Ning.
To hell with that. Tell me anyway.

Something was chasing you. I couldn't see it but it was fast and it had some sort of bladed weapon. I woke myself when I started seeing too much red.
Leonardo should have known that Raphael would confront Mr. Hidesato rather than leaving the discussion to his older brother.

Their encounter with the Teke Teke and Mr. Hidesato’s omission as to her strength had placed Raph in a very precarious situation. Already incensed over his theory that Mr. Hidesato was putting Casey in harm’s way purposely, Raph was bound to boil over.
Mr. Hidesato was seated at his uncle’s desk when the turtles returned from their mission. Upon seeing him, Raph pushed past Leo and strode angrily towards the man.

Planting his fists on the desktop, Raph leaned over and snarled, “Why didn’t ya’ tell us that bitch was so fucking strong?”

For a moment Mr. Hidesato merely stared at him. Then he blinked a few times and leaned back in his chair, folding his hands across his midsection as though untroubled by Raph’s show of aggression.

“Were you able to capture the Teke Teke?” Mr. Hidesato asked.

“Answer my damn question!” Raph shouted, slamming a fist into the desk for emphasis.

“I do not respond well to threats,” Mr. Hidesato said coldly, his dark eyes flashing.

Leo stepped up next to Raph but did not attempt to pull his brother away. Instead he addressed Mr. Hidesato directly. “We caught her, but it wasn’t as seamless a capture as it could have been. My brother’s question deserves an answer, Mr. Hidesato. We are dependent on you for complete information and an important fact was left out of your briefing.”

Mr. Hidesato glanced from Leo to Raph, and then back again. “The oversight was not intentional. Unfortunately, it has been many years since the Teke Teke was first captured by my clan and I have no personal experience with her. Apparently my knowledge of the creature was more limited than I realized.”

“Then how the hell are ya’ setting yourself up as an expert if ya’ don’t know what you’re doing?” Raph demanded.

Rising slowly, Mr. Hidesato placed his fingertips on the desk and stared back at the large turtle. “These creatures have been in existence for centuries. I learned all I could from other warders, from my Uncle, from journals, and from my Father. That does not mean that I know everything there is to know, but I do know much more than you.”

A low growl reverberated in Raph’s chest and remembering his threat to punch Mr. Hidesato in the face, Leo placed a calming hand on his brother’s shoulder.

“The Teke Teke was fast and she was incredibly strong,” Leo said, drawing Mr. Hidesato’s attention. “We understand that there is an urgency in recapturing these creatures, but we can’t go after them without the most complete information available. This legacy is yours Mr. Hidesato, not ours. We are under no obligation to continue. I will not risk the lives of my family and friends without assurances that you are fully upholding your responsibilities to us.”

“The inhabitants of this city are in grave danger as long as the yokai run free,” Mr. Hidesato reminded him.

“We are intensely aware of that,” Leo responded. “It was our friend who inadvertently released the creatures and though we feel a certain duty to rectify that mistake, the liability ultimately falls upon you and your clan. The coffer should never have been left where anyone could get at it.”

Mr. Hidesato took a deep breath and released it. “Please accept my apologies,” he said, bowing his head. “It should not have been necessary for you to remind me that the honor of my clan is at stake. I fear that I have been overly zealous in sending you after creatures before I have fully reviewed my clan’s resource library.”
Donatello came forward, the Teke Teke coin in his hand. As he gave it to Mr. Hidesato, he asked, “If I may ask, how many hunts have you participated in for your clan?”

Opening the coffer, Mr. Hidesato placed the coin into its slot and then closed and locked it again. He seemed unconcerned that Raph hadn’t changed his combative stance, addressing himself to Don. “I have lost count. There were a great many of them, but they were scattered throughout the years. My Mother did not want me to become a warder,” he confessed, “but at my Father’s insistence, I learned martial arts in accordance with the warder code. There are a number of warder clans throughout almost every country in the world, all capturing creatures from their own legends.”


Mr. Hidesato shook his head, a slight smile on his face. “Not exactly those, but certainly things that are similar.”

It did not escape Leo’s attention that Mr. Hidesato had dodged the question that Don had asked. If not for Raph’s belligerence, Leo would have returned to the subject of Mr. Hidesato’s personal credentials, but he needed for his brother to calm down. There were a few things that Leo wanted to have Mr. Hidesato clarify, but it was obvious the man would not be forthcoming if he felt in any way threatened.

Donatello seemed to share Leo’s thoughts. “I don’t know about the rest of you, but I’m tired. Could we table this conversation for another time? If we keep going down this road, Mikey will insist we sit up and watch horror movies with him.”

“Hey, I don’t need movie monsters when I’ve got the real thing trying to eat me every night,” Mikey complained.

“I ain’t done here,” Raph said pointedly.

“You have my apology,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I do not know what more you want from me.”

Leo glanced at Don, his eyes relaying a message. If Leo attempted to pull Raph away, the hot head would probably go ballistic, his deeply ingrained animosity for being told what to do coming to the fore.

“What I want from ya’ is . . . .” Raph began.

“The apology will do for now,” Don said, interrupting his brother. “Tomorrow I would like to review the floor plans and security features of the house with you. Security and concealment are always our top concerns, for obvious reasons.”

“As you wish,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I will be certain to make myself available to you.”

Leo took a step back, sliding his hand from Raph’s shoulder as Don moved up next to the red banded turtle. “Could I get you to help me with something before we go to bed, Raph?”

Raph looked at the genius, his eyes narrowed. “What the hell, Donny?”

Don slid his arm through Raph’s, gently tugging until his brother straightened up from the desk. “Please? You know I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t important.”

It was a tossup as to whether Raph would allow Don to pull him away or not. Don held Raph’s eyes with his own, keeping Raph trapped in his soft brown orbs. Unable to maintain his
anger while Don looked at him that way, Raph turned away from the desk and walked out of the office with his brother.

Mikey waited for Leo, unwilling to leave his older brother alone with Mr. Hidesato.

“Your do understand that you and I are going to need to discuss some things further?” Leo asked the man.

“I had surmised as much from the intensity of your brother’s anger,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Diplomacy is not his strong suit,” Leo replied, “but his ire was valid. If I find that you have at any time purposely withheld vital, need-to-know information, my brothers and I will walk.”

“Understood,” Mr. Hidesato said, his expression inscrutable.

Leo left with Mikey, the pair taking the stairs up to the third floor. As they climbed, Mikey asked in a low voice, “Have I told you lately how much I’m starting to not like this?”

“I know you well enough so that you don’t have to tell me,” Leo said, keeping his voice down too.

They found their brothers in one of the bedrooms. Raph was setting the curtain rod back on the casings over one of the windows, having already replaced the light weight curtains with the darker ones Mikey had made.

“This is the important job Don needed me for,” Raph griped as he turned around and looked at Leo. “Don’t think I didn’t know ya’ gave him the high sign to pull me off Mr. H.”

“It would have done no good to continue pressuring Mr. Hidesato,” Leo told him. “Your approach was justified but not effective.”

“Then what the hell is effective?” Raph asked, crossing his arms. “When we were home ya’ said . . . .”

“Hold that thought,” Leo said, interrupting him. Turning to Don, he asked, “Can we talk in here?”

“I checked both rooms last time we were here, but give me a second to verify,” Don said.

He reached into his duffel bag and removed three additional sets of curtains before finding the scanner he was looking for. Turning it on, he made a pass around the room and then stepped into the next one.

While they waited for him, Mikey helped Raph put up the second set of curtains meant for that room. Even though Mr. Hidesato had said that no one could see into the rooms through the one-way glass, Leo still felt relieved to have the heavier coverings over the windows.

Don returned a few minutes later. “It’s still clear. Either the elder Mr. H didn’t have much company, or he trusted those who he did allow to stay over. We can talk, but I’d suggest we keep the volume down.”

He put the scanner back into the duffel bag and then sat down on the end of the bed. Mikey joined him there, while Raph leaned back against the wall. Leo remained in the center of the room, stance wide, but arms relaxed at his sides.
“When we were at home I said that we needed to learn more about Mr. Hidesato, his family, and his business,” Leo said, picking up Raph’s initial trail of thought. “Donny, what have you found out?”

“I still have a lot more work to do on those subjects,” Don said. “The Hidesato clan wasn’t one for publicity any more than we are. I’ve spent most of my time so far looking into their family business. It’s called ‘Hidesato Importing and Exporting’. They specialize in antiques and collectibles.”

“Is there any more information than that?” Leo asked.

“They have a web site,” Don answered. “An Akio Hidesato is listed as chairman. That’s the uncle who is recently deceased. Mamoru Hidesato is named as chief executive officer. He’s the one we’re working with. The company is privately held, so there is no board of directors. It’s a global company, with yearly sales of around twelve million dollars.”

Mikey whistled. “That sounds like a lot. Is that a lot?”

“It’s not bad for a family controlled importing and exporting company,” Don said. “I don’t know yet what Mr. Hidesato is worth individually. From the looks of this house and the antiques that are in here, I’d say quite a lot.”

“So wait. He told you that if we accept the responsibility of taking over from his clan, that everything him and the clan own passes over to us?” Mikey asked. “We’d own it all?”

“We don’t need it,” Raph said gruffly. “Who’s to say we should believe any of that? Sounds like a carrot ya’ dangle in front of a horse to get him to go where ya’ want him to. What good does any of that information do for us anyway?”

“It tells us that Mr. Hidesato was at least truthful about the family business,” Leo said. “The fact that the only two Hidesato’s listed on the company roster are the ones we know of also indicates that he was honest about being the last of his lineage. Verifying what someone has told you is important, Raph.”

Raph lifted a hand and lowered each finger as he ticked off points. “He’s got access to money, check. He runs a family operation, check. That’s all I’m giving ya’. The rest is maybes and don’t know yet.”

“It’s clear that I have more work to do,” Don said. “I started with the easiest thing first because I had to start somewhere. Do we keep doing this job for him, Leo?”

Leo nodded. “We do.” Raph’s low growl drew Leo’s attention to him. “We have an obligation, Raph. You know how Casey will feel if he learns that no one is trying to recapture those creatures he freed. He’ll do something crazy and get himself killed. We aren’t continuing this quest for Mr. Hidesato, we’re doing it for Casey.”

“Since Mr. H admitted that his knowledge has limits, can I suggest we do what you told him we’d do Leo, and not rely on the information he gives us?” Mikey asked. “Those journals you started reading seem like a good place to really find out what’s what.”

“Are ya’ volunteering to pull your head out of the media room and read a few of them?” Raph asked.

“Hey, if it’ll keep me from getting my legs cut off, I’ll read all of them,” Mikey said emphatically.
“Let’s get some sleep before we do anything else,” Leo suggested. “We’ll get an early start and devote as much time as possible to research.”

Mikey stood up and retrieved the last two sets of curtains. “Come on, Leo. You can help me put these up in the other room before we hit the sack.”

Deeming it a good idea to let Don continue to pacify Raph, Leo followed Mikey into the other bedroom. After they hung the curtains, the pair removed their gear and climbed into bed.

Though they were both tired, Mikey coaxed Leo into indulging him in a light make-out session. They avoided arousing one another, only going far enough so that they were fully relaxed. It wasn’t long before the two of them were sound asleep.

Once more when Leonardo was in his deepest REM, strange images began to play inside his head. He found himself floating amongst the clouds, the wisps of vapor so thick it was impossible to see what lay beyond them.

Suddenly the clouds parted enough to show him glimpses of brightly colored plumes which flew in circles around him. Leo tried to turn with their movements, hoping to keep them in his light of sight, but the things were too fast.

Then he felt a sharp pain along his thigh and looked down to see his skin sliced open. In the next moment a claw raked along his shoulder and blood poured down his arm. When Leo jerked aside to avoid another strike, he found himself falling.

A hard jolt woke Leo abruptly and he sat bolt upright on the bed. Sweat slicked his face, his heart beating fast inside his chest. His movement woke Mikey, who also sat up, thoroughly alarmed at the state his brother was in.

“Whoa dude, are you okay?” Mikey asked, placing an arm around Leo’s shoulders.

Leo exhaled slowly, getting his heart rate back under control. “I’m fine. It’s just that my dreams have gotten a lot more . . . vivid since we started this mission.”

“You mean you’re having nightmares,” Mikey translated.

“Not all of them,” Leo equivocated. “Some simply don’t make any sense.”

“Su~re. That’s what happens when you try to keep stuff all to yourself,” Mikey chided. “I’ll tell you something I learned as a young turtle, Leonardo. You don’t have bad dreams after watching a monster movie marathon if you don’t watch it alone. While Donny plays on his computer later, me and Raph are gonna read those journals. That way you won’t be the only one to know what’s inside of them.”

“I seem to remember that you still had a few bad dreams whether you watched those movies alone or not,” Leo joked.

“Once more you have missed my point,” Mikey said, lying back and pulling Leo into his embrace.

“What would that be?” Leo asked, resting his cheek against Mikey’s plastron.

“That my wisdom is not meant for literal interpretation,” Mikey said. “It simply is.”

Leo chuckled sleepily, all thoughts of his nightmare wiped away by Mikey’s cheerful
presence. As Mikey continued to murmur softly, extolling his own virtues, Leo dozed off.

Morning dawned, but thanks to Mikey’s curtains, the sun did not invade the turtles’ bedrooms. Despite his interrupted sleep, Leo woke a little before eight a.m. and crept from the bed so as not to disturb Mikey.

Making his way down to the dojo, Leo spent an hour in solo practice. This was part of his usual routine and after having it disrupted for a few mornings, Leo felt good getting back to it.

Turning through the final steps of a complex kata, Leo saw Raph standing to one side waiting for him.

“If you’re done, Mikey decided to make bacon and eggs for breakfast,” Raph said. “Ya’ gonna join us for your share?”

“Sure,” Leo said, briskly rubbing his face and arms with a towel. “Is Don up?”

“He is,” Raph said as they started up the stairs together. “He’s working on his first cup of coffee and making sure that any surveillance equipment in the office is off so we can talk freely in there.”

“Any sign of Mr. Hidesato?” Leo glanced at Raph and didn’t miss the grimace of distaste that crossed his brother’s face.

“Not yet,” Raph said. “He’s probably avoiding us so we can’t ask any more questions.”

“That’s fine. Until I’m armed with a few facts, I wouldn’t know what to ask anyway,” Leo said.

The brothers shared a quiet breakfast together without Mr. Hidesato making an appearance. Afterwards they went to the office where they found a note from Mr. Hidesato saying that he was meeting with his uncle’s attorney and would be out for a few hours. He had written down the number to the attorney’s office and reminded them that he was carrying the phone they’d given him.

“Looks like a good chance to do a little snooping in his room,” Raph said, eyeing Leo.

Shaking his head, Leo said, “Unless and until we have a very good reason not to honor his privacy, we won’t be doing that. What we can do is read the clan journals and help Don make a complete survey of the rest of the house.”

“Then I volunteer Mikey to work with ya’ on those journals, and I’ll help Don do his survey,” Raph said.

“All we want is a complete floor plan and the locations of any security or surveillance equipment,” Leo called out as Raph urged Donatello out of the room.

“Yeah, yeah,” Raph’s reply echoed from the hallway, making Leo frown.

Mikey had started perusing the bookcase and had a journal open in his hands. Without glancing up from the page, he said, “Don won’t let him break into Mr. H’s room. All bets are off if the door happens to be unlocked.”

“I’d really rather not start operating in that fashion,” Leo said.

“He’s still pissed,” Mikey said. “You’ve got to give him something.”
“So I should ignore breaking and entering?” Leo asked, taking a seat on the couch.

“You have to admit that room is the most likely place to find equipment for monitoring the house,” Mikey said, handing a journal to Leo.

“I know.” Leo stared out of the window, watching birds flit through the garden. “You know the old adage about being caught between a rock and a hard place? It has to do with reasoning in which contradictory observations lead to the same conclusion.”

“I thought it meant you had two choices and neither one was good,” Mikey said, sitting on the edge of the coffee table.

“I suppose it depends on the context,” Leo said, looking at his brother. “In this instance we have a man who is supposedly the last of his line. He has a trust he is honor bound to maintain. Yet somehow the creatures his clan has sworn an oath to hold captive are released, so therefore he must have meant for that to happen.”

“That sounds like Raph’s reasoning,” Mikey said.

“It has some merit, so I can’t dismiss it offhand,” Leo said. “Then this man seeks for a replacement clan to take up this lifetime responsibility and urges a group of viable prospects to recapture the creatures. Only he withholds important information that could potentially get them killed, so therefore he must mean for the creatures to remain free.”

Mikey scowled. “Yeah, I guess I see why that seems so contrary. But Leo, if he wanted to see those creatures go free for some reason, why didn’t he do it himself? And if Casey just beat him to it, why let April bring us in on it? Why tell us so many of his clan’s secrets, brand us with magic symbols, and arm us with ways to capture the creatures?”

“If he wanted to get to us for some reason, there are less elaborate ways to do that,” Leo said. “The only thing that makes any sense is that Mr. Hidesato told us the truth about wanting those creatures recaptured. So he’s holding something back and we have to decide if his secret is so important that our not knowing it could get us killed.”

“Which brings us back to the journals,” Mikey said, tapping the cover of the one he was holding. “Why can’t anything be simple?”

“I’m sure that’s a question that has plagued people for more than a millennium,” Leo said, opening the journal he was holding and beginning to read.

In a little over an hour, Raph and Don rejoined them. Don sat at Mr. Hidesato’s desk with his laptop and Raph grabbed a journal from the pile that Mikey had placed on the coffee table. Leo glanced over at him when Raph dropped into a nearby chair.

“Anything?” Leo asked.

Raph gestured towards Don. “Lots of things. Like the only room on the ground floor not sporting a camera is the half-bath. Like there’s a secret room inside the closet in the master bedroom that houses a control board and six monitors. Like no one could enter the grounds without being picked up on motion sensors.”

“So you investigated Mr. Hidesato’s bedroom after all,” Leo said, keeping his tone mild.

“The door was open,” Raph told him. “Might as well have had a sign on it saying ‘come on in’. He left that note telling us he’d be gone for hours knowing damn well that we’d search the
“I have to agree with him there Leo,” Don said. “The panel that hides that security room was partly open.”

“Maybe he wants to show us he doesn’t have anything to hide,” Mikey said.

“Ya’ don’t mind if I don’t buy that just yet, do ya?” Raph asked sarcastically.

Leo was leaning forward, sorting through the journals on the table with a concentrated expression on his face. “You know, these have a particular chronology to them,” he said. “It’s not just a record of the creatures that the clan has hunted, it’s a history of the clan itself. We should try to put them in order.”

“Why?” Raph asked.

“Because I think that the answer to whatever it is that Mr. Hidesato is keeping from us can be found in one of these,” Leo said, gesturing at the journals. “It may be something current, or it may be something hidden in the family archives. We shouldn’t overlook anything.”

“There’s a scanner in the war room,” Don said. “I could scan the pages into my laptop and write a program that will sort all of it. That would certainly make it easier to catalogue all of the creatures.”

Raph tossed his journal back onto the table. “That sounds better to me than sitting here trying to read through all of this. Can that program of yours translate this shit too? Some of this handwriting is barely legible.”

“Yes it can,” Don said. “I’ll ask April to help with that so we can get it done quicker.”

“Then how about we ditch this stuff for a while and get in a workout?” Raph suggested, standing up.

“You at a good stopping point, Donny?” Leo asked.

Don closed the lid on his laptop. “Yes. I wouldn’t mind stretching my muscles either.”

“Don’t leave your laptop here,” Raph warned as he started for the door.

“I won’t,” Don said, tucking it under his arm and taking it downstairs to the dojo with him.

The brothers had been practicing for a couple of hours when Don’s shell cell rang. He and Leo were kneeling off to one side while Mikey and Raph sparred, so Don answered the call immediately, keeping his voice down.

“April? Is everything okay?” Don asked after seeing the caller id.

“Actually, I think I may have a case for you guys,” April said. “I need to come by to tell you about it. Is this a good time?”

“Any time is good,” Don said. “We’ll be expecting you.”

Leo glanced at his brother. “Has April found one of the creatures?”

“She thinks so,” Don said. “We should go up and wait for her.”
The smell of cooking food welcomed them as the brothers reached the ground floor. Mr. Hidesato appeared from the direction of the kitchen, having heard their voices.

“I am preparing luncheon,” Mr. Hidesato said. “You have time to wash up.”

“Miss O’Neil is on her way here with what she thinks may be information about a creature,” Leo said. “We’ll rinse off quickly, but if she arrives first, could you let her know we’ll be right down?”

“Of course. I will set another place at the table,” Mr. Hidesato said with a polite bow.

The turtles made quick work of their showers and managed to be downstairs just before April arrived. She let herself in and found Donatello waiting for her.

“We’re in the dining room,” Don said. “Mr. Hidesato wants you to join us.”

April greeted the brothers as she entered the dining room and then took her place at the table when Don pulled her chair out for her. Mr. Hidesato entered a moment later with a large tureen of soup, which Don ladled out while their host returned to the kitchen for the main course.

It was only after they were all eating that April embarked on her story. “You guys know I volunteer at the community center on Mondays,” she said. “One of the older women I help comes in each week at the exact same time. I got a little concerned today when she was late, so when she did arrive, I asked if everything was okay.

“Mrs. Wright has a family friend who lives in a nursing home. It’s one of those huge government subsidized facilities that’s understaffed and filled to capacity all of the time. Mrs. Wright has told me stories about the place from time to time because apparently a lot of the occupants don’t get the best of care.”

She paused to take a drink of water. “Anyway, Mrs. Wright told me her friend says that every night since Friday, the residents of the home have been subjected to a loud shrieking coming from somewhere outside of the building. Her friend told her it’s coming from overhead, almost like something is standing on the roof screeching all night.”

Mr. Hidesato set down his fork and leaned in April’s direction. “Are any words discernible, or is it only a screaming sound?”

“Are you thinking that something is shouting a warning or a curse?” April asked with a frown. “Mrs. Wright didn’t say and in all honesty, I didn’t think to ask. What she did say is that the residents are terrified.”

“What about the staff?” Don asked. “Has anyone investigated?”

“From what I gathered, there is minimal staff working the night shift,” April said. “Mrs. Wright’s friend is ninety-seven and confined to a wheelchair. She doesn’t know if anyone has investigated but she did say that her friend told her she hasn’t seen any police. Mrs. Wright also said that they try to keep authorities out of the place.”

“I wonder if that includes the inspectors who are charged with ensuring that the facility is operating up to code,” Don mused. “Something should have been done about the noise that very first night.”

“Is it possible that the residents of this home are being mistreated?” Mr. Hidesato asked. “A minimal staff and efforts to avoid outside inspection would lend itself to that conclusion.”
“We could look online and find out what their track record is,” April said. “If reports have been filed in the past, there would be a list of citations.”

“Do those things lead you to believe that one of the creatures is haunting the nursing home, Mr. Hidesato?” Leo asked.

“This sound coming from above the building does make me think of a strange bird called an Itsumade,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “The terrible cry is actually a lamentation of ‘Itsumademo?’ which means, ‘Until when?’ It is asking those below how long will the suffering go unnoticed. Itsumade are drawn to places of trouble, often to places where there is anguish or death and little has been done to alleviate the pain.”

“If it’s drawing attention to unnecessary suffering, then why is that a bad thing?” Mikey asked. “Sounds like a whistle blower to me, not something that deserves to be stuck inside a trap coin.”

“That would be so if this creature was content to simply cry out for help for those who are suffering,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is possible that someone has gone to the roof to investigate, but was then destroyed. The Itsumade has the face of a human with a pointed beak, the body of a snake with wings, terrible claws, and is capable of breathing fire.”

“Fire?” Mikey asked, his eyes growing wide.

“Should it sense that someone has come to try and stop it from crying out its warning, it will attack,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It uses its claws to rend and its fire to burn. Its lamentations will stop only when the suffering does, or until it has been captured.”

“And just how are we supposed to do that?” Raph asked with a touch of sarcasm. “In case ya’ haven’t noticed, we don’t fly.”

“That’s not necessarily true,” Don said thoughtfully. When the others looked at him questioningly, he continued. “Remember our flying tech packs? We could use those to put us on an even playing field with the creature.”

“Ya’ make them fire proof by any chance?” Raph asked.

“I’ll bet Casey could borrow some firefighter’s gear,” April said. “He volunteers with a neighborhood fire watch. The pants and jacket will give you some protection. Just try not to take a direct hit.”

“We outflew Avians with those tech packs, we should be able to outmaneuver this Itsumade thing,” Mikey said.

“If that’s what it is,” Leo said. “April, I don’t want you or Casey anywhere near the creature, but are you up for a little undercover work?”

“Sure, Leo. What did you have in mind?” April asked.

“After you and Donny run a check on the nursing home, could you get Casey to go there with you and look at the conditions for yourselves? See if you can find a way to get a real behind the scenes look at how the residents live.”

“I can have Casey keep the administrators busy while I sneak past them,” April said.

“We know how Casey keeps people busy,” Raph said. “Could ya’ tell him to tone it down
enough so he don’t get arrested?”

“I’ll make sure he’s just annoying enough,” April assured him. “If the home is doing something wrong, they won’t want to call the police.”

“If some of their employees have been killed by the thing and they haven’t reported it, then I doubt Casey’s antics will make them phone the authorities,” Don said. “It would certainly be a big clue as to how they operate.”

Leo looked over at Mr. Hidesato. “How do we capture an Itsumade?”

“It requires the use of a signal arrow; a special arrow that emits a loud whistle as it flies,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Are any of you proficient with a bow and arrow?”

“We all are,” Leo said, “but Raph and Mike are the best at it. So to capture it, one of them needs to shoot it with an arrow?”

“The trap coin is placed just beneath the arrowhead,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “One must shoot the arrow with enough force to push the coin into the Itsumade. If you miss, you will have to retrieve the arrow bearing the coin and try again.”

“Without getting our asses burned off,” Raph said sourly.

“That would be preferable,” Mr. Hidesato said.

From Raph’s scowl it was easy to see that he didn’t find Mr. Hidesato’s glib comeback to be at all amusing. In order to prevent a quarrel from breaking out, Leo said, “If everyone has finished eating, why don’t Mike and I help Mr. Hidesato wash up while the rest of you see what you can learn about the nursing home. Raph, would you call Casey and ask him to come over? You and April can fill him in on the plan and remind him of how important it is that the police don’t get involved.”

The sour look didn’t leave Raph’s face, but rather than start an argument, he pushed back from the table and left the dining room. April lifted an eyebrow at Leo but refrained from asking any questions, instead politely thanking Mr. Hidesato for the meal and then leaving with Don to get started on their research.

Leo and Mike cleared the table while Mr. Hidesato took care of the kitchen. Once they’d deposited the dishes, Mr. Hidesato told them he would take care of cleaning them and chased the brothers out.

On their way to the library, Leo leaned close to Mike and asked, “Do you remember seeing anything about the Itsumade in any of the journals you went through?”

“Yeah, I think I skimmed over an entry about a giant bird,” Mike said. “We verifying what Mr. H told us?”

“We are,” Leo said. “Whether he’s purposely leaving things out or his memory is fuzzy we can’t take anymore unnecessary chances.”

The first thing they noticed when they entered the office was that the journals had all been returned to the bookcases.

“I guess Mr. H is a bigger neat freak than you are,” Mike said.
“Do you remember which journal the Itsumade reference was in?” Leo asked.

Mikey walked over to a bookcase and tipped out a large journal bound in brown leather. “It was this one.” He handed it to Leo. “You read Japanese better than I do, all I could figure out was that some kind of bird was involved.”

Taking the journal to the couch, Leo sat down to read. The door to the war room was open and they could hear the sounds of Don and April’s voices. After idly looking through a few journals, Mikey got bored and entered the war room. A few minutes later Raph came out.

Spotting Leo on the couch, Raph crossed the room and sat down next to him.

“I caught Casey just as he was getting back to the apartment,” Raph said. “He’s washing the engine grease off and then heading over here. I told him to dress decent ’cause we’ve got an assignment for him.”

“That means clean blue jeans and a t-shirt with sleeves in Casey speak,” Leo murmured absently.

“What’s got your attention?” Raph asked, bringing his head in close to Leo’s so he could see the journal pages that his brother was studying.

“Mikey found this reference to the Itsumade,” Leo answered. “It’s in line with what Mr. Hidesato told us.”

“Is that right?” Raph asked, fixing Leo with a skeptical look. “Why are ya’ frowning then?”

“This account says that three warders were dispatched to capture the Itsumade,” Leo said. “Two of them returned.”

They were both silent for a moment as they stared at each other.

“Peachy,” Raph finally said.

“I think we’ve already learned that none of these captures is going to be easy,” Leo said. “Remember, those warders didn’t have the advantage that we do; they couldn’t fly.”

“Did Mr. H at least tell us everything about this creature?” Raph asked.

“The only thing he didn’t mention is that the Itsumade seems to have a single minded purpose,” Leo answered. “It won’t be scared off by us.”

“Is that all? No surprise crap like it shoots fire out of its ass and not its mouth?” Raph asked caustically. “I’d hate to be dodging the wrong end of the thing.”

The doorbell rang before Leo had the chance to answer him. Raph got up quickly, not wanting Mr. Hidesato to be the one to let Casey in, and then brought his friend back to the office with him.

When Casey greeted Leo, the sound of his voice brought the rest of the group out of the office. A moment later Mr. Hidesato joined them.

“If we’re going to have a chance of getting into the nursing home, we’ll have to leave now,” April said. “They lock the doors at five thirty. I’ll explain to Casey what we’re going to do; Don will fill the rest of you in on what we found. We’ll be back as soon as we can.”
“Be careful you two,” Don called after them. When the front door closed behind the pair, Don said, “If the Itsumade is drawn to suffering, it picked the right place. We had to do some digging but we finally found a paper trail of citations, dating back for over ten years.”

“What sort of citations?” Leo asked.

“You name it, they were written up for it by the city inspector,” Don said. “Malnutrition, overcrowding, building code violations, improper dispensing of drugs, untrained staff, understaffed, mistreatment of residents, and more. They paid out thousands in fines and thousands more correcting their improprieties. The citations stopped six months ago when the old inspector retired. That looked fishy to me, so I found the name of the new inspector and hacked into his bank account. The nursing home operators are bribing him to turn in clean reports.”

“Damn,” Raph cursed. “April knows what the hell she’s walking into, doesn’t she?”

“She knows,” Don said. “After we saw those reports, she was ready to blast out of here without waiting for Casey. She’s mad, and you know what happens when April gets mad.”

“Do we ever,” Mikey said with a laugh. “Little do they know that hurricane O’Neil is about to blow into their establishment.”

A look of concern crossed Leo’s face and Don quickly said, “Don’t worry bro’, April knows not to get herself tossed out of there before she gathers intel. She’s very determined to find out enough to get the management of the home held accountable in a court of law and have the government place someone more responsible in charge.”

“Righting those types of wrongs are not the primary focus of warders,” Mr. Hidesato said, speaking up for the first time. “Our focus must be on the capture of the Itsumade or whichever creature is haunting that facility.”

“In case ya’ forgot, April and Casey ain’t warders,” Raph snapped. “Ya’ want our help, ya’ take it on our terms. We’ve been protecting this city for a long damn time and turning our backs on some old folks who need help ain’t our style.”

“It’s an Itsumade,” Leo said, his voice low but firm.

“How do ya’ know?” Raph asked, frowning at his brother.

“I dreamt about it last night,” Leo replied. “Just like I dreamt about the Teke Teke before we encountered her.”

“That was the nightmare you had last night?” Mikey asked.

“You are having prophetic dreams, Leonardo? That is remarkable!” Mr. Hidesato exclaimed excitedly. “You have been blessed with an incredible gift that few warders receive after being branded with our mark. Only three members of our clan have ever had this power and they were the greatest warders in our history.”

“I haven’t found it to be all that helpful,” Leo said dryly.

“But it has verified that it is an Itsumade that stalks the nursing home,” Mr. Hidesato said. “We have no need for further involvement with the place.”

“Did ya’ not just hear what I said?” Raph asked. “Getting rid of that squawking bird might be all ya’ care about, but we happen to give a damn about people who are suffering.”
“We can do both,” Don interposed swiftly. “We’ll focus on the Itsumade while April and Casey deal with the humans involved in this situation. It’s a win-win for all of us.”

“Did those three dreaming warders keep journals?” Mikey asked. He could tell that this new revelation about his dreams was bothering Leo. “Reading what they had to say about their so-called gift might be helpful to my brother.”

“Of course,” Mr. Hidesato said, moving over to the bookcases. He selected three journals from the shelves and took them to Leo.

“Awesome,” Mikey said brightly. “Leo can read while Donny and Raph go back to the lair for our flying tech packs. Mr. Hidesato, I’m guessing there’s a bow and some of those signal arrows somewhere downstairs in that arsenal. Why don’t you lead me to it so I can get a feel for that bow?”

Mr. Hidesato bowed. “A very intelligent use of our time Michelangelo,” he said. Mikey followed him from the room.

“I heard that!” Mikey called out from the hallway.

“Come on Raph,” Don said. “Let’s go get those packs. It’ll give us a chance to check on Master Splinter. Leo, could you do your reading in the war room? I’ve got my laptop in there and April’s cell phone is linked up to it. She’s supposed to send a recording of whatever she finds at the nursing home. If something happens and she needs help, you’ll know about it right away.”

“All right,” Leo said. “See you guys back here in a little while.”

For the next few hours Leo read the journals and watched the feed coming in from April’s phone. She’d talked a member of the management staff into giving her a guided tour of the facility and partway through that the man had been called away, probably because Casey had started his diversion.

The images that April captured were nothing less than horrific. Not only were the residents strapped into their wheelchairs, their living conditions were filthy. April went from room to room, floor to floor without encountering a nurse, doctor, orderly, or even a member of the cleaning staff.

Leo couldn’t help but be grateful that the Itsumade had appeared to call attention to the misery of the people trapped inside that home.

While Leo monitored April’s progress, his brothers were involved in their own pursuits. There was a room in the basement set up for target practice and Mikey utilized that area to familiarize himself with the compound bow he’d be using to capture the Itsumade.

There were a couple of extra rooms in the basement that were used for storage and Don requisitioned one to be his work space. He and Raph cleared it out and then set up some work tables. Together they labored to tune up the tech packs.

From what Leo read, the warders who were afforded the gift of prophetic dreams had them in varying degrees. Some were like Leo’s; distorted images, often accompanied by physical sensations. These tended to be open to interpretation and could be perceived as omens.

At least one warder’s dreams were very specific in their details and gave the man a distinct advantage during his hunts. They told him not only which creature he was after, but where and when
Leo sighed and leaned back in his chair after closing the last journal. He knew he should be thankful that he dreamed anything at all in advance of a pursuit, but it would have been nice if his dreams were of a more precise nature.

Suddenly April’s face filled the computer screen and Leo straightened up.

“Leo, we’ve worn out our welcome here and are headed back to you,” April said. “I think we’ve got more than enough to get the authorities to begin an investigation.”

“I saw the footage,” Leo said. “I don’t see how anyone could ignore it.”

“If they try a government cover-up of this scandal, I’ll make sure it’s on the evening news of every channel in the world,” April said with conviction.

The picture went dark then as April disconnected the call. Leo closed the laptop and got up to stretch before heading down to the basement to see what his brothers were doing.

Later when the group had gathered at the dinner table, they reviewed their plan for the evening. The Itsumade would not make its appearance until it was fully dark out and the turtles planned to be on the roof of the nursing home before it arrived.

Although Casey wanted to be a part of the action, even having gone so far as to bring his own firefighter’s gear when he delivered the borrowed outfits, Raph talked him out of it. There were only four sets of ‘wings’ and Casey would not be mobile enough to battle the Itsumade. Casey was disgruntled at being sidelined, but agreed to staying out of the action if he could supply technical support and also drive the turtles to and from their destination.

When it was time to leave, Mikey was carrying the bow and a quiver holding six signal arrows. The trap coin would be attached to one of the arrows, but if for some reason that arrow was damaged, Mikey would have extras.

Casey drove them to an area a couple of blocks from the nursing home and dropped them off before he and April proceeded on to find a parking spot close to the home. After pulling on the protective fire gear, the brothers climbed to the roof of a nearby building and tested the tech packs by flying over to the rooftop of the nursing home.

Industrial sized air conditioners and a water tower made finding hiding places easy. Leo had the wax tool tucked into his belt and Don helped Mikey fit the trap coin onto one of the signal arrows.

The turtles then settled down to wait. Sounds from below told them that street side activity was still frequent and since no passersby had reported seeing a giant bird, they figured that the Itsumade would not appear until the background noise had died down.

They had not failed to see two darkened stains adhering to the gravel roofing material. There were still bits of ash that hadn’t been dispersed by the wind and several tiny bone fragments. At least two of the nursing home employees had seen fit to investigate the strange sounds coming from overhead and had paid the ultimate price for their diligence.

Even though the turtles were keeping their eyes peeled on the sky, the Itsumade’s arrival was sudden. It swept down from the clouds and circled the roof several times before opening its beak to cry out “Itsumademo?”
Its call was loud and harsh; lusty enough to be heard throughout the block, not just inside the nursing home. The surrounding buildings were either vacant or housed offices whose tenants were gone from the area before darkness fell.

Moving fast, the brothers ran from their hiding places, spreading out into a predetermined formation before blasting off from the roof.

Seeing the movement, the Itsumade flattened its wings against its back and dove at the nearest attacker. It was incredibly quick and Raph just had time to dip out of its way before its talons could reach him.

The Itsumade pulled out of its dive rapidly, curving its body to come around for another pass. Don dropped behind the water tower to avoid the flames that shot from the Itsumade’s mouth, feeling the heat fan out around either side of him.

Mikey had the signal arrow loaded in his bow and was attempting to take aim. Each time he thought he had the Itsumade in his sights, the creature rapidly changed positions.

“We have to keep it confined to a smaller airspace!” Leo shouted, seeing Mikey’s predicament. “Circle it!”

Zooming into position, Leo began to fly around the Itsumade, forcing its eyes on him while his brothers rushed towards them.

Moving in a clockwise pattern, the turtles began circling the Itsumade. Eyes blazing, the creature opened its beak to shoot fire and Leo yelled, “Go up, counter-clockwise!”

They shifted just as the blaze left the Itsumade’s mouth. Mikey took aim but just before he released arrow, the Itsumade curved around and flew at Raph.

The tech packs made them fast in the air, only not as fast as the Itsumade. Raph flew away from the Itsumade in a zigzag pattern, but it was gaining on him.

Leo zipped towards his brother, forcing his tech pack into its highest speed. Seeing him coming, Raph turned towards Leo, his hands outstretched.

Just as the Itsumade extended its claws, Leo caught hold of Raph’s hands and spun him around. Releasing each other, their momentum sent the pair shooting away from the deadly creature.

Looking up, Leo saw Mikey draw back his bow string and fire. The arrow shot past him and Leo slowed to look back and see if it struck the Itsumade.

Just before the arrow made contact with the creature, the Itsumade pulled its wings in and rolled. The arrow caught one of its feathers before crashing into the rooftop below.

“Get the trap coin!” Leo shouted to Donatello. He saw the genius diving for the coin and then suddenly there was an intense pain along his thigh.

“Dammit Leo, move!” Raph roared, plunging towards his brother.

Sensing the Itsumade was right behind him, Leo climbed higher, moving in the same irregular pattern that Raph had used to avoid the Itsumade’s flames earlier. Remembering his dream, Leo sought out a dense cloud mass and plunged into it, shifting direction immediately.

Leo saw the Itsumade’s body break through the vapor mass and then disappear again. Having
lost sight of its quarry, the creature was returning to the nursing home.

Taking a moment to check his wound, Leo saw that his pants leg was slicked with blood. A random thought entered his head about how he hoped Casey wouldn’t get into too much trouble for the damage done to the fire gear, and then Leo flew out of the clouds to rejoin the action.

Raph was flying in close to the Itsumade’s body, drawing its attention as he tried to match move for move so that it couldn’t get at him. Don had retrieved the trap coin and was helping Mikey push it onto another signal arrow.

They had to keep the Itsumade in one place long enough for Mikey’s next shot to sink home. The previous warders had sacrificed one of their own in order to hold the Itsumade’s attention long enough for the others to make the capture shot, but that was something Leo would never do.

He would, however, willingly take that risk himself.

“Hey ugly!” Leo shouted, waving his arms and coming to a stop to float in midair.

The Itsumade’s head jerked in his direction and it twisted around to come at him.

“What the fuck are ya’ doing?” Raph yelled.

His moment of inattention was disastrous. So intent on avoiding the Itsumade’s mouth and claws, Raph didn’t see its long tail until it connected hard with the turtle’s tech pack.

“Shit!” Raph cursed as the blow sheared off one of his pack’s wings.

The damage sent Raph into a spiral even as the pack’s miniature rockets propelled him directly at the Itsumade. With a desperate lunge, Raph managed to grab onto the Itsumade’s tail.

His added weight shoved the Itsumade off target and it dropped below Leo. When the Itsumade shook its tail to dislodge Raph, he yanked a sai from his belt and slammed it into the creature’s lower back.

Once more the Itsumade rolled, but Raph clung tight. Drawing his second sai, Raph stretched forward and dug his weapon in at a higher point on the creature’s body. Bit by bit Raph climbed the Itsumade until he was perched on its shoulders, both of his sai buried deep into the Itsumade’s form.

The creature twisted and twirled, trying to turn its head so that it could burn the nuisance from its back, but Raph was perched in a place it couldn’t reach.

“Raph! Its wings!” Leo exclaimed. “Slow it down!”

His brother acted instantly, digging his knees into the spot where the creature’s wings were attached to its body. The Itsumade screeched in pain and came to an almost complete stop in midflight, rearing back like a bucking bronco.

Mikey promptly loosed his arrow, his shot flying true, straight into the Itsumade’s underbelly.

“Jump Raph!” Don called out as soon as the arrow hit.

Yanking his sai free, Raph leaped from the Itsumade’s back. He plummeted down to the rooftop below, curling his body to roll across the gravel and then sliding several feet before coming to a stop.

The Itsumade’s feathers and scales burst into flame. It writhed in the air, flipping and flailing
as the fire consumed its body until it was all pulled into the trap coin.

As the coin started to fall, Leo dove towards it, catching the coin and placing it into the wax tool. He counted off the seconds as he flew back to the nursing home, landing just as the wax sealed the Itsumade into its prison.

Raph walked towards Leo, pulling off his damaged tech pack and removing the fire gear. Don and Mike descended onto the roof to join them.

“We got it,” Leo told them, holding the trap coin up for his brothers to see.

“Ya’ got a nice new scar to show for it too,” Raph responded darkly, looking pointedly at Leo’s bloody pants.

“You didn’t come out completely unscathed either Raph,” Leo said, examining the scrapes along Raph’s arms and legs.

“You two can scold each other later,” Don said. “We need to get out of here so I can patch up Leo’s leg. The bleeding hasn’t even stopped.”

As usual he had a point, so the tired foursome made their way down from the roof and then into the waiting van.

End Itsumade
Life with the turtles had taught April O’Neil many things, one of which was to be prepared for emergencies. That being the case, she always kept a first aid kit inside her van.

Donatello used items from that kit to staunch the flow of blood from the cut on Leonardo’s thigh and to clean the wound. It was nasty enough to require stitches, but Don wouldn’t attempt that type of surgery while inside a moving vehicle.
While Don tended to his oldest brother, April and Michelangelo took care of the scraped skin that Raphael had acquired during their fight with the Itsumade. The fire gear that Casey had borrowed was piled in the back of the van, along with the turtles' tech packs.

Rather than parking near the side entrance into the garden, Don insisted that Casey pull into a parking spot at the curb in front of Mr. Hidesato's home. Don did not want Leo walking any farther than necessary on his wounded leg.

April hopped out of the van first in order to unlock the front door. Throwing it open, she checked the neighborhood before signaling to the turtles that it was safe to leave the van.

Don helped Leo make a dash for the entrance, partially lifting his injured brother so that Leo wouldn't have to put weight on his leg. Casey took the gear out of the van and piled it on the sidewalk so that Raph and Mikey could scoop it up quickly as they raced into the house.

The things they couldn't carry, Casey and April gathered up and then they joined the brothers in the foyer. Dumping everything on the floor, the group traipsed into the kitchen, which was where Don had taken Leo.

Mr. Hidesato had apparently been waiting for them inside the office, but when they bypassed that room, he came out to see what had happened. When he got to the kitchen, he saw that Don had placed towels on the table for Leo to lie down on.

As Don washed his hands at the sink, he said, “Raph, please switch on the light over the table. Mikey, get the sewing gear from my duffel bag.”

“There are medical supplies here in the kitchen,” Mr. Hidesato said, striding to the door that led into the pantry. Inside, a panel on one wall swung inwards, revealing a small room containing medical equipment.

Stacking items from shelves and baskets onto a rolling surgical tray, Mr. Hidesato pushed it up to where Don stood waiting. With a quick glance over the supplies, Don nodded his satisfaction and set to work.

Mr. Hidesato noticed the gauze wrapped around Raph’s wounds and asked, “Do you require medical assistance as well? I am quite proficient at caring for all types of injuries.”

“Ya’ ain’t touching me,” Raph said in a rough tone.

“It’s only scraped skin,” April said hastily, sensing Raph’s animosity. “I’ve already tended to him.”

“Of course,” Mr. Hidesato said, unperturbed. “How badly is Leonardo injured?”

“It’s just a cut,” Leo answered before Raph could use Mr. Hidesato’s question as a way to lay into the man. “No worse than any of the others I’ve received over the years.”

“Yeah, except ya’ got this one from some big ass dragon looking creature,” Raph said, crossing his arms belligerently.

“Did you capture the Itsumade?” Mr. Hidesato asked.

Raph snorted derisively. “Ya’ got a one track mind. Anyone ever tell ya’ that?”

“I prefer to consider myself focused,” Mr. Hidesato replied. “Reacquiring the yokai is why
“At least this time he asked about Leo first,” Mikey said. There was a slight touch of sarcasm in his tone.

“Cut the guy a break,” Casey said. He stood to one side, his arms crossed. “I don’t know about the rest of ya’, but all I can think about is how many people are out there right now getting killed by these damn things. Things that I let out. Every time someone dies it’s on my head.”

“If you insist on feeling guilty, there’s nothing we can say to talk you out of it,” Don said, still concentrating on sewing up Leo’s wound. “But you need to remember that the Itsumade drew attention to a very bad situation. The information you and April dug up is going to save a lot of lives. Think about that.”

When Don glanced up to hand the needle to April, who was assisting him, she gave him a grateful look.

“I have the coin,” Leo said. “It’s in my belt.”

He started to move but Mikey darted up next to him. “Let Doctor Don finish patching you up,” Mikey said, setting a hand on Leo’s shoulder to keep him still. “I’ll get it.”

Reaching into Leo’s belt, Mikey found the little pocket where his brother had stashed the coin and took it out. Turning, he walked over to Mr. Hidesato and handed it to him.

“Thank you. I will put this away immediately,” Mr. Hidesato said, leaving the room.

Everyone was quiet as Don finished wrapping bandages around Leo’s thigh and then went to wash his hands once more. April tidied up the surgical tray, sterilized the needle Don had used, and then returned everything to the pantry.

Raph caught hold of Leo’s arm and helped pull him into a seated position. “How ya’ feeling?”

“It’s just a cut,” Leo repeated, looking into Raph’s eyes. “I’ve gotten worse from sparring with you.”

“My steel ain’t like yokai claws and ya’ know it,” Raph said gruffly. “Suppose they’re poison or something.”

“If that were the case, it would probably be fast acting,” Leo said, hopping down from the table to prove he was feeling no ill effects. “Besides, I think Mr. Hidesato would have told us.”

Glowering, Raph said, “Don’t be too sure of that.”

“I cleaned that wound every which way to Sunday,” Don said. “We’ll just have to keep a close eye on you Leo, to make sure something didn’t get into your bloodstream.”

“And no keeping it from us if you do start to feel weird,” Mikey admonished him.

Mr. Hidesato came back into the kitchen then and April asked him outright, “The Itsumade doesn’t have poisonous claws, does it? We have a concern about Leo’s injury.”

Shaking his head, Mr. Hidesato answered, “No. Many people throughout time have been sliced by its claws and survived. The claws are only deadly if one does not escape them quickly
“Since ya’ already admitted ya’ don’t know everything, we ain’t taking your word for it,” Raph snapped.

Ignoring him, Mr. Hidesato walked over to Casey and offered a rectangular piece of paper to him. “I observed the damage that was done to the firefighting equipment that you borrowed,” he said. “I hope this check is of a sufficient amount to cover the cost of replacement.”

Casey took the check from him and looked at it, his eyes widening. “This is enough to equip ten times the firefighters who volunteer with us. Ya’ don’t need to give me this much money, Mr. H.”

He tried to return the check but Mr. Hidesato waved it away. “It is my way of thanking your volunteers for what they do. Consider the excess to be a donation towards a worthy cause. I have more money than I will ever need and no family to leave it to.”

Though Mr. Hidesato did not look in Leonardo’s direction as he said that, the turtle leader felt as if the last comment was directed at him.

“There’s a mess in the foyer that we need to clean up before we go to bed,” Leo said. “I don’t know about the rest of you, but I’m tired.”

He started forward but Raph stopped him with a hand on his chest. “Ya’ go up to bed with Donny,” he said. “Mikey and I will take the tech packs down to Don’s new work space in the basement.”

“Casey and I can handle the fire gear,” April said, “and then we’re headed home. I have a shop to open in the morning. Good-night everyone.”

Good-nights were exchanged and then the group separated. On his way upstairs, Leo saw that Mr. Hidesato was helping Casey and April take the firefighting equipment out to the van.

One of the bathrooms on the third floor contained an enormous two person jet tub. Rather than going straight to bed, Don led Leo into that bathroom and ran a shallow bath for them. Once they were stripped down, Don helped his brother into the bath, making sure that Leo’s leg was draped over the edge of the tub to keep his bandage out of the water.

Very gently, Don cleansed Leo’s body with a sponge while his brother leaned back and watched him through drooping lids.

“How much rest are you actually getting when you sleep?” Don asked casually, his eyes remaining on his task.

“Enough,” Leo said drowsily.

“Liar,” Don countered.

There was no sharpness to his tone and a corner of Leo’s mouth lifted. “Why do you ask if you know how I’m going to answer?”

“Maybe I’m hoping that someday you’ll be honest with your doctor,” Don said. “It’s because of those dreams, isn’t it?”

“They don’t help,” Leo answered truthfully. “They happen whether I want them to or not.”
“If I gave you something to help you sleep . . . .” Don began.

“I wouldn’t take it,” Leo interrupted. “You know perfectly well I don’t like my senses dulled in that way.”

“You’re a stubborn ass, just like Raph,” Don said without rancor. “Why are half my patients so difficult?”

“That’s a rhetorical question, so I won’t bother trying to come up with an answer,” Leo said. “Mikey does what you tell him.”

“No he doesn’t,” Don said. “He just says he will because he likes the attention. Mikey forgets all of my instructions as soon as I’m out of view.”

“Then it’s a good thing you have such a small clientele,” Leo said with a touch of humor.

“I’m glad you think it’s funny,” Don said as he finished washing himself. “Ready for bed?”

“M-hm,” Leo murmured sleepily, letting Don help him out of the tub.

Leo allowed himself to enjoy Don’s pampering as his brother dried him with a large, fluffy towel. Collecting their gear, the pair headed into the bedroom that wasn’t already occupied. From next door they could hear the muffled sounds of chirrs.

Seeing the slight frown on his brother’s face, Don said quickly, “The rooms aren’t bugged and there aren’t any cameras. If this is our home away from home, then we should enjoy each other the way we normally do. They’re keeping the noise down to a minimum. Mr. Hidesato won’t hear a thing.”

Leo released a sigh. “I suppose I’m being overly cautious. Our relationship is a private thing that I don’t think Mr. Hidesato needs to know about.”

“Because you don’t know how he’d take it,” Don said, sitting on the bed and pulling on Leo’s hand until his brother sat down next to him. “Considering the number of slots in that coffer, we may be at this job for a while. We can’t hide this side of our relationship from him forever. How about we deal with it if and when the time comes?”

“As always, you are very wise,” Leo said, offering Don a smile.

Leaning over, Don kissed him. There was a twinkle in his brown eyes as he said, “Why don’t you lie back, spread your legs, and let me give you the kind of sedative that you won’t complain about?”

True to his word, Don’s ‘sedative’ sent Leo into a deep sleep. When he woke nearly seven hours later, Leo wasn’t sure if it was from the dull throb in his thigh, or the dream he’d had.

Don lay curved against his side, one arm across Leo’s chest. Too relaxed to move, Leo looked up at the ceiling and thought about the dream. He and his brothers were swimming in the river, enjoying themselves beneath the water even though they had to be careful around the many dark and undefined shapes that periodically appeared in front of them.

Dreaming about water after a relaxed soak in the bathtub didn’t seem all that unusual to Leo. Normally a dream of that sort wouldn’t linger in his head, but for some reason it was still vivid even after waking.
The change is his breathing must have alerted Don, who stirred slightly and asked, “You okay?”

“Yep,” Leo answered, yawning. “I’d like to get in a workout.”

“Not if you’re going to pull those stitches,” Don responded menacingly. “If you insist on it, we’ll go down together so I can keep an eye on you.”

“Without coffee?” Leo teased as he rose from the bed.

“I’ll survive,” Don said. “For a little while anyway.”

The pair had been in the dojo for about thirty minutes when they were joined by Raph and a sleepy looking Mikey.

Pausing in his pull-up routine, Leo said, “I thought you two would have slept in.”

There was a suggestive nuance in his voice that didn’t escape Raph’s notice. “Yeah? Well from the sounds I heard ya’ making, the two of ya’ didn’t go right to sleep either.”

Leo glanced at the cameras but before he could say anything, Don spoke up. “They’re off.” He patted his laptop. “I wrote an override routine so I can control security from here. The idea of being constantly spied on doesn’t sit well with me either.”

“You go Donny,” Mikey said as he plopped down on a mat and began stretching. “Are we practicing or what?”

“We are, Leo isn’t,” Don said firmly. “He can critique from the sidelines.”

“Peachy,” Raph muttered. “Leo in Splinter Junior mode, always my favorite thing.”

His gripe was ignored. The group spent a couple of hours working out and training before heading upstairs for brunch.

While Mikey prepared omelets, Leo cut up some fresh fruit. Don switched on the small television set that was in the kitchen and flipped to a news station.

A few minutes later a report came on about a federal raid on a local nursing home. The brothers stopped what they were doing to watch as footage of various arrests were shown, along with film taken by the anonymous whistle blower who had broken the story.

“April moves fast when she’s motivated,” Mikey said, waving his spatula at the television screen.

Raph laughed. “She must have lit a fire under someone’s butt bright and early this morning.”

“Her appraisal business has introduced her to some influential new friends,” Don told them. “April always did know where to apply pressure.”

When Leo picked up the tea pot, Raph took it away from him. “Go sit down. I’ll make your tea and Don’s coffee. There ain’t enough room for ya’ over here anyway.”

Leo knew better than to fight that particular battle, especially with the way Don was glaring at him. Taking the bowl of fruit with him, Leo sat down next to Don at the kitchen table. His genius brother had his laptop open and was typing away at something.
The smell of food mingled with coffee and the four brothers enjoyed the companionable quiet, the sound on the television having been muted.

After a bit, Don noticed Leo staring into space. “Penny for your thoughts.”

“Did you have the secret room inside the pantry on your floor plan?” Leo asked.

“No,” Don answered. “I didn’t even know about it until Mr. H opened it up. I’ll add it later.”

“I wonder how many other rooms of that sort are tucked into spaces throughout the house,” Leo mused. “Do you think Mr. Hidesato knows all of them?”

“Add that to the long list of secrets the guy’s keeping,” Raph said, setting a cup of tea in front of Leo and one of coffee before Don.

“To be fair, I haven’t actually had the time to sit down with him and go over the layout of the house,” Don said. “We talked about getting together to do that, but we keep missing each other.”

“Do that today,” Leo said. “As soon as he makes an appearance. Show him the floor plan you’ve already come up with and then have him verify its accuracy.”

“And what will we be doing today?” Raph asked as he and Mikey placed omelets before Leo and Don and then sat down at the table with theirs.

“Journals,” Leo said, earning a groan from both of his brightly banded brothers. “Would you rather rely entirely on Mr. Hidesato’s memory?”

“If one of you would rather scan the pages into the computer for me, I can show you how to work the scanner,” Don said.

Raph swallowed a bite of food and said, “Show Mikey. He’s better with gadgets than I am and ya’ sure don’t want Leo touching sensitive electrical equipment.”

“It’s been years since I last broke the toaster,” Leo protested.

“Months,” Raph corrected, giving him a roguish grin. “You’re suffering from selective memory.”

They finished their meal and cleaned up after without seeing Mr. Hidesato. Their next stop was the office, where they found that Mr. Hidesato had once more put things away.

“Ya’ think he’s, what do they call it when someone can’t stand for things to be messy?” Raph asked.

“The opposite of you, Raph? Not a slob?” Mikey asked with a deceptively innocent look.

“You’re one to talk,” Raph growled at him.

“I think you mean obsessive,” Don said.

“If you put it back where you got it from, it doesn’t get lost,” Leo said, choosing a few journals from the bookshelves.

“Then why ain’t ya’ been doing that?” Raph asked. “Ya’ take them out, he puts them back.”

Leo frowned. “I’ve been putting them into specific piles on the coffee table,” he said. “Trying
to sort them chronologically.”

“Maybe you need to tell him you’re doing that so he doesn’t put them back on the shelves,” Don said.

“Yeah, unless he’s sticking them back on the shelves to keep you from finding something,” Mikey said.

“We’re going to have to reach some level of trust with the man if we’re going to work with him,” Leo said.

“So far it’s been a one way street,” Raph said. “We’re doing all the work and he’s withholding all the information.”

Not in the mood to listen to that argument again, Don said, “Come on, Mikey. Grab one of those journals and let me show you how to scan its pages.”

When the pair entered the war room, Leo looked at Raph and asked him in a low voice, “What do you want me to do, Raph? I’ve made it clear to him that we won’t continue this hunt if he holds out on us. He’s apologized and blamed previous lapses on a lack of firsthand knowledge and faulty memory. These creatures are loose in our city and they’re killing people.”

“I know, I know,” Raph said. “I heard Casey last night. Don’t matter what we say, he’s gonna feel guilty for every death. The more of them we can prevent, the better. I don’t like feeling boxed in is all.”

“Neither do I. Here,” Leo said, handing his brother a journal, “the handwriting in this one isn’t too bad. Why don’t you see what this ancestor had to say about hunting yokai?”

“What the heck,” Raph said as he plopped down on the couch. “It’ll be just like reading real life horror stories.”

A short while later movement from outside in the garden caught Leo’s attention and he looked up. Four men were spread out along the paths, raking leaves, trimming bushes, and pulling weeds.

Raph saw his brother looking at something and turned his head. “Crap!” he exclaimed, startled. “Ya’ sure they can’t see us?”

“Mr. Hidesato assured me this was one way vision glass,” Leo answered.

The sound of a door closing from somewhere on the ground floor drew their attention and then a minute later, Mr. Hidesato entered the room.

“My uncle’s attorney chose not to discontinue the services of a grounds crew,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I approved that decision yesterday when we met, knowing that you do not venture outdoors during daylight hours. I am in somewhat of a quandary with regards to the housecleaning staff. My uncle has used the services of the same group of people for a number of years, and they are extremely trustworthy. I would hate to lose them.”

“If they don’t go down into the basement or into the war room, we could stay in those places when they’re here,” Leo said. “We can take care of any cleaning that needs to be done in those two areas ourselves.”

Mr. Hidesato bowed. “That would work well. I will post the cleaning schedule on the board in the kitchen. Have you had lunch?”
“We had a late breakfast,” Don told him, coming out of the war room after hearing the man’s voice. “Once you’ve eaten, could you spare some time to review the floor plan and security systems with me?”

“I did promise to do that, did I not? Come, we will go to the kitchen and confer there,” Mr. Hidesato said.

With his laptop tucked beneath his arm, Don followed Mr. Hidesato. Raph leaned forward and in a low voice asked Leo, “Do ya’ think I should go with them?”

“I doubt that Don needs a bodyguard,” Leo said mildly. “Why, do you have some reason to believe that leaving them alone together is a bad idea?”

Raph shrugged before settling back. “Nah, I guess not.”

He’d just turned the page on the journal he was reading when Mikey popped back in. “I like this job,” he said, dropping the journal he’d been scanning on the desk. “Donny has a whole system set up for keeping track of which journals we’ve scanned. All I have to do is put the pages face down, check the monitor to see if the image is clear, and press a button. Hey, what’s going on outside?”

“Grounds crew,” Raph said without looking up. “There’s a cleaning crew too. Mr. H is gonna write their schedule on the board in the kitchen so we can hide when they’re here.”

“You mean to tell me there’s people who clean the house so we don’t have to do it?” Mikey asked. “I’m never leaving here!”

“A media room and a cleaning staff. Ya’ know Leo, we might have to use a crowbar to pry him out of here when the time comes to leave,” Raph said.

“Why can’t we keep the nice stuff for once?” Mikey asked with a frown. “It was offered to us, wasn’t it?”

Raph closed his journal with a snap. “That ‘offer’ as ya’ call it comes with a price. Ya’ might want to think about that ‘cause it’s a decision we’re all gonna have to agree on.”

“Guys,” Don called out from the hallway, warning them that he was approaching and that he wasn’t alone. When he walked in Mr. Hidesato was with him.

Raph and Mikey glared at each other and then turned their attention to Don.

“I got a ping on my laptop while we were working,” Don said. “You remember the program that April and I wrote to search for patterns that might tell us of yokai activity? I think I’ve got something.”

He walked across the room and set his laptop on the desk before turning again to face his brothers.

“Early this morning a patrol officer drowned off of the river bank at East River Park in Brooklyn,” Don said. “He was responding to a call, the second one in the last three days, about something that sounded like a crying baby. The first report was from a fisherman who went into the water amongst the weeds to see if a child was there.

“He had waded in up to his knees when he claimed his legs got tangled in something and he went under. Fortunately, he was fishing with a friend who grabbed onto his fishing pole and pulled
him out of the water. They called the police but by the time they arrived, the sun was coming up and whatever had made the sound was gone. The police said it was probably a crane or some other bird and wrote the incident off."

“Let me guess,” Raph said. “His legs didn’t get tangled in anything.”

Don shook his head. “Something tried to yank him under. It was successful today. A pair of police officers responded to another call about a crying baby. According to his partner, the first officer had waded out into water only up to his calves looking for the source of those cries. The next thing the officer knew, his partner cried out and then disappeared into the water.”

“Did he go in after him?” Mikey asked.

“He radioed in as he stripped off his gear. By the time he got in the water, his partner was no longer in the spot where he’d gone down. The water was murky and passersby stopped to help, shining their flashlights everywhere, but they couldn’t find the man. His body was located a little ways downriver a couple of hours later,” Don said. “That combination of incidents flagged an alert on my computer. I have a way of collecting confidential police report details that the media can’t get.”

“That means he hacked into something,” Raph translated for Mr. Hidesato’s benefit.

Leo took a slow breath, sitting up straight before catching Mr. Hidesato’s attention. “Do you know what creature it is?” he asked.

Mr. Hidesato’s brow furrowed. “You seem certain that this is one. Did you have another dream?”

Though Leo could feel Don’s eyes on him, his focus remained on Mr. Hidesato. “I dreamed that my brothers and I were swimming in the river. Other than dark shapes near the bottom that was probably trash, there was nothing else to the dream.”

“You didn’t tell me about it this morning,” Don said, a slightly scolding edge in his voice.

“I associated it with concern about getting my leg wet while bathing last night,” Leo said. “That’s all I thought it was. It is a creature, isn’t it Mr. Hidesato?”

“It is a Kawa akago,” Mr. Hidesato said. “A river baby. They are tricksters, cousins of the Kappa, but where Kappa prefer to dine on human entrails, Kawa akago are omnivorous. They look like small, red-skinned babies and remain close to riverbanks, where they call out to passersby, mimicking the sound of crying human babies.

“When someone follows the sound, the Kawa akago moves farther away, continuing to call as it leads the hapless human further into the river. It will then sneak up on the unsuspecting human and pull their legs out from under them, sending them tumbling into the water. Legend has it that this was meant as a prank, though people often drowned in this manner. It has been my clans’ experience that the Kawa akago drowns people on purpose.”

“How do we trap it?” Mikey asked.

“You must go into the water to capture the Kawa akago,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The trap coin must be placed inside its mouth when the creature is fully submerged. This is not a simple task. The Kawa akago moves well in the water and it is stronger than the average human man. Warders usually work in pairs to capture the creatures. Many of the legendary creatures are centered in or near water, so most warders’ train with pearl divers at an early age in order to learn to free dive
without oxygen.”

“For once we’ve got an advantage,” Raph chortled. “Turtles and water go together just fine.”

“We can still drown Raph,” Leo reminded him. “Don’t get too cocky.”

“Whatever,” Raph said. “When do we go after this thing?”

“It will not appear until the sun goes down,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It retreats from light because it relies on being unseen. Because you look so much like Kappa, it will not call out to you, and unless it cries, you will not know it is there.”

“Guess we could get Casey to help,” Raph said. “As long as he don’t go into the water, he’ll be safe enough. This Kawa akago will see him and try to pull its trick and then we can dive in after it.”

“All of us except Leo,” Don said. “He can keep Casey out of the river and vice versa. I do not want to redo those stitches.”

Mr. Hidesato glanced through the window and said, “I must go out and speak to the grounds crew and then attend to some business matters. I will see you at dinnertime.”

The turtles waited until they heard the sound of the outer door closing behind him before any of them spoke.

“Why doesn’t he ever go with us on one of these captures?” Mikey asked. “We wouldn’t have to bother Casey if Mr. Hidesato went down to the river with us.”

“He claims that it’s due to his age,” Leo said.

“Mr. H moves pretty well when he’s sneaking around here,” Raph said. “I think something happened in the past and he’s lost his nerve.”

“There’s no point in speculating,” Leo said as he reached for a journal. “Let’s see if we can find an entry for the Kawa akago and make sure Mr. Hidesato didn’t forget anything.”

“Mikey can get back to scanning so we won’t have to do this kind of search every time we’re faced with a new yokai,” Don said.

Later that afternoon Raph called Casey and lined him up to assist in their hunt, inviting him to join them for dinner. The pair decided to leave April out of it this time around, as she’d already had a very hectic day.

Casey arrived just as the food was being placed on the dining table. As they ate, the group went over the history of the creature they were going after and how they planned to capture the Kawa akago.

There was still time to kill once dinner was over, so Raph, Mikey and Casey retired to the media room to watch some mixed martial arts. Don took some medical supplies from the storage closet in the kitchen and joined Leo upstairs in their bedroom where he would be changing the bandaging on his brother’s leg.

“I wasn’t completely truthful about that dream,” Leo admitted as Don kneeled next to him and began removing the old wrap from his thigh.
“Was there more to it than what you told us?” Don asked.

“Not in the dream itself,” Leo said. “It was more in how I felt about it after I woke up. There is a different sensation to the dreams that are yokai related. I’m starting to recognize that feeling.”

“Why wouldn’t you have shared that with everyone?” Don asked. “Or was it Mr. Hidesato that made you hesitate to say more?”

“I have a sense that he expects me to recognize and possibly even control my dreams,” Leo said. “I think he wants me to be able to interpret what I’m seeing and use that to our advantage.”

“He can’t reasonably expect that when you’ve only just realized you’re having prophetic dreams,” Don said. “How long did it take those three other warders to get the hang of their dreams? Were any of them able to achieve lucid dreaming at the same time?”

“It’s hard to determine those types of answers from their journals,” Leo said. “None of the chronicles are that precise. Some warders kept pristine records and seemed to enjoy writing out the story of their hunts in great detail; others were very monosyllabic. Right after our first capture I made a quick entry in the back of a journal but I didn’t say very much. I don’t even know which journal it is anymore.”

“It wouldn’t hurt to write our own journals,” Don said. “We could call them reports and make sure to write down everything. This is a unique opportunity; where other warders perhaps captured a dozen yokai during their lifetime, we’re going after quite a lot more than that.”

“You’re assuming there will be someone to read them in the future,” Leo said.

Don paused in his ministrations. “I’d prefer to think that I’m being prudent. The warders who wrote those journals probably thought that the creatures they’d captured would stay captured, but they chronicled their adventures anyway. Whatever the future holds, whatever decision we make, it wouldn’t hurt to keep a record of the things we’re doing here while it’s all still fresh in our heads.”

“I concede your point,” Leo said with a smile.

“Good,” Don said, giving Leo’s leg a final pat before standing up. “Want to spend some time goofing off in front of the TV?”

“Why not? Hopefully Mikey hasn’t started charging admission,” Leo said.

They joined the other three in the media room where the entire group enjoyed the luxury of leather seats, a large television, and surround sound. Mikey even made popcorn, though what he didn’t eat himself they wound up throwing at each other during a mock popcorn war.

It was approaching eleven p.m. when Leo stood up and signaled that it was time to leave. After stopping in the office to collect the Kawa akago trap coin and the wax tool, the turtles piled into April’s van and with Casey at the wheel, drove towards East River Park in Brooklyn.

During the ride Don used his computer to make sure they wouldn’t run into the police. “They cleared the scene around nine,” he reported. “Taking into consideration news crews and gawkers who’ve had more than two hours to trample around, we shouldn’t encounter anyone.”

“Mr. Hidesato said the Kawa akago doesn’t like the light,” Leo said. “It’s probably just now dark enough to make the creature feel comfortable in coming out. We’ll stay in the van while you walk along the shoreline, Casey. You’ll wear a headset with an open line to us and as soon as you hear a baby crying, let us know.”
“Do not go near the water,” Raph admonished his friend. “I mean it; we don’t know if this thing will jump out and grab ya’ if ya’ get too close, so don’t.”

“Got it,” Casey said, turning into the drive that led into the park. “Walk up and down and wait to hear something crying.”

“When you do lure it out of hiding, Raph, Mikey, and I will go in after it,” Don said. “Leo is not to go in the water.”

“Okay,” Casey said. “Don’t go near the water, don’t let Leo near the water.”

“Don’t act like you’re looking for the creature either,” Mikey said. “It likes to play pranks and pranks are no fun if the victim is expecting it.”

“Ya’ ought to know,” Raph said. “You’re the expert on pranks.”

Following Don’s directions, Casey found the area where the police officer had been pulled into the water. He drove past it slowly to ensure that no one was around before turning back and finding a parking spot close to a stand of trees.

“If the police come by, we’ll bail out and hide in the trees,” Leo said. “Tell them you were curious and then leave. You can come back for us later and we’ll try again if we can. If not, we’ll at least be able to prevent anyone else from falling victim to that creature tonight.”

Don handed a headset to Casey and waited for him to put it on before doing a sound check to make sure it was in working order.

After Casey climbed out of the van, Raph leaned out of the open passenger window. “Just stroll along looking at the sky and shit, like ya’ ain’t got anything better to do. And remember what I told ya’.”

“Don’t go near the water,” Casey said. “I heard ya’ the first time.”

Raph watched his friend walk towards the water and then turned to look at his brothers. “Can I go on record as saying how much I hate having to use Casey as bait? I know it makes him feel like he’s being useful, but it don’t sit right with me that he might have to do this kind of thing a lot.”

“You were the one who pointed out that in this situation he’d be our best bet for luring the creature out of hiding,” Don said. “We have a similar problem with these yokai as we do with humans; they see us as turtles rather than prey, or they see the warder brand and avoid us like the plague.”

“Can we have this moral discussion at another time?” Leo asked. “Right now we need to keep our eyes and ears open.”

His brothers quieted down. After a few minutes they heard Casey begin humming to himself, either from nerves or boredom, or a combination of both.

The night was dark, with the crescent moon partly covered by heavy clouds. Though they were parked near where Casey was walking, there were a few spots on his route where he was hidden from view.

Casey had been strolling for a half an hour when he whispered, “How long do ya’ want me to keep this up? Maybe it moved downriver or something.”
“I hope it didn’t get spooked by all the cops and decide to take its show on the road,” Raph muttered.

“Stick with it, Casey. It knows these are good hunting grounds. It won’t go anywhere,” Leo said.

“You sound pretty sure of that,” Mikey said.

“Call it a gut feeling,” Leo told him.

“You sure it’s your gut and not that dream?” Mikey asked.

Before Leo could answer him, Casey hissed into his mouthpiece. “I hear a baby. The sound’s coming from the water.”

“Stay where ya’ are,” Raph said as he and his brothers scrambled out of the van.

The turtle brothers could hear what sounded exactly like a baby crying as they approached the water. Apparently their presence did not startle the Kawa akago, because it continued to mimic a baby even when they stepped near the water’s edge.

As Leo started to walk past him, Casey said, “Whoa there buddy. Ya’ heard what Don said. The two of us stay out of the water.”

Leo’s mouth compressed into a thin line to show his displeasure at being sidelined, but he didn’t argue the point. Standing next to Casey, Leo watched his brothers enter the river.

Patches of weeds stuck up from the water in sections and the crying sound seemed to be coming from somewhere within them. Moving slowly towards the sound, the three turtles encountered a slight drop off that took them from ankle deep water into water that was up to their knees.

Rather than getting closer to the yokai, the crying sound seemed to retreat from them the farther into the water they went. With a hand motion, Raph signaled to Don and Mikey that they should spread out and try to surround the Kawa akago.

What happened next was so sudden it took all of them by surprise. Something grabbed hold of Donatello’s ankles and dragged him under water.

“Donny!” Raph shouted before taking a deep breath and diving under the surface. The water was murky, making it difficult to see anything, but Raph could just make out Mikey swimming farther out into the river.

With a burst of speed, Raph swam after him, hoping that Mikey had seen where the Kawa akago had taken Don. He also hoped that Don had managed to take some air into his lungs before being yanked beneath the water’s surface.

They had reached a much deeper part of the river when Raph saw Mikey point at something below them. Looking where Mikey had indicated, Raph could just make out a turtle shaped form amidst the junk that littered the bottom of the river.

Forgetting about the Kawa akago, Raph and Mikey swam towards Don. When they got close, they saw that his body had been wedged through the window of a submerged car. He was wiggling and pushing against the metal frame with his one free arm, trying to dislodge his body, but he was stuck tight.
Grabbing onto Don’s legs, Raph tried pulling his brother free. He couldn’t get any leverage because the car was on its side and Don was too high off the river bottom. Seeing his dilemma, Mikey swam downwards until he could plant his feet on the muddy ground. Wrapping his arms around Raph’s legs, Mikey anchored his brother and then leaned back, using his weight to help Raph pull Don loose.

They had barely started to tug on Don when a dark streak shot through the water and plowed directly into Mikey’s legs. Mikey’s knees buckled and the yokai grabbed one of his legs to try and pull him away from his brothers.

It was only Mikey’s solid hold on Raph’s legs that kept the Kawa akago from swimming off with him. Mikey kicked at its head and when the creature sped away, Mikey let go of Raph in order to swim up to try a different tactic to free Don.

Using his nunchucks, Mikey pounded on the windshield until it buckled and pulled away from the rubber seal that held it in place. Shoving the windshield aside, Mikey swam into the car as far as he safely could and began pushing against Don’s shoulders while Raph tugged on him.

Don’s eyes were starting to bug out, his expression showing panic. The sudden dunking had clearly kept him from taking in extra oxygen, and his struggles had depleted what little he’d stored in his lungs.

Raph could tell from the way Mikey’s legs were churning the water that his youngest brother had doubled his efforts to free Don. That could only mean that he was becoming anxious over Don’s condition. If they couldn’t yank Don out of the window Raph would just take off the entire car door and bring it, along with his brother, up to the surface.

Before Raph could make a move, the Kawa akago shot out of the watery darkness and seized his leg. Releasing Don, Raph yanked a sai from his belt and twisted around to bring the pommel down on the creature’s head.

The Kawa akago let go of Raph and was off in a flash, putting distance between itself and the turtle. It was clear to Raph then that the Kawa akago was not going to allow them to release its victim. Every time they turned their attention to Don’s plight, the creature was going to try to add either he or Mikey to its collection of drowning victims.

Mikey had backed out of the car to check on Raph. When Raph swam back to Don, he saw Mikey gesturing frantically and knew they were running out of time.

Then Raph saw a red blur sweeping towards Mikey and pointed behind his brother. Trained to act in an instant, Mikey shot upwards, his sudden burst of speed surprising the Kawa akago, who passed directly beneath him.

They weren’t going to outswim the thing. They didn’t have the time to waste even if they could. Don had stopped struggling and gone limp, yet each time they tried to free him, the Kawa akago attacked them.

All of that flashed through Raph’s brain in an instant. If he didn’t do something quickly, Donny was going to die.

He saw Mikey coming back down again, making directly for his trapped brother. Raph knew he only had seconds to try to come up with a plan before the creature attacked once more.

It was then he remembered that hitting the Kawa akago with his sai had caused it enough pain
to drive it off. If the thing wasn’t immune to pain, then Raph intended to teach it a lesson about messing with a ninja.

Swimming towards the car, Raph kicked his legs enticingly and pretended that his focus was on his brothers. He kept one hand near the weapon in his belt and watched for movement from the corners of his eyes.

Sure enough, a streak of red burst through the murky darkness, making straight for Raph’s legs. Timing the thing’s movement, Raph let the Kawa akago’s grasping hands get within inches of his ankles before tucking his knees up to his chest and rolling over.

As soon as his body was upside down, Raph kicked out with his legs and slammed into the Kawa akago. The force of Raph’s heavy body drove the creature to the river bottom hard enough for the impact to send mud swirling.

Raph kept going downwards, a sai in one hand. The Kawa akago saw him coming and pushed itself into a standing position, its hands reaching up to claw at the water in an attempt to swim away from the rampaging turtle.

Just as it began to rise, Raph reached out and drove his sai through the creature’s foot with enough power to pin it to the river bottom. Raph’s free hand swept into a pocket in his belt as the Kawa akago’s mouth opened in a silent cry of pain.

Raph swiftly shoved the trap coin into the creature’s maw. A look of terror replaced its previously mischievous expression and then the Kawa akago began to turn translucent.

As its color faded, the water started to churn. Backing away, Raph watched the swirling water turn into a miniature whirlpool that slowly drained away into the center of the trap coin.

Snatching the coin from the bottom of the river once the Kawa akago was inside, Raph swam rapidly back to where Don was trapped. He saw that Mikey was again inside the car, once more attempting to shove against Don in the hopes of freeing him.

While he swam towards them, Raph’s eyes raked over the car door and Don’s body. A thought struck him then, one he hoped would work quickly.

Floating up next to Don, Raph rapped on the car to get Mikey’s attention. When his brother backed out enough to see him, Raph pointed at Don’s bō staff and then lifted his hand several times.

Mikey’s eyes widened in sudden understanding and he nodded. Ducking back into the car, his braced himself and then slid a hand under Don’s bō. On the other end of the bō, Raph did the same thing and then tapped on the car one more time.

Together the brothers pushed upwards on Don’s bō as hard as they could. For a second nothing happened, though both turtles were giving it everything they had.

Then they heard a crackling sound and the bō staff bent slightly. Maintaining the pressure on the staff, the pair leaned into it and were rewarded by a sudden snap as the bō broke in half.

They each yanked their broken halves out of the way. Removing the staff had given them a little over an inch of extra space and loosened Don enough so that when Raph pulled and Mikey pushed on him, their brother slid free.

Raph’s hand was clenched tightly around the coin, but he could feel something start to move. When Mikey swam up next to him, Raph pointed at the wax tool in his belt. Mikey quickly removed
the tool and Raph handed the coin to him just as the center began to swirl again.

Gripping Don tightly, Raph swam for the surface, leaving it to Mikey to seal the coin. Don was limp in his arms and all Raph could do was to think repeatedly, “Hold on, Donny. Hold on.”

On the shore, Casey paced back and forth. Leo stood in the same spot he’d been in when his brothers had entered the water, his eyes almost unblinking as he stared into the river.

“That’s it,” Leo finally snapped, “it’s been too long. I’m going in.”

He started forward and Casey froze, unsure as to whether he should stop him or dive in too.

Leo was just at the water’s edge when Raph surfaced with Don slung over one shoulder. Seeing Leo on the verge of entering the water, Raph yelled, “Stay there, Leo! Casey, I need your help!”

Casey ran past Leo, trudging through the water until he met up with Raph. Together they carried Don to the shore, where Leo waited to help them with their unconscious burden.

Laying Donatello on the ground, Leo knelt next to him and began chest compressions, counting to fifteen before listening for breathing. Hearing nothing, Leo covered Don’s nostrils and began mouth to mouth resuscitation.

Raph fell to his knees, gasping from his exertions. Mikey collapsed next to him, though neither took their eyes off of Don.

Once more Leo stopped to listen. Shaking his head, he interlaced his hands and went back to pushing on Don’s chest, all the while murmuring, “Come on, Donny; breathe.”

“Don’t ya do this to us Donny,” Raph said, his voice breaking.

Almost as if he’d heard them, Don’s body jerked. Moving his hands, Leo gripped his brother’s shoulder and rolled him onto his side just as Don convulsed into violent coughing.

Water sprayed out of his mouth as he continued to hack, drawing in wheezing breaths between each racking cough. Leo gently patted his shell, the relief on his face clear.

Raph and Mikey slung their arms around each other, unable to say anything as they watched Don start to breathe easier. Finally he rolled back over again and stared up at the sky before his gaze swept around to find his brothers and Casey.

“Donny?” Leo asked.

“I’m okay,” Don said. He glanced at Leo’s thigh and then back up again. “You didn’t get your stitches wet, did you?”

When everyone started to laugh, Don’s brow furrowed and he tried to sit up. Leo helped him, though he was still laughing.

“What’s so funny?” Don asked. “Do you really think I want to fix that wound again?”

“Ya’ almost drowned genius,” Raph said. “Ya’ weren’t breathing for a couple of minutes there and all ya’ can worry about is some damned stitches?”

“Did we capture the Kawa akago?” Don asked as his brothers assisted him in standing.
Mikey lifted the coin, its center sealed in wax. “It’s right in here, where it belongs.”

“Let’s get back to HQ and take a hot shower,” Raph said. “I’ve had more than enough of swimming to last me a while.”

Leo wrapped an arm around Don as the group started back to the van, keeping Don at their center. After a couple of minutes he began to feel as though something was off, and then realized what he was missing.

“Guys, where is my bō staff?”

End Kawa akago
“Where are we going, Brad?” the girl asked.

“It’s a special place, Sarah. My cousin told me about it,” Brad answered.

He pulled Sarah along, leading her off the designated walking path and into the undergrowth. There was a very faint trail; one Brad couldn’t have seen this late at night if not for the light on his cell phone.
“We’re going to get caught,” Sarah whispered. “There are more cops patrolling the park now because of the people who’ve gone missing.”

“They won’t find us where we’re headed,” Brad assured her. “Trust me, you’ll want to see this.”

Sarah clung to her boyfriend’s hand and followed in his footsteps, ducking beneath low branches and skirting thick bushes. It took a few minutes, but soon they stepped into a small clearing.

In the center of an expanse of lush green grass was a single tree. The moonlight shone on it, highlighting its oddly formed branches.

A few whitish colored stones were scattered beneath the tree, but other than that, the thick grass and seclusion was very inviting.

“They call this the ‘make out tree’, ” Brad said, his mouth close to Sarah’s head. “This is where lovers go to promise themselves to each other.”

“Lovers, huh? Is this why you brought me out here, Bradley?” Sarah asked, her manner teasing.

Sliding his arms around the girl, Brad said, “You’ve got to admit, between your parents and mine, it’s hard to get some alone time.”

Setting her hands on his hips, Sarah leaned in, inviting the boy to kiss her. After a couple of minutes, the kiss grew more feverish and when their lips separated, they were both panting.

Touching his forehead to Sarah’s, Brad said, “I just can’t wait anymore, baby. I need to be with you in every way.”

Sarah closed her eyes and nodded. Without another word, Brad pulled her towards a particularly attractive section of grass, close to the tree.

They sat on the grass and Brad rolled onto his hip next to Sarah, taking her into his arms again and kissing her. When she relaxed into the kiss, he pushed her onto her back and began to unbutton her shirt.

Cool air hit Sarah’s bare skin. Brad’s lips moved to her jawline, then to her neck. She clung to his shoulders, watching as his kissed his way down to her chest and then closed her eyes.

When his mouth found her breast, Sarah gasped and tilted her head back, arching into his touch. The new sensation made her spine tingle, and Sarah opened her eyes in surprise.

Her gaze fell on the trunk of the tree and she noticed a sticky red substance running out of an opening in its center.

“Brad. Brad,” Sarah said, pushing at his shoulders.

Reluctantly lifting his head, Brad said, “Don’t stop now, baby.”

“No. Look. What is that?” Sarah asked, twisting her upper body so that she could point at the tree.

Brad glanced at it and then back down at his girlfriend’s breasts. “Just sap. It won’t get on
It was obvious he wasn’t really looking. Sarah wiggled out from under Brad, rolling over and putting her hand down for leverage. When her hand hit one of the rocks, it turned over in the soil.

Instead of a rock, the girl found herself staring at a human skull.

Sarah screamed, scrambling away from the head.

“What the hell . . . ?” Brad exclaimed, staring around at the human remains that had begun to pop up out of the ground.

“Go, we have to go!” Sarah yelled, jumping to her feet. A shadow moved across the grass and caused her to look up.

Several jagged, finger-like tree branches whipped downwards, wrapped around her body and snatched her off the ground.

“Ahhhhh!”

Leonardo woke with a start, his heart hammering in his chest. The girl’s scream echoed in his head, making it ache.

“Mpff, Leo?” Raph asked sleepily. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Leo answered, his voice shaky. “Go back to sleep.”

“Bullshit,” Raph said, sounding more alert. “Tell me the truth. Ya’ had another dream didn’t ya’?”

Seeing no point in dissembling, Leo said, “Yes. It was . . . different though.”

“Different how?” Raph asked.

Leo described the dream, going into as much detail as he could remember. He finished by saying, “My previous dreams have all been more personal. In this one I felt like I was watching a horror movie, only I was on the inside.”

“Come here,” Raph said, sliding an arm under Leo’s carapace to draw his brother closer.

For a moment Raph just held him and Leo relished the tenderness. It was rare for Raph to show the gentle, caring side of his nature. It usually only happened very early in the morning like this, when they were sharing a bed.

“Ya’ think this was really one of those, what’d Mr. H call them, prophetic dreams?” Raph asked. “Big change from those confusing ones ya’ were having before.”

“Don was certain it would take time for me to learn to interpret my dreams,” Leo said. “This might not have been one of the prophetic kind. It was too specific.”

“Specific enough for Donny to do some research,” Raph said, and then stressed, “in the morning.”

“But if we could locate it now . . . .” Leo began.
“Unless ya’ got super speed, that ain’t gonna happen. It’s too close to daylight,” Raph reminded him. “I don’t intend to take over as the practical one, Leonardo. That’s your job.”

Leo sighed in resignation, relaxing into Raph’s hold. “You’re right. There’s no point in going off half-cocked. We can examine my dream tomorrow.”

“After we swing by the lair and grab Don’s spare bō staff,” Raph said, chuckling. “He’s a little ticked off at losing the first one.”

“He’ll get over it,” Leo said, nuzzling into Raph’s shoulder.

Raph’s lips brushed the top of Leo’s head. “Now go back to sleep.”

Closing his eyes, Leo let the sound of Raph’s heartbeat relax him even further. He replayed the events of the night in his head, remembering how helpless he’d felt standing on the riverbank as his brothers fought the Kawa akago.

Donatello had very nearly drowned. There was a lesson to be learned from that experience. Every one of the legendary creatures was dangerous. Every one of them had the potential to be deadly.

Mr. Hidesato hadn’t been there to receive the trap coin from them upon their return. He had waited up for them on their previous five missions, greeting them as soon as they entered the house. Perhaps he had taken it for granted that this capture would be routine and that he wouldn’t be needed.

Sleep finally returned and Leo let the remainder of his concerns drift away in the soothing mists of unconsciousness.

Since they had to swing by the lair to retrieve Don’s backup bō staff, the turtles met at mid-morning in the kitchen. Preparing brunch for themselves and Master Splinter, they packed up the food and exited the house through the secret passageway in the basement.

Mr. Hidesato had not appeared and they did not find a note from him. They had seen on the chalkboard in the kitchen that the housecleaning staff would arrive after noon. It was a good time to be away from the house.

Master Splinter was sweeping the kitchen when his sons arrived. He greeted them warmly, accepting hugs from each of the brothers. Though they communicated with him daily, it was easy to read the relieved expression on his face at seeing them in person.

“How is your leg?” Master Splinter asked Leo as Mikey and Raph began unpacking the food.

“Healing nicely,” Leo said. “Don did a good job patching me up.”

“As usual,” Raph added, glancing up as Don joined them.

Spinning his bō staff, Don settled it into place on his shell and said, “Saying nice things about me doesn’t get you off the hook for busting my other bō.”

“Then next time don’t get your ass trapped underwater,” Raph retorted.

“Perhaps the four of you will enlighten me on the details of this last adventure while we eat,” Master Splinter requested.
They served themselves buffet style and sat down at the table to enjoy their meal. Taking turns, the brothers shared the specifics of their hunt for the Kawa akago.

Master Splinter nodded as they reached the end of their recap. “It would be best to remember that each of these creatures warranted capture and confinement for a reason. None of them should be taken lightly.”

“We’re doing our best to learn all we can about them before we go on a hunt,” Don said.

“And that ain’t easy considering most of our info comes from the old warder journals,” Raph said. “Mr. H hasn’t been all that helpful.”

“He might be doing the best he can,” Mikey said. “I think sometimes he’s just in a hurry to send us after these things ’cause he thinks we might miss our chance to catch them.”

“We’ll miss our chance if we get killed,” Raph said. “Why are ya’ defending the guy? If he’d gone with us as bait last night instead of Casey he could’ve done something that would have kept that yokai from nearly drowning Donny. Yesterday ya’ were the one questioning why he don’t go on these hunts with us.”

“Well I’ve had time to think about it,” Mikey said. “I watch his face when he’s talking to us about these creatures. He works hard to keep from showing any emotion, but his body language tells a story. I think something happened during a hunt and now he can’t do it anymore.”

“Do you mean something like he was hurt?” Don asked. “Or watched someone else get hurt?”

Mikey shrugged. “I don’t know. But he was quick to reimburse Casey for the fire gear that got wrecked when we took down the Itsumade. Nobody asked or expected him to do that. I’m just saying maybe we should cut him a little bit of a break.”

“I’ll cut him a break when I know he ain’t trying to hide stuff from us,” Raph said. “Why’s he keep putting the journals away every time we take ‘em out? Why did Don have to practically chase him down to get a detailed tour of the house and security systems? And what’s the deal with the warders who’ve had those prophetic dreams?”

“Mr. H does talk as though he doesn’t know much about them,” Don said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. “He seems to expect Leo to understand his and control them without any guidance.”

“Speaking of which, this is a good time to tell them about the one ya’ had last night,” Raph said, looking at Leo.

Leo took a sip of water and commenced telling his family about his latest dream. He went into as much detail as possible, knowing it would aid them in trying to determine if it was yokai related.

“The girl in your dream said that people had gone missing in the park,” Don said. “That’s something we can verify with a quick internet search.”

“You can do that here, right?” Raph asked.

“I can but we’ll need to go back to HQ to research what this creature might be,” Don said.

“If it turns out that it is one, HQ is where we’ll learn how to capture it,” Mikey said. “It’ll be in the journals or Mr. H will know.”
“Let’s try the journals first,” Raph said.

“You do not trust Mr. Hidesato,” Master Splinter said. “Do you believe that he means you harm?”

Raph paused to think about that. “I don’t think he purposely means for us to get hurt,” Raph said slowly. “I think it’s more like what Mikey said, he’s in a damn hurry to catch these creatures and ain’t taking the time to make sure we’re prepared.”

“Then it is up to the four of you to determine if you are ready for each challenge that presents itself,” Master Splinter said. “Follow your instincts. If you do not think you have the information necessary to complete a task with a reasonable amount of safety, then do not go forth.”

“That’ll sure give Mr. H fits,” Mikey said.

“To hell with him then,” Raph said.


“Sorry, Sensei. It’s just that every time I think of how easy it was for him to throw Casey to the wolves it pi . . . hacks me off,” Raph said.

“Do not let that anger control you,” Master Splinter warned. “Your intuition is very acute, but it can be dulled by rage. Your brothers need for you to be at your sharpest.”

“I won’t let them down,” Raph said. “I’m just blowing off steam.”

“Let’s put some of that excess energy that I’m sure we all have to good use,” Leo said, standing up. “Just because Mr. Hidesato has a crew cleaning HQ doesn’t mean we don’t still have responsibilities. I’m sure Master Splinter would like a hand with the sweeping and dusting.”

“I’ll take care of the kitchen,” Mikey said without his usual protests regarding chores.

“Good. Perhaps after the lair is clean you boys will join me in the dojo for a short workout,” Master Splinter said. “Meet me there when you are finished.”

After Master Splinter left them, Don walked over to where Leo was standing and in a low voice asked, “Do you think he’s been lonely without us here?”

“He says not, but I think our being away so much does bother him,” Leo said. “We should make it a point to be home every couple of days.”

Raph moved in close to them after retrieving the broom. “Maybe we should get him to come stay at HQ with us. There’s plenty of room. I know ya’ told Mr. H that Father would rather be at home, but I think he’s just sitting around here worrying.”

“I’ll speak to him about it after practice,” Leo said. “Mr. Hidesato might be more forthcoming with someone nearer his age.”

“Sensei could probably tell from just looking at Mr. H if he’s holding out on us,” Raph said.

“Donny, we’ll take care of the cleaning,” Leo said. “You start checking to see if there are reports of missing persons from the Central Park area. Learn everything you can.”

“On it,” Don said, trotting off with his laptop to his primary work area.
The turtles spent over an hour taking care of various chores around the lair, then met in the
dojo to practice with Master Splinter. Before they began, Leo shot a questioning look in Don’s
direction and received a nod in return.

Leo was an expert at compartmentalizing, but the knowledge that there was validity to what
he’d experienced in his dream kept trying to interfere with his focus. It took a conscious effort on his
part to push his thoughts to the side as he worked out.

Since he still had to take care not to pull his stitches loose, Leo had an opportunity to speak to
his father while his brothers were sparring.

“We were wondering if you’d like to move in to Mr. Hidesato’s with us,” Leo said. “It may
take us a long time to capture all of the creatures that escaped. He already extended the invitation
and it would ease our minds to know you were safe and comfortable.”

“I am both safe and comfortable here in our home,” Master Splinter said. “I know you are
concerned about me, Leonardo. It would certainly ease my mind to see you all every day, but as I
grow older I become more set in my ways. There are two things you can do for me though.”

“Anything Master Splinter,” Leo replied.

“Leave a map here which shows the way through the sewers to Mr. Hidesato’s house,”
Master Splinter said. “If you need me or if I feel that you might, I want to be able to find you
quickly.”

“I’ll have Don make a map for you that includes the security key code which gives you
access to the secret tunnel,” Leo said. “What is the second thing?”

“Be careful, my son. Look out for your brothers and allow them to look out for you,” Master
Splinter said.

“I will, Sensei. Of course,” Leo said.

Since it was nearly two in the afternoon by the time they finished their practice session, the
family had a late lunch of leftovers and sandwiches. Soon after they’d eaten, Master Splinter bid
them good-bye and went to his room for meditation.

The brothers didn’t leave right away. Mikey and Raph busied themselves with preparing a
couple of meals to leave in the refrigerator for their father, while Leo and Don sat at the kitchen table
to review what Don’s research had turned up.

“In the last week, three young couples have gone missing from the vicinity of the park,” Don
said. “Family and witnesses can only put one couple directly in Central Park, but it’s a safe bet
based on other witness statements and your dream that they all disappeared from the park.”

“Does that include the couple I saw in my dream last night?” Leo asked.

Don shook his head. “If someone has noticed they’re missing, it hasn’t shown up on any
news outlet and I can’t find that a missing persons’ report has been filed.”

“Isn’t there like a waiting period before the cops will let ya’ report someone as missing?”
Raph asked.

“Only in television shows,” Don said. “The police will take those reports as soon as the
person has vanished. According to what Leo heard the young couple say, they probably live with
their parents. If they didn’t come home, surely an alert would have gone out by now.”

Mikey paused in his food prep to say, “So either Leo’s dream was wrong, or what he saw hasn’t happened yet.”

“All of my dreams have foretold a future event, but not like this,” Leo said.

“Your first dream wasn’t prophetic, it was about the Dodomeki and happened after we captured her,” Don reminded him.

“So maybe that was the activating dream,” Raph said. “Ya’ know, the one that gets the future sight juices flowing.”

“That’s as good an explanation an any,” Leo said.

“It’s possible your dreams are evolving,” Don said. “Was that the case with any of the three warders who also had prophetic dreams?”

“Not from what I read in the journals,” Leo answered. “The dreams were either vague, distorted, with accompanying physical sensations, or they were specific and detailed, but not personal. No warder had both types of prophetic dream.”

“None of them warders were mutant turtles either,” Raph said flatly. “That kind of makes this a whole new ball game. I say we take advantage of this advance information.”

“I agree with Raph,” Leo said. “Let’s finish up here and get back to HQ. With what I saw in my dream, we should be able to identify the creature. Based on the position of the moon, I have a pretty good idea of what time of night it was when the couple was attacked.”

“If they’re meant to show up tonight, we can scare them off,” Mikey said. “Only problem is that Central Park is . . . how big did you tell us it was, Donny?”

“Eight hundred and forty-three acres of landscaped beauty in the center of the city,” Don said.

“Yeah, should be easy to find a killer tree in a couple of hours,” Raph said, his voice heavy with sarcasm.

Leo stood up and moved over to the sink to begin washing the dishes they’d used. Mikey was putting food into containers so that Raph could transfer them to the refrigerator. While those three finished up in the kitchen, Don took a load of trash out of the lair and up to a dumpster in an alley close to their home.

Once they had Master Splinter set for a couple of days without them and Don had provided him with the promised map, the brothers took their shell sleds back to Mr. Hidesato’s house.

Because they had no idea how long the cleaning crew needed to be in the house, the turtles didn’t come up from the basement until Don had checked the security cameras.

The house was empty. No cleaning crew and no Mr. Hidesato either.

Checking the office desk, Mikey said, “He must have come back while we were gone ‘cause now there’s a note from him here.”

Opening the folded sheet of embossed stationary, Mikey read, “Warders, I have been called
away on business. I do not anticipate being gone from the house for more than one night.”

When he stopped reading, Raph said, “Is that it? That’s all he says?”

Mikey held the note up for him to see. “That’s it. Two sentences.”

“Do you suppose he took his shell cell with him?” Don asked.

“There’s only one way to find out,” Leo said. “Call him, Donny.”

Don already had his shell cell open. “It’s ringing.”

Just as he said that, the sound of a ringing phone was heard inside the room. Mikey walked around to the front of the desk and opened one of the drawers.

“It sure is,” Mikey said, lifting Mr. Hidesato’s shell cell out of the drawer.

“Ain’t that some shit,” Raph said with disgust. “He bitches at us about being out of touch, and he goes off and doesn’t even take his phone. Still gonna defend him, Mikey?”

“Maybe he doesn’t want us to track him down at his girlfriend’s,” Mikey said.

Raph scoffed at him. “Let me know when you’re ready for a reality check.”

“We’re going to have to discover which yokai this is on our own,” Leo said with finality, putting an end to their argument. “Skim through the journals and look for the key word ‘tree’. Don, I don’t know how many journals Mikey scanned into the computer, but could you do a quick word search?”

“Shouldn’t take but a minute,” Don said. “I’ll be right back.”

Unlocking the war room entry with the key that Mr. Hidesato had hidden in a book, Don disappeared inside. His brothers each grabbed a journal from the bookshelves and began searching through the pages.

True to his word, Don returned quickly. “The information isn’t in the computer yet. Don’t bother looking in the journals with a yellow sticky note attached to them; those are the ones Mikey already scanned.”

He didn’t wait for a response. Going to the bookshelves, Don chose a handful of books and sat down on the couch next to Raph to read them.

Because he was a speed reader, Don got through two journals to each one his brothers managed. It was just short of an hour when Don called out, “I’ve got it.”

Raph shut his journal with a sigh of relief. “Good. What are we tackling this time?”

“It’s called a Jubokko,” Don said. “Outwardly, they look like ordinary trees, indistinguishable from the various species you normally find in a region. It’s only when someone is paying attention that they’ll notice that the branches have more frightening aspect to them, or that there are human bones buried beneath the tree.”

“In my dream, the bones looked like white rocks,” Leo said. “The blood flowing from an opening in its trunk wasn’t visible until the couple were right under the tree branches.”

“Jubokko are usually found in battlefields or places where mass deaths have occurred,” Don
“It feeds on blood. It’s the blood that transforms the tree into a yokai.”

“So how did a tree in the middle of Central Park get transformed?” Mikey asked. “Is there some battleground that I haven’t heard of?”

Don shook his head. “No, but I can make an educated guess as to what drew the yokai to that particular tree. Didn’t the young couple in your dream call it the ‘make out tree’, Leo?”

“Yes they did,” Leo said. “Everyone who’s gone missing were couples.”

“Then we have to surmise that those couples who meet under that tree go there to have sex,” Don said. “Blood has probably been spilled on that spot on more than one occasion.”

His brothers were giving him odd looks, clearly not understanding what he was telling them.

Clearing his throat, Don said, “You know, virgin blood.”

“Oh~h,” Mikey hummed while Leo and Raph grimaced.

“So what’s the tree do, scoop ya’ up with its branches and eat ya’?” Raph asked.

“Close. It hoists its victims up into its boughs and then the jagged branches pierce the victim’s skin and suck out all of their blood. After the body is completely drained, the tree drops it on the ground. The journal doesn’t say what happens to those remains, but a reasonable hypothesis would be that birds, insects, and other small animals consume them until all that’s left are bones,” Don said.

“How do we capture the yokai if it’s inhabiting a real tree?” Leo asked.

Don ran his finger down the journal page, flipping it over to peruse the other side. “The opening in the trunk is where the trap coin has to go. Blood feeds the yokai and the blood is stored there. The trap coin pulls the blood from the tree and the yokai follows it.”

“That’s totally gross,” Mikey said, looking disgusted.

“I guess the trick is getting the coin past those deadly branches,” Leo said. He thought for a minute. “Maybe we could distract the yokai’s attention with a decoy.”

“Not Casey,” Raph said darkly.

“No, of course not,” Leo said, giving his brother a wry look. “I was thinking blood.”

“I’m almost afraid to ask,” Raph said. “What the hell are ya’ talking about?”

“We could slip into a blood bank and take a few bags,” Leo said. “If we rig up a remote controlled toy truck to carry a small dummy stuffed with the blood and drive it under the tree, the yokai might go for it. All I need is a second or two to run up close enough to toss the coin into the opening.”

“Why you?” Mikey asked. “I think we’ve already established that I’m the fastest.”

“I’m fast enough and I’m stealthier,” Leo said.

“It senses blood, Leo. Stealth isn’t as important as speed is with this thing,” Don told him.

“Mikey gets the coin,” Raph said with finality. “He’s fast and he ain’t sporting stitches in
one of his legs. We’ll back him up in case the damn thing ain’t fooled by this contraption ya’ just dreamed up.”

As much as Leo hated to do it, he had to concede their points. “All right. What time does the nearest blood bank close, Don?”

“Hang on,” Don said as he checked for the information on his laptop. “They close at seven. Sunset is around seven fifteen. What time do you think the attack in your dream occurred?”

“Right around midnight,” Leo said. “If we slip in and get the blood at eight, that will give us almost four hours to set up the decoy and find the tree.”

“That’s something I can work on now,” Don said. “I can use satellite imagery and plug in the coordinates for Central Park. By zooming in, I should be able to do a grid search for the tree. Your description was pretty detailed, Leo.”

“You’ll only have a couple of hours before we have to hit the blood bank,” Raph said. “Can ya’ search eight hundred and forty-three acres in that time?”

“And build the decoy that will carry the bagged blood?” Leo asked.

“Oh wait, let me pull another miracle out of my shell,” Don said with a hint of acerbity.

Raph grinned. “At least we ain’t asking ya’ to pull one out of your a . . . .”

“I’ll bet we can help with those jobs, if you’ll tell us what to do,” Leo said.

“Mikey’s good at working a joystick, so he can search the park once I get him set up,” Don said. “If you guys could go back to the Lair and grab a few things from my work area, I can get started on the decoy.”

“Give us the list,” Raph said as he stood up. “I’m sure Master Splinter will be surprised to see us pop in on him again so soon.”

“I kinda doubt anything we do surprises him,” Mikey said with a laugh.

It was after eight o’clock that night before the turtles were ready to leave HQ. Rigging up a dummy that could hold at least four bags of blood without tipping the toy truck over was tricky. In order to balance the dummy, it had to be about the size of a four year old child.

When Leo and Raph rejoined their brothers after sneaking into the blood bank, Leo said, “I feel terrible about taking this. I hope they won’t need it.”

“It was your idea,” Raph said.

Don placed the bags into his duffel and said, “It’s a good trade-off, Leo. This blood is meant to save lives and that’s what we’re going to do with it.”

Maneuvering through the sewers in order to reach their chosen point of entry into the park took a while. Leaving their shell sleds in a sewer cross junction, the brothers carried the parts for the decoy with them up an incline to an access grate beneath one of Central Park’s bridges.

“What time is it?” Leo asked.

“Nine-thirty,” Don said.
Voices carried through to them as people walked by on a path that ran right next to the access grate. The turtles backed away to avoid being inadvertently seen.

“Shit,” Raph hissed. “Ya’ sure ya’ found the right place, Mikey? We’re gonna play hell getting out of here and across fifty yards of open terrain without being seen by someone.”

“I’m sure,” Mikey said. “I even zoomed in on the spot. It fits Leo’s description from his dream to a T.”

“We can’t assemble the decoy until we’re ready to use it,” Don said. “It’s too bulky to carry while running.”

“There’s time,” Leo said. “We can wait for the foot traffic to die down. I’m more concerned about the police park patrols. They’ll be watching for anything out of the ordinary.”

“Yeah, like four giant turtles sneaking through the park,” Mikey said.

Waiting in the dark for the perfect opportunity to strike an enemy was something that was an integral part of being a ninja. That didn’t mean that a long period of enforced inactivity was enjoyable. Don and Mikey passed the time by playing tic-tac-toe on the dirt covered ground.

Leo remained alert, listening to every voice as people passed their hiding place. He didn’t know which direction the couple from his dream were going to come from and he wanted an advanced warning if he could get one.

Raph leaned against a tunnel wall, his arms crossed as he watched Leo. His father hadn’t needed to tell him to stay sharp. This whole job of hunting down creatures set his teeth on edge and the strange dreams Leo was starting to have didn’t help. Maybe they were supposed to be a good thing because they provided much needed clues, but seeing how they were affecting his older brother was a cause for concern.

Finally Leo stirred. “Time, Donny?”

“Eleven twenty-four,” Don replied.

“It’s been over half an hour since the last person passed,” Leo said. “Keep an eye out for police.”

Mikey carried the dummy and Raph scooped up the truck. When Don had his duffel ready, Leo pulled open the grate and stepped out onto the path. Looking in both directions to make sure the way was clear, Leo signaled to his brothers.

Once they were all out of the tunnel, Leo closed the grate just enough to where a casual observer couldn’t tell it had been forced open. If they had to leave in a hurry, it wouldn’t do to have to fight with rust covered metal.

The moon was full, just as it had been in Leo’s dream. There was no one in sight as the turtles surveyed the grass covered expanse they would have to cross in order to reach the shrubbery which hid the Jubokko from sight.

Mikey went first, staying low as he dashed across the field and into some bushes. Don followed him, then Raph, and finally Leo. They encountered no one and once hidden by the thick growth, the brothers began to push their way through to where their target lay.

Before they reached the clearing they heard voices drawing near. Leo motioned to his
brothers to get down.

“We’re going to get caught,” Sarah whispered. “There are more cops patrolling the park now because of the people who’ve gone missing.”

“They won’t find us where we’re headed,” Brad assured her. “Trust me, you’ll want to see this.”

Raph quirked an eye ridge in Leo’s direction and his brother nodded.

Cupping his hands around his mouth, Mikey shouted in a booming voice, “You two, what are you doing in there!”

“Shit!” Brad exclaimed.

There were crashing sounds caused by the pair running through the underbrush. The turtles saw a flash of color as the couple raced past their hiding places. Within minutes they were gone.

“Good job Mikey,” Leo said.

“It’s a ninja thing,” Mikey replied.

Don was already pushing through the shrubbery, working his way towards the clearing. His brothers joined him and the foursome soon stepped into the open.

The tree and setting was exactly as it had appeared in Leo’s dream. “This is it,” he said, his voice low.

“That’s not a spot I’d choose to make out,” Don said. “That tree is creepy looking.”

“You aren’t a horny teenager,” Mikey said. “Oh wait, yes you are.”

“He ain’t a horny human teenager,” Raph clarified, setting the truck on the ground. “Let’s get this decoy fixed up.”

He pulled up the metal rod that Don had welded into the back of the truck and tightened the brace on the hinge. Mikey affixed the cloth dummy to the rod and Don stuffed the bags of blood inside the dummy, tightly tying the cloth fasteners over the opening so the blood wouldn’t fall out.

Don took the controller from his duffel and switched it on, testing the connection by moving the truck back and forth.

“You have the coin, Mikey?” Leo asked.

“Right here,” Mikey said, bringing the trap coin out of his belt. “I’ve even picked out my running path.”

“Don’t put your foot down on any of those ‘stones’,” Leo warned. “They’re all bones and they’ll turn if you land on one.”

“The last thing we need is for ya’ to twist an ankle out there,” Raph said.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence,” Mikey retorted.

“Go ahead Don,” Leo said.
Pushing the control toggle forward, Don sent the truck rolling across the ground towards the Jubokko. As it drew near the base of the tree, Don had to maneuver the truck around roots and bones to avoid capsizing the top heavy toy.

“This kinda reminds me of that movie ‘Tremors’,” Mikey said with a laugh. “Only difference is this predator comes down instead of up. Unless we’re talking about the ass-blasters in Tremors 3.”

“Shh,” Don cautioned him. “I’m trying to work here.”

The words had barely left his mouth when the tree moved. Several of its branches shot downwards, enveloping the dummy and lifting it off the ground.

Mikey stood stunned for a moment as needle like protrusions pierced the cloth dummy, seeking the blood bags inside.

“Go!” Raph yelled, giving his brother a shove.

Jumping forward, Mikey sprinted towards the tree. His path led straight for the opening in its trunk.

He was watching for the branches. What he wasn’t expecting was that a root would shoot up from the ground and grab at his ankle.

Mikey saw it just in time. Springing forward onto his hands, he shot over the root, landing and then dancing away from another one.

“We gotta distract them!” Raph shouted, running forward, his sai in his hands.

Leo was right with him, both swords drawn. It only took a split second for Don to drop his duffel and take off after them.

A tree branch darted towards Raph, who stabbed at it with his sai. The branch recoiled and another took its place, until Raph was engaged in a battle to keep them off of him.

When a root curled up in Donatello’s path, he jammed his bō staff beneath it and popped the root in half. As he whacked another that came at him, a branch made it past his defenses and grasped the outer edges of his carapace, lifting him from the ground.

Twirling his staff, Don held the jagged limbs away from his skin, but no matter how hard he hit the branch holding him, it wouldn’t let go.

“Donny!” Leo exclaimed, sliding to a stop when he saw his brother’s predicament.

“Stay with Mikey!” Don called.

The Jubokko seemed to sense the young turtle’s intent. Roots began to burst from the ground at an alarming rate, each seemingly intent on catching Mikey.

As fast and agile as he was, Mikey couldn’t dodge the sheer number of roots. Two of them caught the toes of his right foot, causing him to fall face down in the dirt and drop the trap coin. Other roots quickly wrapped around his legs.

Spinning away from roots that were bent on entangling him, Leo leaped to Mikey’s aid. With both katana, he sliced the roots away from Mikey’s legs and then dropped one of his swords in
order to scoop up the trap coin.

Just as Mikey scrambled to his feet, a branch swept down and grabbed hold of Leo. He lifted an arm to cut at the branch and another caught his sword hand.

“Mikey, catch!” Leo shouted, tossing the coin to his brother.

Already hopping to avoid tree roots, Mikey plucked the coin from the air and turned back towards the tree trunk. A branch swept down at his head and Mikey ducked under it, whirling like a running back to sidestep roots.

Raph yelped as branches caught both his arms and yanked him off the ground. He watched helplessly as Don was hoisted into the tree boughs, hearing his brother cry out as needle-like limbs found his skin.

Mikey was almost at the trunk opening when a branch snapped to the side, hitting his shoulder with brutal force.

Feeling the ground go out from under him, Mikey threw the trap coin at the opening as hard as he could.

For a second, both Mikey and the coin were airborne. Then Mikey hit the ground and the coin disappeared into the Jubokko’s bloody maw.

At first, nothing happened. Mikey lay in the dirt, breathing heavily as he stared at the tree and then realized that none of its roots were trying to ensnare him.

The branches holding Raph, Leo, and Don slowly unfurled, releasing them. Don hit the ground with a thud and Raph ran over to him, helping him stand. There were tiny pin pricks along his arms and legs, but he was otherwise unhurt.

As Leo pulled Mikey up, the ground under their feet shook and all four turtles stepped back from the tree trunk. The tree began to shrivel; first its branches, then its roots, and finally the trunk itself. It was as though all of the moisture was being drained from the tree.

The blood that had dripped from the opening glistened and then vanished as the trap coin popped out of the trunk opening.

Raph took the wax tool from his belt and snatched up the coin. Placing the coin between the tips of the tool, Raph squeezed it shut and began counting.

“Are you okay, Donny?” Leo asked as his brother picked up his fallen bō staff.

“I’m fine,” Don said. “Nothing a few small bandages won’t fix.”

There wasn’t much left of the tree. It was dry and dead looking, all of its leaves gone and the remaining roots brittle.

“We should place an anonymous call to the police and tell them where they can find the people who went missing,” Leo said as they walked away from the tree. “Their families need the closure.”

“They’ll probably start a man hunt for a serial killer,” Don said. “Too bad they’ll never know who the killer really was.”
“You see guys, this really was like Tremors,” Mikey said, followed by “Ow!” as Raph popped him on the back of the head.

Their return to HQ was without incidence. Entering the house, the turtles saw no indication that Mr. Hidesato had returned.

Taking the coffer from a locked cabinet in the war room, Leo place the Jubokko in its allotted slot and then locked it away again. As he was doing so, Donatello dug into his duffel bag and removed four thick leather-bound journals.

“I’ve been saving these and now seems a good time for us to use them,” Don said as he handed one to each of his brothers. “Leo and I talked and we thought it would be a good idea for all of us to keep a written record of the hunts we’ve been on to capture these creatures.”

“A more detailed account of what it takes to catch them than we’re finding in the journal library,” Leo said.

“Keeping a diary ain’t really my thing,” Raph said. “But somebody has to write down the truth or Mikey will claim to be the hero on every one of our hunts.”

“You always did have trouble accepting the truth,” Mikey teased.

They walked out of the war room and found Mr. Hidesato standing near the desk, waiting for them.

End Jubokko

Chapter End Notes

A sweet moment between Raph and Leo captured by the very gifted Nei-Ning.
This comic was created by the amazing Sherenelle from a scene in this chapter.
That's not a spot I'd choose to make out. That tree is creepy looking...

You aren't a horny teenager.
Night of the Hari onago

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
Word Count: 8,851
Rated: R 2k3 violence/gore, language

Chapter Notes

~~This enticing preview image was commissioned from the very talented AlessandraDC
Leonardo had taken a step closer to Raphael without realizing it, perhaps subconsciously expecting a violent outburst from his brother. Raph was certainly not Mr. Hidesato’s biggest fan.
Instead, his voice heavy with disdain, Raph said, “Nice of ya’ to join us.”

“Were you out capturing one of the escaped creatures?” Mr. Hidesato asked.

“Nah, we just got back from a neighborhood block party. We’re real popular with the ladies,” Raph replied.

“Leonardo?” Mr. Hidesato asked, looking at the elder turtle.

“We defeated and captured a Jubokko,” Leo answered.

“No thanks to you,” Raph said.

“I still have a company to run,” Mr. Hidesato said, “and business interests to which I must attend.”

“I guess that’s more important than making sure we know what the hell it is we’re going up against,” Raph said. “So maybe one of us dies. No big deal, right? I mean, there’s still three to carry on for ya’.”

“You have the journals,” Mr. Hidesato said, ignoring Raph’s sarcasm.

Raph snorted derisively. “Fat lot of good those do us. There’s more information left out of them than is in them. That’s supposed to be where ya’ come in. This is supposed to be the priority. Ya’ sure as hell keep telling us that capturing creatures is all that matters.”

“You assured us you would be available to assist us,” Leo said.

Don said, “I can quote you if you need a reminder. You said, ‘Unfortunately, you do not have the time to acquire all of the necessary knowledge. Since I have studied these creatures from the time I was a small child, I will tell you what must be done.’”

“Kinda hard to tell us what must be done if ya’ ain’t here,” Raph said, glaring at the man.

“When you said we’d have to learn on the job, we didn’t think that meant we’d be learning on our own,” Mikey said.

“Do you know what the journal said about the Jubokko?” Leo asked. “It warned us to beware of the tree’s branches and that the trap coin had to go into the opening in its trunk. Nowhere in the journal did it mention that the tree’s roots were also a danger.”

“We got to learn the hard way, just like with the Teke Teke,” Raph said. “Learning the hard way is what gets ya’ killed.”

Mr. Hidesato looked around at them, noting that they were a united front. “Even if one could not see you, it would not be difficult to tell that you are brothers. Please, trust me when I tell you that my absence was not only unavoidable, but that it was crucial.”

“See, that ‘trust me’ line, that’s what people say when they can’t be trusted,” Raph said. “Ya’ ain’t given us one good reason to trust ya’ yet.”

“You run an antiques business,” Mikey said. “What was so crucial that somebody else couldn’t handle it? Did someone break a priceless vase?”

Perhaps it was the turtles’ growing suspicions, the guarded look that Mr. Hidesato sometimes wore, or the instances where information had been withheld, but Leo was suddenly impatient with
the subterfuge.

“If you will recall, I told you before that I would not risk the lives of my family or friends without assurances that you’d fully uphold your responsibilities to us,” Leo said. “You aren’t telling us something and we want to know now what that is. If you don’t satisfy us, we’re leaving.”

Compressing his lips, Mr. Hidesato appeared to weigh his options. Finally he turned, walked over to one of the easy chairs, and sat down.

Waving towards the other seats, he said, “Please, be comfortable. I do not know what it will take to satisfy you, but it is possible our conversation could last a while.”

Mikey sat in the chair opposite him while Leo and Don took seats on the couch. Raph chose not to sit down, instead standing behind Mikey’s chair, his arms crossed.

Mr. Hidesato glanced at him but said nothing, no doubt realizing that Raph would not relax until he received answers that would fully satisfy him.

“You may remember my telling you that there are warder clans all over the world,” Mr. Hidesato said, “and that they have their own coffers filled with captured creatures to safeguard.”

He paused, obviously wanting an acknowledgement of his statement. Leo said, “We remember your telling us of other warder clans and about how the warder legacy passes from one generation to the next.”

“There is more,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The eldest warder in each clan automatically becomes a member of the Warder High Council. Once each year the representatives attend a summit meeting to discuss any events of note which may have occurred during the previous twelve months.”

He stopped because Leo, who was not prone to gawking, was doing so. “How could you suggest we accept this lifelong responsibility knowing full well we could not become High Council members?”

“It was a detail I was sure we could resolve,” Mr. Hidesato said, sweeping it away with a wave of his hand. “The High Council membership is secondary at the moment. What is key here now is that I was called away on Council business. An emergency video conference meeting of a Council quorum which I was required to attend.”

“What was the emergency?” Don asked.

“This situation,” Mr. Hidesato said. “They have learned that the creatures under my clans’ guardianship have escaped. I had hoped to recapture the majority of them before the other warder clans became aware of this catastrophe. If we could have quickly returned the creatures to the coffer, then I could have mitigated the severity of the repercussions.”

“What kind of repercussions?” Mikey asked. “What does that even mean?”

“There’s probably close to a hundred coins in that box,” Raph said. “How could ya’ possibly think we’d be able to capture them that fast?”

“I must admit that I was more concerned with protecting the honor of my clan than with the feasibility of clearing up this disaster quickly,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Perhaps if I had notified the Council immediately, I could have sidestepped the call from some of the members that more drastic measures be taken.”
“Drastic measures?” Leo asked. “What kind of drastic measures?”

Mr. Hidesato made a steeple with his fingers and pressed them to his chin. “The other clans wanted to send their own warders to New York to deal with this situation. Dozens of warders, all converging on the city at one time.”

Now all four turtles gaped at him. It was Raphael who found his voice first. “What the hell? There are warders who could have come here and cleaned up this mess? Ya’ didn’t even need us!”

“Yes I did,” Mr. Hidesato rushed to say. “You do not understand.”

“I certainly don’t,” Don said. “Why would you choose four untrained ninja to recapture these creatures when there are apparently so many trained and experienced warders willing to travel here to take care of this?”

“You said ‘wanted to send’ warders,” Leo said, frowning.

“Yeah,” Mikey said. “Don’t they still want to? We could sure use the help since they know what to do.”

“No,” Mr. Hidesato snapped, straightening in his seat. “I assured the Council that we have the escape under control.”

“We don’t!” Raph exclaimed.

“People are dying,” Leo said quickly, cutting off any further outburst of temper from his brother. “We are more than willing to take a backseat and offer assistance to other warders.”

“If these warders come here to take over the hunt, even more people will die,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Every clan follows its own code when it comes to hunting creatures. The Council does not dictate our rules of engagement, they merely monitor whether the job is getting done.”

“I thought that warders captured yokai in order to protect people,” Don said. “How would more die if other clans came here to do that job?”

“My clan has always made an effort to hold the lives of innocent people in high regard whenever we can,” Mr. Hidesato said. “For many other clans, the first priority is capturing creatures. They will do whatever it takes to achieve this goal, including placing unsuspecting people in harm’s way and destroying property in order to drive a yokai out of hiding. Some have been known to dynamite entire buildings, while others have flooded cities to drain a river where a yokai lurks. You do not want these people here.”

“Some of these other clans, are they from Japan as well?” Leo asked.

“Yes,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “My family has worked with them in the past.”

“Are there that many creatures?” Mikey asked. “Wasn’t your family in charge of them?”

“There are a great many more yokai than just the ones my clan captured,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The number of coins a coffer can hold is limited. Yokai are strong and the bonds created by magic are finite.”

“How many more?” Mikey asked.

“Hundreds,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Some have multiples. Many are created by the yokai
themselves, while others come into being because of a strong belief in them.”

“Remember what I said about Tulpa? A strong belief by large amounts of people that a creature exists could cause that creature to manifest,” Don said. “Magic would play a part in that creation.”

“That is the problem that the Council is concerned about,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The longer that yokai roam free and people see or experience them, the more people believe in them. This starts a sequence where captured yokai can be regenerated. When this happens, the newly created yokai have to be caught.”

Now it was Don’s turn to frown. “It could turn an already bad situation into an unbreakable cycle. How was it overcome in the past?”

“Because this phenomenon is so much like a virus, the solution employed is very like administering a vaccine,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Inhabitants of villages and towns where the yokai were prevalent were told that the creatures had been captured. They were made aware of the existence of warders. Once they believed in us and our ability to contain these creatures, the yokai disappeared.”

“We certainly can’t do that here,” Don said. “The likelihood that a large number of people would be knowledgeable enough to connect strange occurrences to yokai is extremely small. This is a city of nearly nine million people. If we started to tell a few of them about creatures, the word would spread. We’d have an epidemic.”

“Not to mention the fact we couldn’t tell them about us,” Mikey said.

“That is why we must trap and store these yokai as quickly as possible,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“So what, ya’ fill your coffer and that’s it?” Raph asked. “Ya’ retire?”

“Some clans are large enough to maintain more than one coffer,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Ours was not, though we were the best of them. Most coffers are filled with only a few types of yokai. The Hidesato clan coffer is the only one containing no duplicate creatures.”

“Lucky us,” Mikey said.

“I had to assure the heads of the other clans that they do not need to come to New York,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I told them that I had highly trained warders out collecting the creatures. It was the only way to hold them back.”

“Ya’ got highly trained ninjas out collecting creatures,” Raph said, correcting him. “You’re the only highly trained warder around here and ya’ can’t be bothered to come out with us.”

“My role now is more one of diplomacy and representation,” Mr. Hidesato said. “My age . . .”

“Sounds like a damn excuse,” Raph broke in. “Our Father is old and he kicks butt. Even if ya’ just came out and told us what the hell to look for it’d keep us from getting killed. But no, you’d rather sit up in this nice comfy house, looking down your nose at us and . . . .”

Raph’s rant was interrupted by the ringing of his shell cell. A glance showed him that it was Casey who was calling.

“What’s up Case?” Raph answered with a touch more impatience than normal.
Casey’s voice sounded shaky and Raph switched the call to speaker mode. “I was out busting up some Purple Dragon activity when I came across some . . . remains. Raph man, this is some freaking shit! What’s left of a . . . a person looks like it was torn to shreds. There’s an arm laying ten feet away from a pile of insides. It’s gotta be one of those creatures.”

“Get away from there,” Raph said. “Ya’ hear me, Casey? Get the hell outta there!”

“Maybe I can find out what did this,” Casey said.

“Ya’ ain’t equipped to fight one of those things,” Raph said. “We don’t know what it is so we ain’t either, but if ya’ don’t move your ass, I’m coming down there to move it for ya’.”

“I’m in the Bronx,” Casey said. “It’ll take ya’ too long, even at this time of morning.”

From the corner of his eye Raph saw that Mr. Hidesato was signaling frantically. When he looked over at the man, Mr. Hidesato said, “Tell Mr. Jones to bring the arm here.”

“What the hell for?” Raph asked, only half hearing Casey’s arguments as to why he should remain where he was.

“Just tell him,” Leo said.

“Casey,” Raph said, ignoring his friend’s babbling. “Casey! Mr. H says grab the arm and get your ass over here.”

“Ya’ want me to pick the damn thing up?” Casey asked, his voice rising an octave. “It’s a fucking mess!”

“Wrap it in something and transport it,” Raph said, irritation in his tone. “Ain’t like this is the first gory mess ya’ ever saw.”

“First one anybody ever asked me to touch,” Casey said, hanging up on Raph without another word.

“He sounds thrilled,” Don said.

“I guess this means we’re not sleeping yet. How about I make us a snack?” Mikey asked. Without waiting for a response, he added, “Pizza in forty minutes.”

Mr. Hidesato stood up. “Please pardon me. I will return when Mr. Jones arrives.”

He bowed to them and left the room. The turtles heard him climbing the stairs and by an unspoken agreement, they all went to the kitchen together.

As Mikey began to take out the ingredients he needed in order to make a pizza, two of his brothers took seats at the kitchen table while Raph paced.

“You should sit down for a few minutes,” Don told him in a mild tone. “It’s going to take Casey a while to get here.”

“I’m too pissed to sit down,” Raph retorted. Spinning, he aimed a hard glare in Mikey’s direction. “Don’t ya’ try to defend Mr. H again either.”

While Raph’s back was turned, Leo shook his head at Mikey, silently warning him that it would be best not to respond to his brother. Mikey shrugged and returned to rolling out his pizza dough.
“Mr. Hidesato is at an advanced age, Raph. No matter what their physical training, a human in their late sixties cannot be expected to move quickly,” Don said. “You can’t really expect him to go with us on a hunt.”

“What I expect is that he stop hiding shit from us,” Raph said. “We forced his hand just now and he had to tell us about the Council. From the start he made it sound like we were his only option for catching those creatures. He used us ‘cause he knew we’d be obligated to Casey.”

“A flight from Japan takes around fourteen hours,” Don said. “He asked for our help because we’re already here.”

“The knowledge of our existence along with the realization that his clan was at its end no doubt influenced his decision not to call for backup from other warder clans,” Leo said. “He might have been telling the truth about wanting to avoid the unnecessary mayhem other warders could bring to the city,” Don said. “He might also be concerned about saving face and his clans’ reputation.”

“So what else ain’t he telling us?” Raph asked in a belligerent manner. “What other secrets is he hiding that are gonna bite us in the ass? If he didn’t tell us this one until we backed him into a corner, then what’s it gonna take to drag the rest out of him?”

“We’ll find out,” Leo said, trying to calm his brother. “So far we’re doing all right on our own.”

“He should have said he had people out there who were trained to catch these things!” Raph yelled. “He should have been right up front about that!”

“Maybe it’s a matter of trust for him too,” Mikey said, despite Leo’s warning. “It had to be a shock to him to have four mutated turtles walk into his house. No matter how good April told him we were, we’re not anything he’s ever dealt with before.”

“And those escaped creatures aren’t something we’ve ever dealt with before either,” Raph said, grabbing a chair and plopping down onto it. “Mr. H ain’t much help, the journals ain’t much help, so maybe we can talk to some of those other warders and get their advice.”

“If we did that, we’d be telling them we don’t know what we’re doing and that Mr. Hidesato is unable to help us,” Leo said. “All we’d accomplish is to give them an excuse to come to New York.”

“Suppose other warders had gone out after the Jubokko,” Don said. “If what Mr. H says is true, those warders would have let that young couple distract the tree so they could sneak in to capture the yokai.”

“Mr. H might seem like he’s got a one track mind, but he’s never outright suggested we use people as bait,” Mikey said. “Well, except for Casey, but that’s only ‘cause Casey keeps insisting he wants to help.”

“Dammit,” Raph said, crossing his arms and leaning back forcefully in his chair. The chair back creaked in protest. “I hate this complicated crap. What happened to the good old days of smacking some bad guys around?”

Mikey slid two pizzas into the oven and turned back to his brothers. “Oh, you mean like the Shredder, the Foot Clan, Hun, or our best bud Bishop? Yeah, that was always so much fun.”
“Beats the hell out of this magic stuff,” Raph said. “You’d think we’d had enough of that with the Tengu Shredder.”

“Possibly part of our destiny is to defeat demons and evil magic,” Leo said. “I’ve contemplated upon that many times. That and how we came to exist at all. Everything about what we’ve encountered in our lives seems intertwined with our origin. Maybe this is too.”

Raph rolled his eyes but seemed to relax. “I’ll leave all that deep thinking to ya’ and Donny,” he said. “Why ya’ want to find answers to things that don’t really matter is beyond me.”

That began a conversation that continued along those lines until the doorbell rang.

“I’ll wait for the pizza to be ready,” Mikey said quickly as his brothers got up. “I don’t need to see a severed arm.”

“I hope we’ll still be hungry for pizza after we see it,” Don said as he left the kitchen.

When they opened the front door to Casey he stepped inside, gingerly holding a newspaper wrapped object out in front of him.

“Where am I taking this nasty thing?” Casey asked.

“Come with me, Mr. Jones,” Mr. Hidesato said. He was standing near the foot of the upper staircase, having appeared without anyone’s notice.

Leo was relieved when Mr. Hidesato led the way downstairs. For just a moment he worried that the man was going to use the kitchen table to examine the remains. It was bad enough they’d already performed first aid on the same surface where they ate.

The lights were on in the dojo and in Don’s work space, which was where Mr. Hidesato took them. A plastic sheet had been laid across the center table and a floor lamp pulled up next to it to provide additional illumination.

There was a tray of medical instruments sitting on a corner of the table. None of the turtles had heard or seen Mr. Hidesato setting it all up. Since he hadn’t come into the kitchen to access the hidden medical closet, Leo had to wonder where these particular instruments had come from.

Mr. Hidesato indicated that Casey should place his find on the table and the man did so with alacrity. He appeared relieved to have divested himself of his burden and took a step back. In the strong light, Casey’s face had a distinct greenish tinge.

Leo wasn’t sure what he expected to see, but as Mr. Hidesato peeled back the newspaper, the young turtle couldn’t help but gasp. The arm was barely that; scraps of what appeared to be suede still clung to areas, but most of the skin had been shredded, leaving strips of muscle still holding the bones together in spots.

Using a scalpel, Mr. Hidesato carefully cut away the largest piece of suede and examined it under the light.

“See here Leonardo,” Mr. Hidesato said, gesturing for Leo to stand next to him. “The suede has very distinctive marks upon it, as does the skin that lay beneath the suede. What do they look like to you?”

Despite the gruesome appearance of the arm, Leo studied both the skin and the piece of suede as Mr. Hidesato indicated he should. Don moved in close, giving the objects the same intense
“It looks as though something hooked the skin,” Leo said slowly, unsure as to what he was seeing.

“Something sharp,” Don said with more confidence than his brother. “Almost like the end of a fish hook. You can just see the mark of the barb on the underside of the suede.”

“Some of that skin looks chewed,” Raph said. “The rest of it looks sliced.”

“There wasn’t much left of the guy,” Casey said. “The only reason I even know it was a guy was ‘cause there was hair on some of the remaining parts where women don’t grow hair.”

“Most of him was eaten,” Mr. Hidesato said. “This was undoubtedly the work of a Hari onago.”

“Hey, if you guys are through looking at gross stuff, the pizzas are ready,” Mikey called out from the doorway. “I can mix up some sodium bicarbonate for anybody who can’t eat.”

He left without waiting for his brothers. Leo knew his quick exit was to avoid inadvertently seeing the arm and couldn’t really blame him. They were all somewhat inured to grotesque sights, but that didn’t mean they invited the chance to see them.

At the top of the stairs Mr. Hidesato said, “I will be in the office when you have finished your repast.”

With a short bow he left them. The turtles and Casey proceeded on to the kitchen where they found the pizza already sliced and waiting for them on the kitchen island.

Casey took a bottle of ginger ale from the refrigerator and bypassed the food. The brothers loaded their plates and sat down at the table to eat.

“What do ya’ think this Hari whatever is?” Raph asked as he bit into his pizza.

Mikey lifted a palm. “Uh uh. New rule, we don’t talk creatures while we’re eating. I put effort into these pies and I want you guys to remember the food, not the gross stuff we’re now doing for a living.”

Don filled his glass from the jug of water which sat in the center of the table. Holding up the glass, he said, “Here’s to a job well done.”

His brothers followed suit and Casey came over to clink his bottle against their glasses. They all drank and Casey slid into a seat.

“How did ya’ get out of the apartment?” Raph asked. “And why were ya’ out chasing Purple Dragons?”

“Angel swung by the shop and told us the Dragons were planning to pull a heist at an auto parts warehouse in the Bronx,” Casey said. “I been restless and April agreed it’d be a good idea for me to go discourage that piece of crap gang from robbing anybody.”

“Did ya’? Discourage them I mean,” Raph said.

Casey grinned. “I discouraged the hell out of them.”

After ten minutes of light hearted banter Casey managed to down a couple of slices of pizza.
They finished up and Don loaded the dishwasher before the group headed in to the office to meet with Mr. Hidesato.

He was seated at the desk when they arrived, scrolling through a tablet. Setting it down, Mr. Hidesato said, “Business inventory. I have not had a chance to review the list of newly acquired items.”

“You have someone taking care of day to day operations for your import export company?” Don asked, sitting down in a chair opposite him.

“There is a business manager who oversees the various operations as well as a financial officer who takes care of the finance side of the business,” Mr. Hidesato said. “They have been with the company for all of their adult lives.”

“Are they aware of any other part of the family business?” Leo asked.

“No, though I believe they do suspect we have a crime fighting sideline,” Mr. Hidesato said. “They have alluded to as much in conversations, but they do not ask and we do not tell.”

“How about ya’ do tell us about the creature that tore that guy apart,” Raph said.

Mikey pulled up a chair and sat down, but the others remained standing. Mr. Hidesato tapped the screen on his tablet and then tapped it again before turning it around for the group to see. On it was an image of a beautiful Japanese woman in a kimono, her thick black hair flowing all of the way down her back.

The picture was old and faded. “This image was created by an artist in seventeen seventy-nine,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The story is that the brother of one of the artist’s friends was killed by this woman. They did not know what she was, but the rumors about the killing spread to our clan and we hunted and captured her before she could do more harm.”

“This is a Hari onago?” Don asked. “How does she kill?”

“Her hair is a deadly weapon,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “The tips of each of her hairs is fitted with a needle-like, barbed hook. She walks the streets searching for young, single men walking by themselves. When she comes across one, she offers him a coquettish smile. If the smile is returned, she attacks by letting all of her hair down and the barbed ends then lash out with incredible speed, sinking deep into her victim’s flesh.”

“That explains the fish hook appearance on our victim’s skin,” Don said.

“She is immensely strong,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Once her victim is ensnared and helpless, she rips him into pieces with her hooks and devours the remains.”

“Anybody ever get away from her?” Casey asked.

“If one is a very fast runner and can get into a building with a sturdy door,” Mr. Hidesato said. “If the man can get safely indoors before her hooks catch him, he only has to survive until sunrise, when the yokai vanishes.”

“She’s fast and she’s strong,” Raph said. “How the hell do we catch her?”

“The trap coin must be shoved onto one of her barbs,” Mr. Hidesato said. “To do this, one must grab a section of her hair.”
“That means getting close enough to get tangled up in her hair,” Don said.

“Without getting ripped to shreds,” Mikey added.

“Once the trap coin is in place, her hair will lose its mobility,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It requires speed and agility to catch this yokai. Then there is the matter of luring her out in the first place.”

“I’m guessing she won’t find turtles attractive,” Leo said.

“Nor old men,” Mr. Hidesato said with a quick glance in Raph’s direction.

“That leaves me,” Casey said.

“Ya’ ain’t all that fast,” Raph said, giving him hard stare.

“Maybe not, but I’m fast enough,” Casey said. “I figure all I gotta do is make it to my motorcycle. I can start that baby up in under a second and get her to sixty before any of that bitch’s hair touches me.”

“If we jump out of hiding before she can pursue Casey, then we can surround and cut her off from him,” Leo said.

“It wouldn’t hurt to give him a little extra protection,” Don said, appearing lost in thought.

When he didn’t continue, Raph prodded him. “What are ya’ thinking, Brainiac?”

“Bullet proof vest,” Don said. “Well, not bullet proof, but something he could wear over his clothes that would be harder for a barb to penetrate. Casey, do you have a leather jacket?”

“Yeah, April bought me one a couple years ago,” Casey said. “It’s thick as hell.”

“That’s perfect,” Don said. “You’ll need leather pants too and not the kind they wear on TV shows.”

“More like chaps the cowboys wear,” Casey said, understanding what Don was going for.

“Like that,” Don said. “I could make them if you could get me some leather. April might have some in her shop. Wear a thick shirt under the jacket and blue jeans under the pants. And boots if you’ve got them.”

“I’ve got boots,” Casey said.

“What about his head?” Raph asked. “I know it’s thick, but she could sink a barb into his face.”

“Hey!” Casey protested.

“He could carry his helmet,” Mikey said. “As soon as Hari decides his face looks good enough to eat, Casey could slap the helmet on his head.”

“I’ll run home, let April know what’s going on, and grab whatever leather stuff I can find in her shop,” Casey said.

“Come back as quickly as you can,” Don told him. “I’ll need time to fashion some pants for you.”
“There is a spare bedroom on the second floor, Mr. Jones, if you want to get some sleep,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It has its own bath.”

“I’ll take ya’ up on that,” Casey said. “Be back shortly.”

Raph went to the front to let Casey out and then locked the door behind him. He returned to the office in time to hear Don ask, “What are we going to do with the arm?”

“There is a furnace in the room next to your work space in the basement,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is separate from the one used to heat the house and burns much hotter. The smell of anything burned inside is ventilated in such a way that it is not noticeable.”

“That means you’ve had occasion to burn things such as this before,” Leo said.

“Unfortunately,” Mr. Hidesato said. “We have tampered with it and left traces of ourselves on the remains, so they cannot be returned to the site of this poor man’s demise.”

“His family isn’t going to get any closure,” Mikey said.

“Too often with yokai that is the case,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I have often wished to be able to offer the family some comfort, but the cause of most yokai deaths do not allow for that.”

“Kinda sucks,” Mikey said.

Mr. Hidesato pushed back from the desk and stood up. “I will burn the arm and then retire. Good-night warders.”

Taking his tablet with him, Mr. Hidesato left the room and went downstairs. After he was gone the brothers looked around at each other.

“There’s no point in my lying down,” Don said. “I’ve got work to do as soon as Casey gets back here.”

“I’m gonna hit the showers,” Raph said. “Anybody want to go with?”

“I’ll join you,” Mikey said, getting up from his chair. “What about you, Leo?”

“I’ll wait here with Donny,” Leo said. “I want to check the journals and see if I can find the entry for the Hari onago.”

“Both of ya’ are gonna need sleep sometime,” Raph said. “How about I come down and help ya’ with that leather suit when I’m done in the shower, Don?”

“I accept,” Don said. “I’d like a couple of hours of shuteye after I finish the thing.”

“Then I’ll collect Leo for a nap too,” Mikey said. Addressing his older brother, he added, “You aren’t going to spend hours with those musty journals.”

“Speaking of journals,” Don said, “why don’t you guys take the blank ones I brought upstairs? We need to work on them sometime. Be as detailed as possible. If we’ve learned anything from our hunts it’s that future warders need as much information as we can give them. We also know we can’t depend on the creatures to stay caught.”

“Okay,” Mikey said, snatching the journals up from the corner of the desk where they’d left them earlier. Then he and Raph went upstairs.
Don collected his duffel bag from the couch and went around to sit at the desk. Taking a blank pad of paper from his duffel and a pen from the desk set, he began to sketch a design for the leather pants he was going to make.

While he did that, Leo took some journals from the bookshelves and got comfortable on the couch. The journals they had pulled out while researching the Jubokko were still scattered across the coffee table, which surprised Leo. Mr. Hidesato had time to put them away and hadn’t done so, perhaps having grown tired of tidying up behind the turtles.

Leo was searching through his second journal when the doorbell rang. When he started to rise, Don waved at him to stay seated and went to let Casey in. They both returned to the office long enough for Don to collect his sketch and duffel bag. Casey was carrying a bag with the logo for April’s shop emblazoned on its sides.

Sometime after Raph went down to join Don in the basement, Mikey strolled into the office, fully intending to drag Leo up to bed. He found his brother sound asleep on the couch with a journal face down on his plastron.

Sliding the journal out from under Leo’s fingers, Mikey set it on the coffee table and then used one of the blankets on the back of the couch to cover his brother. He took a second one with him over to an easy chair, pulling the matching ottoman close and then getting comfortable with his feet up. Mikey was asleep in minutes.

The house settled into silence. Leo slept dreamlessly for a time and when a dream did come, it was different than the others he’d had.

In his dream, Leo and his brothers surrounded a comely young woman. For a moment nothing happened, and then the wind kicked up, disarranging her long, dark locks.

As soon as her hair lifted, the attractive face became contorted with rage. Leo felt something sharp flick the skin on his cheek and it stung.

Before he could react, a light from somewhere nearby began to grow brighter. Within seconds that light swelled to such brilliance that Leo had to squint against it.

“Leo, dude, wake up,” Mikey urged, shaking his brother’s shoulder.

Leo’s eyes snapped open and settled on Mikey’s concerned face. Clearing his throat, Leo sat up and Mikey perched on the coffee table in front of him.

“What’s wrong?” Leo asked.

“You were making some weird sounds and holding your hands up in front of your face,” Mikey said. “Was something attacking you in your dream?”

“It was the Hari onago,” Leo said, touching his cheek as the memory of the wound she’d inflicted came back to him. “I wasn’t trying to fend her off though, I was trying to protect my eyes from a very bright light that came out of nowhere.”

“Did you find her in a journal before you fell asleep?” Mikey asked. “Maybe it says something about a light.”

“I found a reference to her and it was pretty much everything Mr. Hidesato told us,” Leo said. “Nothing about a light.”
“Then we gotta ask him,” Mikey said. “Maybe he forgot about it.”

“What time is it?” Leo asked.

Mikey rose and went around to look at the small clock on the desk. “Just past two-thirty,” he said. “I could go for a sandwich. How about you?”

Getting up to stretch, Leo said, “I could. Do you have any idea where Raph and Don are?”

“Nope. I fell asleep in that chair,” Mikey said. “Let’s go find out.”

Mikey went downstairs and Leo upstairs. Leo found his brothers asleep in one of the bedrooms and backed out quietly.

Meeting Mikey again on the ground floor, Leo said, “They’re sound asleep.”

“Probably ate before they went up,” Mikey said as he and Leo proceeded into the kitchen.

They discovered Mr. Hidesato seated at the table, sipping coffee and reading the newspaper.

“Did you sleep well?” Mr. Hidesato asked them.

“Leo had another dream,” Mikey said as he pulled out a loaf of bread.

Lowering his paper, Mr. Hidesato asked, “Was it about the Hari onago?”

While they made sandwiches, Leo told the man about his dream. Taking seats at the table, Mikey asked, “So that light. Was that something the creature makes?”

Mr. Hidesato frowned as he shook his head. “No. It is nothing with which I am familiar. Perhaps it was an automobile headlight?”

Mikey stopped his sandwich halfway to his mouth, his eyes wide. “You don’t think it could have been Bishop, do you? I keep expecting him to pop up.”

“He probably will if reports of strange sightings reach him,” Leo said. “It’s something to be considered.”

“Who is Bishop?” Mr. Hidesato asked.

Leo explained, telling him of Agent John Bishop and the Earth Protection Force. “He’s helped us in the past, but most of our encounters involve him trying to dissect us. He’ll investigate any yokai sighting he’s made aware of to find out if it’s of alien origin.”

“It won’t matter if it isn’t ‘cause he’ll still get in our way,” Mikey said. “We’ve gotta try to keep a low profile on what we’re doing and on any news getting out about creatures.”

“Another good reason not to have other warders come here,” Mr. Hidesato said. “They will not be nearly as circumspect as we are.”

The brothers finished their sandwiches and then went to the dojo for a workout. It wasn’t long before Raph and Don found them.

After their workout, Leo took a quick shower in the basement bathroom and then joined his brothers in the media room. Mr. Hidesato had told them he was preparing dinner so that they could relax.
When it was time to eat, Raph ran upstairs and pounded on Casey’s door, rousing his friend. At the dinner table, Leo told them of his dream and their concerns about Bishop.

“That’s just what we need, Bishop horning in on this,” Raph said.

“We can’t worry about him,” Leo said. “We’ll carry on with our plan and hope he isn’t around. If we do see him at some point, we’ll probably have to tell him something of what’s happening, just to keep him out of our way.”

“What makes you think he’ll listen?” Don asked.

“We proved that we were right about the Tengu Shredder,” Leo said. “That should have bought us some consideration from the man.”

“If he becomes a nuisance, I can bring some pressure to bear on the man,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I am not without influential friends. If necessary, the full weight of the Council can be utilized as well.”

“Did ya’ finish those pants, Donny?” Casey asked.

“They’re ready for a fitting,” Don said.

“Let’s review logistics while we finish up here,” Leo said. “Then we can get Casey suited up.”

“I brought April’s van,” Casey said. “My motorcycle’s inside.”

They discussed the plan for capturing the Hari onago and then Don helped Casey into his protective gear. Don had taken apart several leather jackets in order to create the pants, making certain they were large enough to fit over Casey’s jeans and not restrict his movements.

While Casey pulled the van around to the alley behind the gardens, the turtles collected the proper trap coin and the wax tool. It was after nine and dark out as the Turtles climbed inside the van for the ride to the Bronx.

Casey drove slowly past the alley where he’d found the remains of the Hari onago’s victim. There was white chalk outlines around where the various human parts had lain, indicating the police had processed the scene. After driving around a couple of times, the group determined that there was currently no police presence in the area.

“They probably think it was a gang related killing,” Don said.

“Let’s make sure it’s the only one,” Leo said, his expression grim.

“How are we gonna know where Casey should park his bike?” Raph asked.

“As long as we’re in the general area of her first kill, I’m fairly certain she’ll come to him,” Leo said. “What we need is a spot that will provide us with good cover.”

“The city blocks here are about six hundred feet long,” Don said. “Casey can probably run that in under a minute.”

“If he’s motivated,” Raph said.

“Ya’ can bet your ass I will be,” Casey said.
“We should cut that time down,” Leo said. “We have to allow for the time it takes you to mount your bike and start it.”

“Then he should be no more than four hundred to four hundred and fifty feet from where he parks the bike at all times,” Don said.

“Make sure ya’ back it into the parking spot,” Raph said. “That way ya’ can turn away from whichever direction the creature shows up.”

“Geez, ya’ think I’m an idiot?” Casey asked.

“I’ll get back to ya’ on that,” Raph said with a grin.

“Jerk,” Casey said.

“Wack bag,” Raph tossed back at him.

“Over there,” Leo said, tapping Casey on the shoulder and pointing to a section of the block where a small liquor store sat.

“Gotcha, let me find a parking place,” Casey said.

Once he’d parked the van, Casey and Raph took the motorcycle out of the back and walked it to within three hundred feet of the liquor store. Leaving it backed onto the sidewalk facing outwards, they joined the other three turtles who were waiting in front of the store.

“Walk a hundred feet in that direction,” Leo said, pointing away from where the motorcycle was parked, “then come back past us towards the bike. Stay at least fifty feet from it and turn around to come back. If you’re too close to the bike when she approaches, you won’t get a big enough jump on her.”

“So I just walk up and down the sidewalk?” Casey asked.

“Just walk,” Leo said. “Try not to look as though you’re waiting on anything. We’ll post atop the store awning, in the tree, behind the garbage bins, and on the window balcony one floor up.”

“Don’t look in our direction when ya’ go by either,” Raph said.

Casey lifted the collar on his jacket and turned to look at his motorcycle. “Okay, I guess I’ll start walking.”

When he glanced back, the turtles had vanished to their hiding places. Exhaling heavily, Casey began strolling the sidewalk, swinging his helmet and behaving as though he hadn’t a care in the world.

Hiding amongst the tree branches, Leo scanned the street. It was quiet; a block containing mostly small stores with some apartments above them. Since it was nearly ten-thirty at night, most of the apartments were dark.

Leo kept track of the time as it passed. They were two blocks from where the yokai’s first attack had been and it had happened sometime after midnight. The waiting did not bother him, but concern over police patrols did. If a patrol unit caught sight of Casey, they would stop and question him. He’d more than likely be told to move along and that would ruin their chances of catching the creature.
Luck seemed to be with them. For more than two hours Casey paced the same length of sidewalk, seemingly undaunted by the monotony. Only three cars passed on the street during that time and none of them were police units.

Already watchful, Leo grew even more so as the hour crawled past midnight. His brothers were well hidden and he couldn’t see them, but he knew that they were quite aware of the time.

Donatello, on the balcony, had the most unobstructed view of the street. Casey was approaching their positions when Don imitated the call of a Northern Mockingbird to draw his brothers’ attention.

Through the branches of the tree, Leo saw a young woman in a loosely fitting kimono walking down the sidewalk towards Casey. Their friend stopped under the awning where Raph was hidden and awaited her approach.

Without pausing in her steps, the Hari onago smiled demurely at Casey. Leo tensed, getting ready to spring from hiding.

For a moment Casey seemed to have forgotten what he was supposed to do. Holding his breath, Leo waited, hoping that Casey wouldn’t allow her to get too close. Then Casey shook his head as though waking himself, and smiled.

As soon as Casey returned her smile, he yanked the helmet onto his head, turned on his heel, and started running.

The Hari onago was incredibly fast. In the time it took Casey to don his helmet she had let her hair down. If he hadn’t been simultaneously moving, the first lash of her hair would have entangled him fully.

As it was, several barbed tips slid off his helmet and a dozen more ripped into the top layer of his leather jacket and pants.

Running as if the very devil was after him, Casey sped toward his bike without looking back. Before the Hari onago could move to give chase, the turtles leaped out of hiding and surrounded her.

The sound of Casey’s motorcycle starting up told the turtles he’d reached safety. They didn’t need to worry about his staying out of the yokai’s reach; his tires squealed as he sped away from the scene.

Upon seeing the turtles, the Hari onago hissed, her eyes on the warder symbols burned into Leo’s arm. Turning away from him, she tried to slip past Mikey, pulling up short when she saw that he also bore the symbol.

Finding that she couldn’t escape, the creature decided to fight. With blinding speed her hair snapped out at the turtles, the barbs on each tip deadly sharp.

Leo automatically turned his carapace to her, feeling the snap of her hair as it bounced off the hard surface. He spun back to try to grab hold of one of her locks, but her hair recoiled from his grasping hands.

“Keep your shell to her!” Leo yelled.

A barb swept past his guard but couldn’t penetrate his plastron. Each length of hair seemed to have a mind of its own and Leo knew it wouldn’t be long before the creature stopped trying for
their center mass and went for areas not protected by shell.

“Shit!” Raph yelped as a barbed tip sliced into his arm.

“Ow! Ow, ow, ow, ow!” Mikey screeched, jumping up and down while hair snapped at his legs.

Don had his bō out, trying to trap a section of hair. In the time it took to blink, the Hari onago hooked one of his hands and caused him to drop his weapon. Leo drew his sword and sliced the tendril of hair as Don worked it out of his skin. When he threw it down, the tendril crawled across the sidewalk and was scooped up by another section of hair.

The Hari onago tried to run through the space left by Leo when he’d moved to rescue Don and the turtle leader had to jump to cut off her escape. In response, several coils of hair lashed his body, scratching the skin along his exposed sides and arms.

“Fuck me!” Raph shouted as a lock of hair looped around his wrist and dug into the back of his hand. With his free hand he tried to catch another tendril that came at him, but it drew back so quickly his hand grasped air.

“She’s too fast!” Mikey called out, sounding desperate.

A tendril snapped towards Leo’s face and he ducked aside, not quickly enough to avoid the stinging cut she inflicted along his cheek.

Just as in his dream, as soon as that happened, a light suddenly appeared in the darkness. It wasn’t coming from the street though, it was coming from Donatello.

Looking over at his brother, Leo saw that the warder symbols on his arm had begun to glow. The brighter they got, the slower the tendrils nearest him became.

“Grab my hand!” Don yelled, reaching for both Leo and Raph.

When Leo’s hand touched Don’s, his own warder symbols started to glow. Stretching toward his youngest brother, Leo tried to catch hold of Mikey’s hand.

Almost as if in desperation, the Hari onago focused on the one warder whose symbols had not come to life. As all of her hair began to move towards Mikey, Don clamped down on the coil that was still caught in the back of Raph’s hand to keep it from escaping.

Though slowed by the warder magic, the Hari onago’s hair swept forward quickly enough so that the first tendril touched his plastron before Mikey could move.

“Get him, Raph!” Leo ordered as he fastened onto Mikey’s hand.

Raph was moving before the words fully left Leo’s mouth. Pouncing at Mikey’s outstretched hand, he seized it and completed the circle.

The symbols on Mikey’s arm began to glow once he made the connection to his brothers. As the intensity of the light increased, the Hari onago’s hair backed away from the warders, moving in
Trapped by the magic of the light, the creature stood frozen, her hair looped around her body. Using two fingers, Don worked the barb of the last tendril loose from Raph’s hand and then maintained his grip on it so that it couldn’t get away.

“Gotta move fast,” Raph said, squinting against the brightness created by the warder symbols. “Who’s got the coin?”

“Mikey does,” Leo said. “Stay still; Mikey will lean towards you. When he releases your hand, slide yours up along his arm to maintain contact while he gets the coin out of his belt.”

Leo leaned in Mikey’s direction when the younger turtle began to move, giving his brother as much slack as he could. When just the tips of his fingers were still touching Don’s, Leo held his position.

Very slowly Mikey reached for his belt, making certain that Raph was touching him at all times. Taking the coin from a hidden pocket, he lifted his hand again and transferred the coin to Raph.

“I’m gonna count three,” Raph said. “On three I’ll stick this coin on the hair Don’s holding.”

“The rest of us won’t let go of each other,” Leo said.

Raph nodded. “Ready? One, two, three!”

Spinning towards Don, Raph’s hand snapped down on the length of hair. It pulled against his grip, the tip twisting around to avoid the coin he was holding.

The glow from the symbols diminished once the circle was broken and the Hari onago showed signs of coming to life. Just as her hair began to slide loose from her body again, Raph jammed the coin onto the barbed tip and leaped away.

Head thrown back, the creature howled as her hair whipped towards the coin and was pulled into it. There was a grinding sound from the heels of her shoes when the Hari onago dug into the sidewalk to try to fight against the coin’s magic.

Her struggles were in vain. Within seconds her body disappeared into the coin.

Dropping Leo’s hand, Don pounced on the coin, sweeping it up and placing it inside the tips of the wax tool. Leo released Mikey’s hand and the glow from their symbols faded completely.

Holding up the sealed coin, Don looked around at his brothers, then at Casey who walked over to join them.

“Guys, what the hell just happened?” Casey asked. “Ya’ glowed. What made ya’ glow like that?”

Speaking for his brothers, Leo said, “We have no idea.”

End Hari onago
There wasn’t much talk during the ride back to HQ. The turtles were all still stunned by the events of the evening and Casey, though he had questions, honored his friends’ mood by staying quiet.
Casey parked April’s van in the alley behind the garden, making sure to securely lock it because his motorcycle was inside. He trailed along with the brothers, entering the house through a door in the laundry room and then into the kitchen.

While Don gathered some first aid supplies from the medical closet, his brothers used washcloths to clean their wounds. The barbed tips of the Hari onago’s hair had done a number on all of them. Mikey’s legs were covered in abrasions, there was a nasty cut on one of Raph’s arms and both he and Don had deep lacerations on their hands.

Each of them had scratches and scrapes along their sides, and Leo sported a sliced cheek.

They helped each other tend to their wounds, none of which required stitching. Don used butterfly bandages to pull together the skin on Leo’s cheek while Raph applied an antibiotic ointment to each of Mikey’s abrasions, bandaging the larger cuts.

While the turtles attended to their injuries, Casey removed the outer layer of his protective leather clothing. The leather pants were badly ripped all down the backside, but the barbs hadn’t penetrated through to his jeans. Unfortunately, his leather jacket had also been torn open by the yokai.

“Damn,” Casey muttered, holding his jacket up to the light. Holes and tears in the material were quite visible. “April’s gonna bust my chops for ruining this jacket.”

“Then ya’ should have found something else to wear,” Raph said without looking at him. “Ya’ knew what we were going up against.”

“Shit, I thought I was gonna move fast enough so she wouldn’t touch me,” Casey griped. “I thought ya’ guys were gonna jump her before she got close enough to shred my damn jacket.”

“She wouldn’t have gotten as close as she did if ya’ didn’t hesitate when ya’ saw her smile at ya’,” Raph said, applying the last bandage to Mikey’s legs and standing up. “What’s with the freezing up routine? Ya’ do that every time we see one of these creatures. Ya’ never do that when we’re fighting anyone else.”

“Excuse me for finding supernatural monsters unnerving,” Casey snapped. “So what the hell was with that glowy thing ya’ guys had going on? Never seen ya’ do something like that before.”

The brothers exchanged glances. “We experienced something similar during our training with the Ninja Tribunal and the fight with the Tengu Shredder,” Don said. “We had amulets then and they helped us to focus and amplify our chi.”

Casey looked confused. “I got no idea what ya’ just said.”

“Life energy,” Mr. Hidesato said from the kitchen entrance. None of them had heard his approach. “It requires concentration to focus one’s chi in such a way as to physically manifest it.”

“It requires focus and energy,” Don said. “You express your chi, your own life energy, through sheer force of will. All you have to do, as Mr. Hidesato said, is concentrate.”

“Is that what ya’ did, Donny?” Casey asked. “That glow started with ya’.”

“A glow?” Mr. Hidesato asked. “During your encounter with the Hari onago?”

“Yeah,” Casey answered. “That bitch was too damn fast and her hair was tearing the guys up. Then all of a sudden Don’s arm starts to glow and the hair near him slows to a crawl. Don
yelled for his bros to grab his hands and as soon as they did, they started to glow too. When all four of them were glowing, that monster just froze."

Mr. Hidesato was staring at Donatello by the time Casey finished his recitation. “The glow, did it come from the warder symbols branded on your arm?”

“It started there, yes,” Don said. “I just thought that if magic was used to brand us with the symbols, then maybe there was magic in the symbols themselves. We needed an edge of some kind. At the rate that barbed hair was moving, we weren’t going to be able to keep her contained long enough to shove the trap coin onto a section of hair.”

“Damn, Donny,” Raph said, looking at his brother with admiration. “All I could think to do was to charge her and start stabbing as fast as I could.”

“There have been few warders in our line or any other with the ability to tap into the magic contained in the symbols,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It provides a degree of protection and gives one the ability to control the magic of the trap coin and wax tool, but to wield that magic as a combat tool is almost unheard of.”

“They never met our Donatello,” Raph said. “He’s full of surprises.”

“I’ll bet there’s never been a warder in all history as smart as Donny,” Mikey said, wrapping an arm around Don’s shoulders and tugging him close.

“Aw you guys, cut it out,” Don said, looking embarrassed. “I just did what needed to be done.”

“Once the Council learns that my team of warders includes one who has prophetic dreams and another who can control the magic in the symbols, they will be far less inclined to interfere,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Sure, and once they find out we’re mutants, they’ll be ready to make trap coins to hold us,” Raph said, his manner surly.

“I think it would be best if you told them as little about us as possible,” Leo said. “Our father raised us to be invisible and to remain unknown to the outside world. He would not be pleased to have the knowledge of our existence spread around to so many strangers all across the globe.”

“They already know that I have found four people with the requisite training to be warders and that they have taken on that mantle,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Knowing that you have special skills is more likely to keep them away than to draw their interest.”

“The operative word there is ‘people’,” Don said. “Which we aren’t. Suppose that telling them about our gifts piques their interest rather than lessens it? Suppose that makes them more inclined to want to see us?”

“We can’t afford for there to be even the slightest chance that your Council will demand an audience with us,” Leo said. “Public knowledge of our existence would be just as detrimental as having these creatures roaming the streets.”

“Right now the only thing you’ve done for us is run interference,” Raph said. “If ya’ can’t handle even that, what good are ya’?”

“I realize that we have our differences Raphael,” Mr. Hidesato said, “but I am not inclined to allow you to insult me at your every opportunity. Most of what you have learned as warders has
come from me. I would hope that you are skilled enough to do this job without my having hold your hand.”

“I’ll give ya’ something to hold,” Raph growled, starting forward.

“Enough bro’.” Leo quickly stepped to the side to partially block Raph. Looking at Mr. Hidesato, he said, “Since we’ve accepted this job in order to save face for your clan, it is only right that we have the final say in matters concerning the Council. All they need to know is that your warders are getting the job done, that we’re capturing the escaped creatures as soon as they pop up, and that we’re doing so with minimal damage to life and property. That means no publicity, which should be their primary concern.”

“You are correct of course,” Mr. Hidesato said, bowing his head in acknowledgment. “I beg your forbearance; the situation we find ourselves in is unusual for all of us.”

“All good, Raph?” Leo asked, glancing over his shoulder at his brother.

Raph’s eyes were still narrowed in anger, but he grit his teeth and after a moment said, “Yeah, fine.”

“Could we go to bed now?” Mikey asked. “I’m beat and the cuts on my legs sting.”

“The Hari onago?” Mr. Hidesato asked.

“Here,” Don said, passing the coin and the wax tool across to Mr. Hidesato.

“I will put this away in its proper place,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Yeah, ya’ do that,” Raph said with a slight sneer.

“Goodnight to you then,” Mr. Hidesato said, he turned to go but paused in the doorway to add, “Excellent work, Warders. Sleep well.”

“Ass . . . .” Raph began.

“I think you’ve already made your point,” Leo said, interrupting him.

“Still feels good to vent,” Raph replied. “Hey Case, ya’ staying here?”

Casey slung his jacket over his arm and said, “Nah, I’m heading home. April will worry if she wakes up and I ain’t there. If I call to tell her where I am and that wakes her up, then I’ll feel shitty. She don’t get enough sleep as it is.”

“We’re glad you take such good care of her,” Don said.

“She takes care of me,” Casey said, correcting him. “Don’t know what I’d do without her and don’t ever want to find out. Later guys!”

He left via the laundry room and Raph made certain the door was secured behind him. When he returned to his brothers, he saw that Don and Mikey had gone to the medical closet to put things away.

“Ya’ looking for a job as a diplomat, Leo?” Raph asked.

“Not especially,” Leo answered. “Right now we need each other. There’s no point in antagonizing the man. We have a big stake in clearing this mess up for Casey’s sake. If we step
“Remembering that we only got Mr. H’s word for how they operate,” Raph said. “He ain’t been all that forthcoming with us.”

Mikey stretched as he walked towards them, yawning wide. Behind him Don was shutting the pantry door.

“Bed,” Mikey said, his tone insistent. “Argue later, sleep now.”

“Yes your highness,” Raph said with a grin. “Ya’ want a foot rub too?”

“If you’re offering,” Mikey replied. “I think Don deserves it more though, since he did save our butts tonight.”

“I’d settle for all of us sleeping in the same room tonight,” Don said as the brothers started up the stairs. “I really miss being near all of you.”

“That’s easy,” Mikey said with enthusiasm. “Let’s just shove some stuff around and put all the mattresses on the floor in one room.”

“Sometimes you have the best ideas,” Don said, running up the stairs.

“Not sometimes, all the time,” Mikey insisted as he raced to catch up to his brother.

Leo and Raph quickened their pace as well and soon the four turtles had mattresses piled onto the floor in one of the bedrooms. Don crawled into a spot at the center of the pile and Mikey jumped in beside him, pulling Don into his arms.

Curling himself around Don’s shell, Leo sighed with satisfaction as Raph pressed in close to him. Lifting his head, Leo waited for Raph to slide his arm underneath and then lay down in the muscular crook of his brother’s arm.

“Let’s not sleep in separate rooms anymore,” Mikey mumbled sleepily. “It doesn’t feel right.”

Don hummed his agreement, having drifted too far towards sleep to bother with a proper response. Raph’s snores a few minutes later indicated that he was already out.

It took Leo a bit longer to fall asleep. He kept thinking over the events of the night and of the magical glow that had appeared just when they needed it.

As it had in the past, their close spiritual connection had manifested itself in a tangible way as soon as their protective instincts had kicked in. Holding each other, touching each other, had given them the strength to fight the yokai.

Sleeping like this, all in one bed, that gave them comfort. Their bond was their greatest weapon. It produced a magic of its own, one that was more formidable than anything the warder clans could dream up.

Inhaling deeply, Leo breathed in his brothers’ scents, and fell asleep.

Running.

Running and chasing something.
No matter how fast he ran, the thing he was trying to catch remained elusive, just out of Leo’s reach.

It bobbed in front of him, one minute wearing red, the next it had changed color and was blue. There was no face.

All around him there were lights and nearly colorless brick walls. The lights shone in his eyes, making him squint as he chased his quarry. Leo stretched out a hand, leaping to grasp at the suddenly purple colored object. His fingers stroked across a silken garment. As soon as the tips of his fingers made contact, the color of the garment changed again, becoming so white it faded into the background.

A disembodied voice suddenly sounded close to his head.

“What color do you choose?”

Before he could respond a circle of inky blackness enveloped him and Leo felt himself falling. His shout of surprise woke his brothers.

“Leo. Leo! Wake up bro’,” Mikey urged, grasping his older brother by his upper arms.

“What the shell? Snap out of it Leo,” Raph said, sliding a hand beneath Leo’s head and tilting it towards him.

Leo’s eyes blinked open to look up at Raph. For a moment he was disoriented; the darkness of the room in direct contrast to the colors he’d left behind in his dream.

When clarity hit he struggled to sit up, using Raph’s arm for leverage.

“Another prophetic dream?” Don asked with concern.

Leo rubbed a hand across his eyes and shook his head to clear it. He was leaning back against Raph, who had an arm around his older brother and felt the shiver that went through Leo’s body.

“I don’t think I like what these dreams do to ya’,” Raph said.

“We need them,” Leo replied. “Besides, it’s not as though I can turn them off.”

“What did ya’ dream about this time?” Raph asked.

Narrowing his eyes in concentration, Leo recounted his dream, trying hard to remember everything about it, no matter how small. When he finished, he noticed that Don was writing down what he’d said in one of their journals.

Don glanced up when the room grew quiet. “I think it’s important that we leave behind a written account of your dreams, Leo. Future prophetic dreamers will find the information useful in interpreting their own dreams.”

“Future warders are probably gonna use that computer program you’re building to look up whatever they need to know,” Mikey said. “It’ll make the Hidesato clan name even more famous than it already is, at least according to Mr. H.”

“I’ll create a cross-referencing system so that when key words are searched, all possible yokai matches will appear,” Don said. “Narrowing the search will depend on how many key words a
warder inputs. These dream logs will help."

“I don’t know why, but it makes me think of a big game hunter going out in the wild with a computer strapped to his back,” Raph said. “Is that the future? Kinda takes the sport out of it.”

“I’m not too worried about giving these creatures a sporting chance,” Leo said.

“Remember that Marlin dude who tried to kill Leatherhead?” Mikey asked. “He had all kinds of computerized gadgets with him, not to mention that robot thingy he called Amelia and the gun he named Betsy.”

“None of which did him any good against us,” Raph stated. “Think ya’ can go back to sleep, Leo? A couple extra hours of shuteye will do us all some good, especially if your dream is gonna send us out later on another chase.”

“The dream delivered its message, so hopefully I can actually sleep this time,” Leo said, sliding back down under the blankets. “It’s hard to rest when your dreams are as active as your waking life.”

“Yeah, well the sooner we catch all those damn creatures, the sooner ya’ leave the weird ass dreams behind,” Raph said, getting comfortable and pulling Leo in close to him.

The only one who didn’t immediately lie down again was Don. He continued to write in his journal, no doubt too caught up in an idea to be able to sleep. There was no use in telling him to save it for later, they all knew by now how Donny’s mind worked.

Raph’s even breathing and Mikey’s mumbling told Leo that they’d both gone back to sleep. The scratching of Don’s pen was kind of soothing, and Leo found himself drifting on the edge of sleep as well.

A thought that niggled at the back of his mind kept Leo from falling into much needed slumber. After a few minutes he finally caught what it was that worried him.

“Choose,” Leo whispered, looking up at Don. “It told me to choose a color.”

“I know, I wrote that down Leo,” Don said as he paused in his writing, keeping his voice low. “What about it?”

“Red, blue, and purple,” Leo said. “Our colors. At least, three of our colors.”

“You think it wanted you to choose either yourself or one of us for some reason?” Don asked with a frown. “Like, maybe you were chasing it because it had Raph and I and it wanted you to give yourself up in order to save us?”

“I don’t know,” Leo said. “It’s all conjecture. I don’t like it.”

“Neither do I, but there isn’t much we can do until we figure out which yokai we’re hunting,” Don said. “You have those dreams as a way to forewarn us about things that are going to happen. Armed with that knowledge, we should be able to forestall the worst from occurring.”

“In other words, don’t dwell on it and go back to sleep?” Leo asked, a slight smile turning up the corners of his lips.

Don sighed and closed his journal. “I should take my own advice.”
As he lay down, Leo said, “You’re learning. Besides, you should be well rested in case we need you to turn up the warder symbol magic again.”

“You guys should be able to do it too, now that we know we can,” Don said.

“It’d be a good idea if we practiced doing that later today,” Leo said.

Mikey snorted, mumbled something about ‘Turtle Titan’, and batted at the air. Don caught his hand and lowered it, exchanging grins with Leo as he did so.

“Goodnight Leo,” Don whispered.

“’Night Donny,” Leo replied.

It was late morning by the time all four of the brothers were up and around. They found a selection of baked goods on platters in the kitchen along with a note from Mr. Hidesato saying that he hoped they would enjoy the pastries and that he had gone out on an errand but would return in a few hours.

“It looks as though he thinks he’s feeding an army,” Don said, looking around at the food as he waited for his coffee to brew.

Mikey was already chowing down on a bear claw as he filled his plate with an assortment of goodies. “He is feeding an army,” he said around a mouthful of food.

“I don’t know that I want to eat anything in this house that we didn’t make ourselves,” Raph said, sounding grouchy.

Raph’s eyes lingered on some apple strudel before his lip curled defiantly and he went to sit down at the table. It was clear he wanted someone to talk him into eating a pastry; he was too stubborn to take one unless they did. Leo reached into the waste bin and held up a box which showed the logo of a nearby bakery.

“He had the pastries delivered, Raph. I’m fairly certain they’re safe,” Leo said.

“Yeah, what’s he gonna do, poison the warders who are helping him out?” Mikey asked as he too sat down. “Maybe this is his way of saying he’s sorry for making you mad. Like, all of the time.”

“And maybe I don’t want his apology,” Raph said, his manner belligerent.

Don placed a cup of coffee in front of him. “You two are going to have to find a way to communicate. It’s pretty clear to me that Mr. H isn’t used to directing warders, at least not brand new ones.”

Leo helped himself to a turnover and then placed one of the apple strudels onto a separate plate, giving it to Raph before going back to the stove to deal with his whistling tea pot. Over his shoulder he said, “You love strudel, Raph. Enjoy it. No one is going to read anything into you having breakfast. Supplying us with food is the least Mr. Hidesato can do for our helping to clear his family name.”

“Humpf. When ya’ put it that way, I should accept some payment for the aggravation,” Raph said before taking a big bite of the strudel.

Don covered his grin as he joined his brothers at the table. He waited for Leo to sit down
before digging into his blueberry kolache.

“We should take an assortment of these over to Master Splinter,” Leo said. “He enjoys fresh pastries.”

“I’ll bet he could help us learn to control the magic in the warder symbols,” Don said. “His guidance would make that process move along a lot faster.”

“We’re gonna try to tap into the magic the way Donny did? Radical dudes!” Mikey exclaimed enthusiastically.

“Why do you have to talk like that?” Raph asked, frowning at his brother. “Keep it up and you’ll scare off the yokai before we even get close to them.”

“Hey!” Mikey protested.

“It could be worse, Raph. He could start shouting ‘Cowabunga’ again,” Don said with a laugh.

“Let’s finish up here, pack some food, and head back to the lair,” Leo said. “This is as good a time as any.”

“I have a lot of work to do if I want to get all of those journals scanned into the new computer program,” Don said. “We still need to figure out which creature your dream was trying to warn us about. That information is here.”

“We won’t stay long,” Leo said. “We have to find a way to balance our training with this job and it wouldn’t be fair to Master Splinter for us to be away from him for too long. He worries.”

They quickly finished their breakfast. While Mikey packed some food for their father, Leo left a note on the kitchen chalkboard so that Mr. Hidesato would know where they’d gone. Once they were ready, the foursome headed down to the basement and out to the shell sleds.

Upon entering the lair, the brothers were surprised to find that April was there with Master Splinter.

“Casey’s watching the shop with my part-time clerk,” April explained as she greeted the turtles. “This is the first chance I’ve gotten in a couple of weeks to get in some training time with Master Splinter.”

“Ya’ just start?” Raph asked. “We brought some breakfast.”

“We have just finished,” Master Splinter said, walking to the kitchen with his sons and April.

“Mr. H went a little crazy with the pastries,” Mikey said. “I think he bought out the store. These will keep in the refrigerator and you can warm them up whenever you get hungry for something sweet Sensei.”

“That is very thoughtful of you, my sons. You have quite a few more injuries since the last time I saw you. Are you all right?” Master Splinter asked.

“We’re fine Father,” Leo answered. “We had a run in with a creature whose living hair had barbed tips.”

“Other than feeling like fish that managed to wriggle off a hook we’re doing pretty good,”
Raph said.

“Speak for yourself,” Mikey said. “My cuts still sting.”

“I have an ointment in my lab that will help with that,” Don said. “I’ll grab it before we leave.”

“I saw what that thing did to Casey’s jacket. All of you need to be more careful,” April said. She gave Don an odd look. “He also said that you were glowing, but I couldn’t make any sense of his explanation. What happened?”

Don recounted their adventure in hunting down the Hari onago and how he’d managed to tap into the magic of the warder symbols. Master Splinter began to nod as Don finished his tale.

“It comes as no surprise to me that you were able to access the magic in those symbols, Donatello. You have long had the ability to tap into a deeper part of your spiritual side. That skill often lays dormant due to your more cerebral pursuits,” Master Splinter said. “I am pleased that the talent has proven advantageous. The question is, could you produce the same results without being driven by fear for your brothers’ safety?”

“That’s partly why we came home, Master Splinter,” Leo said. “We believe that we should all learn to access the power in our warder symbols. Mr. Hidesato said that very few warders have ever been able to tap into that power, but it seems that could be one of our more powerful weapons against the yokai.”

“We did it with our acolyte amulets,” Mikey said. “We should be able to do it with the symbols too, right Master Splinter?”

“It depends on how long it takes you to focus Michelangelo,” Master Splinter said dryly.

“Ow,” Mikey said, grasping his heart. “You wound me.”

Raph chuckled. “Bet that stung more than the cuts on your legs.”

“Why don’t we get in a little warm up while Sensei eats something?” Leo suggested. “He can help us with our meditation when he’s ready. Want to join us, April?”

“I’d love to join you guys,” April said wistfully, “but it’s not a good idea for me to leave the shop in Casey’s hands for much longer. Price bargaining is not his forte.”

“Neither is being around a lot of breakables,” Raph said with a grin.

They said their goodbyes to April and then the brothers went to the dojo to work out. After a while their father joined them and following his directions, they sat in a semi-circle facing him.

“Like your avatars, the power to access the world’s magic is within all of you,” Master Splinter said. “Magic is a part of the spirit world. When you access your inner spirit, you become one with the magic that exists within.”

“We used our amulets as a way to direct our chi when we manifested our avatars during the fight with the Tengu Shredder,” Don said. “It’s what I was thinking about when we were trying to capture the Hari onago.”

“So you utilized the symbols in your brand as a way to amplify your chi,” Leo said.
“The symbols are connected to magic, they were forged through magic,” Don said. “It only makes sense that once our inner spirit bonds with the magic surrounding it, we could control the magic by releasing it through the symbols.”

Raph shook his head. “I’m starting to feel like this is way above my paygrade.”

“You’ve done this before Raph,” Don said.

“That’s the point,” Raph said. “I’ve done it, not talked about it. When I’m in a fight and I know I’ve got a weapon, I can get to that weapon no matter where it is. Even if it’s inside of me. What I can’t do is talk it into coming out.”

“But talking about it is what makes you aware of the fact that it is inside you,” Leo said.

“We’re already aware of that ‘cause Donny did it,” Mikey said. “If Donny can do it, then we can do it too. Right, Sensei?”

“That is the hoped for outcome,” Master Splinter said. “Let us see what comes of this exercise. Focus, all of you. Concentrate on what you feel in your heart and deepest soul. Access your inner being and connect to your chi.”

His sons dutifully closed their eyes, breathing deeply and steadily to calm themselves. Master Splinter watched, noting that one of Michelangelo’s eyes would pop open from time to time so that he could glance at his brothers, and that a grimace periodically crossed Raphael’s countenance.

Only Leonardo and Donatello seemed fully entranced, both doing their utmost to focus internally. In a matter of minutes, the symbols on Donatello’s arm began to glow, the radiance soon encompassing his entire body.

Then the symbols on Leonardo’s arm began to shimmer as well. The light radiated outward, climbing in both directions along his arm, but then fizzled out.

Suddenly Donatello gasped and his eyes snapped open. The glow from the warder symbols faded quickly and Don slumped sideways.

“Donny! Are ya’ okay buddy?” Raph asked, springing over to help his brother sit back up.

“I’m okay,” Don said, though he looked woozy. “That took more energy than it did last night. I guess the adrenaline gave me a power boost.”

“I managed to tap into the magic too, but I couldn’t bring it up to full force,” Leo said. “It’s a little draining.”

“I guess me and Mikey are the duds,” Raph said. “I didn’t even come close to feeling any magic.”

Mikey lifted a hand. “I didn’t even know where to go to look for it. I think I’m just gonna stay close to Donny when we’re hunting.”

“Maybe we’re meant to be the muscle,” Raph said. “Leo’s got those dreams giving him helpful hints and now Donny’s got a magical power boost. Somebody’s got to do the heavy lifting.”

“As you said earlier Raphael, you will have the weapon when you need it,” Master Splinter said. “You achieve the deepest concentration and connection to your chi during a battle. Michelangelo as well. Inaction does not suit either of you.”
“We should probably head back to HQ now,” Leo said as he stood up and bowed to Master Splinter. “Hopefully Mr. Hidesato has returned and we can figure out which creature it was that I dreamt about last night.”

The other three turtles rose as well, each bowing to their father. He walked with them back to where they’d parked the shell sleds.

“Ya’ know, at this rate it’s gonna take a long time for us to collect all of those escaped creatures,” Raph said. “Be nice if there was a way to get that magical helping hand we’re supposed to be getting to point us at the damn yokai.”

“Magic does not function in that way, Raphael. Though it works in conjunction with the laws of nature, it also acts upon things by way of an invisible ether. It is spirituality, or the art of changing consciousness according to one’s will. It is not controllable until you are able to access your inner being, and even then you will only be privy to a microcosm of that which is magical,” Master Splinter explained.

“So what you’re saying is that magic ain’t like a compass,” Raph said. “See, this is why I’ve never liked this magic stuff. It makes things way more complicated than they need to be.”

“We’ll be back in a couple of days to see how you’re doing Father,” Leo said. “Call us if you need anything.”

“I will, my son. Give Mr. Hidesato my regards. Take care of yourselves and each other,” Master Splinter urged the turtles as they sped away.

Back at HQ they found that Mr. Hidesato had returned and was seated at the desk in the office, looking through some of the warder journals. He closed them as the turtles entered, giving them his full attention.

“You father is well, I trust?” Mr. Hidesato asked.

“Yes he is, thank you,” Leo said politely, sitting down opposite him. “He sends his regards and his thanks for the pastries. We took some of them to him since fresh baked goods are a rare treat for all of us.”

“I would imagine your lives have been filled with many difficulties,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is quite a feat in itself to remain unnoticed in a city of this size.”

“We haven’t gone completely unnoticed,” Leo said. “We’ve certainly made our fair share of enemies out of those who prey upon the helpless.”

“Then becoming warders seems a natural evolution,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is our job to protect the innocent from the evil these yokai do.”

“Be nice if once they’re caught, they got locked up in a way that they couldn’t get out again,” Raph said.

“That is another thing that must someday evolve,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Perhaps with your assistance, we can find a way to create a permanent form of confinement.”

“Perhaps,” Leo said noncommittally. “For now, we should concentrate on catching the ones that have escaped. I had another dream and we’re hoping it will make more sense to you than it has to us.”
As Leo began describing his dream, his brothers sat down nearby. Mr. Hidesato gave Leo his full attention, nodding as the young turtle reached the end of his tale.

“The colors you described; the blue, red, and then purple, narrowed the field considerably, but when you said that it asked you to choose a color, I knew it could only be one yokai,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I am sure the creature in your dream was the Aka manto.”

“Doesn’t that mean ‘red cloak’ or ‘red vest’?” Don asked.

“Yes. The Aka manto manifested from an urban legend related to toilets,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Toilets? Now we’re hunting down creatures in toilets?” Mikey asked, his voice rising in pitch. “That has to be the grossest thing ever!”

“Anything can be cursed,” Mr. Hidesato said. “This particular phenomenon has countless variations along the same theme and usually takes place in a specific stall in a specific bathroom. The manifestation is said to have come about originally in the restrooms of elementary schools.”

“Why elementary schools?” Don asked.

“It is thought that the creature was created from the anxiety inherent in being a student. The Aka manto asks children an impossible question to which any answer results in something terrible. The feeling it evokes is not too different from having to answer a difficult test problem, or a teacher’s question in front of an entire classroom when one doesn’t know the answer.”

“The worry over being teased adding to the anxiety,” Leo said.

“What’s the terrible thing that happens when ya’ can’t answer this Aka manto’s question? And what is the question?” Raph asked.

“The question is quite simply ‘Do you want red paper or blue paper?’ Sometimes the choice will be purple paper, sometimes white,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“The colors from my dream,” Leo said.

“How is that an impossible question?” Raph asked. “Just grab what’s on the roll.”

“There will be no paper on the roll, that is the point,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Even should a clever person bring their own toilet paper with them, it will vanish. The Aka manto forces you to make a choice.”

“What happens when you do?” Don asked.

“The repercussions are as varied as the color choices,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Choosing red paper may get you stabbed and sliced up so violently that blood sprays everywhere, making it appear that you are wearing a bright red cloak. It might get your skin flayed so that it hangs off your back like a red cape.”

“I guess choosing blue isn’t much better,” Mikey said, scowling with disgust.

“Choosing blue also results in blood loss. In this case, the blood is sucked out of the body, leaving the person dead and blue-faced on the floor,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Sometimes when the choices are either purple or white and one of those is picked, the person may be allowed to escape unharmed, or it may cause them to be pulled down through the toilet into the plumbing.”
“What happens if you pick a random color?” Mikey asked.

“Usually an equally horrible death,” Mr. Hidesato said. “For instance the person may find their face is being pushed down into the dirty toilet water and held there until they drown. In some cases, the legend has it that whatever the paper option or choice made, the person who comes into contact with the Aka manto simply disappears.”

“Talk about a creature getting you when you’re at your most vulnerable,” Don said.

“So what happens if you tell it you don’t need any paper?” Mikey asked.

“Ah, now in some instances that will help you to escape,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “That response could buy you enough time to run out of the restroom before anything happens. The legend of the Aka manto is old and as varied as the different regions from whence it arose.”

“Which means that the one who escaped into New York could be doing any number of things to its victims,” Leo said.

“It also means it could be anywhere,” Don said. “Would anyone like to hazard a guess as to how many restrooms there are in this city?”

“No,” Raph said.

“Unfortunately, schools are in session during this time of year,” Don said. “I suppose our best bet is to see if there are any reports of any of the things you’ve described happening to people. Leo, did you get any sense of your locale in that dream? Any landmarks?”

“I was inside someplace,” Leo said, recalling the dream. “There were cream colored brick walls and lights. I suppose it could have been a bathroom. Wait, I remember flowers. I saw a vase of flowers and I could smell them, so they must have been real.”

“I don’t know a damn thing about school bathrooms, but I kinda doubt they get decorated with flowers,” Raph said.

Don suddenly snapped his fingers, straightening in his chair. “Bryant Park!” he exclaimed. “Fresh flowers!”

“We ain’t looking for a park, Donny. We’re trying to find a haunted restroom,” Raph said.

“There’s a public bathroom in Bryant Park,” Don said. “The bathrooms were recently renovated there to the tune of about three hundred thousand dollars. One of the things it boasts is fresh flowers. The pictures I saw of the interior showed both cream and white colored bricks.”

“I thought this thing haunted school bathrooms,” Raph said.

“If it’s drawn to people who are feeling anxious, then the Bryant Park bathroom is as good a place as any to find them,” Don said. “The people who use them are mostly tourists. We’ve seen how anxious strangers are when they’re in this city for the first time. They get lost, they need to use a restroom, and it’s hard to find a public toilet in New York.”

“Worse yet if you’re doing one of those tour things and you’re on a schedule,” Mikey said. At the odd looks his brothers gave him, he added, “What? I read.”

“We can certainly double check,” Don said. “There are bound to be reports of strange deaths or disappearances in the area of the park. Those restrooms are regularly maintained, so none of the
city’s transient population go into them. If the creature is attacking people in there, someone will notice immediately.”

“See what you can find out Donny,” Leo said.

“Right away boss,” Don said, heading into the war room.

“So let’s say we track this Aka manto to Bryant Park, how do we capture it?” Raph asked. “Don’t tell me we gotta flush the coin down a toilet.”

Mr. Hidesato stared at him, a discomfited look on his face.

Raph sat forward. “We gotta flush the coin?”

“The coin does have to go into the toilet,” Mr. Hidesato admitted, shrugging his shoulders. “You needn’t flush, but it will have to be retrieved from the bowl once the Aka manto has been drawn into the coin.”

“I volunteer Mikey,” Raph said.

“I think Raph should do it,” Mikey said at the exact same moment.

“Do what?” Don asked, returning to the room.

“Throw the coin in the toilet,” Raph said. “That was fast. Ya’ find something?”

“No human remains, bloody or otherwise, but a couple of tourists have gone missing in the vicinity of Bryant Park,” Don said.

“Guess they picked the wrong color,” Mikey said.

“Men or women?” Leo asked.

“One of each,” Don said. “That makes sense. The stalls for both restrooms are probably back to back.”

“What time of day? Has anyone seen anything?” Leo asked.

“According to the reports, the people who’ve reported the pair missing say it happened late,” Don said. “They split off from friends to look for a bathroom. The police haven’t yet associated it with the Bryant Park bathrooms because they close at ten. At least, that’s when the attendants are supposed to lock up. None of them remember seeing either of the missing people.”

“The Aka manto would appear to them as an attendant in order to lure them inside,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Locks and security systems would be nothing to it.”

“That denotes a certain amount of intellect,” Don said. “Not to mention adaptability.”

“These creatures should not be underestimated,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Some of them are extremely cunning. The longer they are out there, the more acclimated they will become to western society.”

“Marvelous,” Raph said. “As if catching them ain’t challenging enough.”

“Yeah, we might even find one driving a cab,” Mikey said with a grin.
“I ain’t afraid of no ghost,” Don replied, laughing.

“Okay you two, how about we get back to our own problem,” Leo said, shaking his head indulgently. “I’m going to guess that the Aka manto has to believe it has a victim trapped in a stall so that it will make an appearance, otherwise tossing the coin into a random toilet won’t work.”

“You are correct,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The creature must be in the stall with its victim.”

“We ain’t sticking one of our pals in a bathroom stall,” Raph said quickly. “There’s no room to maneuver. They couldn’t get out of our way.”

“I’ll do it,” Leo said. He saw how his brothers were looking at him. “If I bundle up so it can’t see me and I keep the warder symbols hidden, it should think I’m just another human looking for a place to relieve himself.”

“And how are ya’ gonna move around with a bunch of clothes weighing ya’ down?” Raph asked. “Remember what happened to Mikey when the Dodomeki went after him.”

“I won’t wear anything too loose fitting,” Leo said.

“A large pullover with a hood would cover your upper half,” Don said. “Your hands won’t matter, they’d just look like you were wearing green gloves. You could wear sweat pants with a drawstring waist and I could tape some brown felt to the tops of your feet to look like shoes.”

“That means ya’ can’t carry your swords,” Raph said.

“They will not do any good against an Aka manto,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“I’ll still have my belt on under the clothes,” Leo said. “The outfit is two separate pieces, so I can reach my knife.”

“Once the Aka manto accosts you and gives you your choice, you should answer immediately,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Hesitation will mean it chooses a color for you.”

“And what do I say?” Leo asked.

“Past warders have had the best luck by responding, “I choose no paper”. That will cause the Aka manto to falter as it tries to process your unusual answer,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Like a computer program when an incorrect response has been input,” Don said.

“Bet a computer program don’t suck the blood out of the guy sitting at the keyboard,” Raph said.

“Maybe I should be the one playing decoy,” Don said. “I’m the one with the most protection.”

“It’ll be okay, Donny. I think I’m meant to do this,” Leo said. “That’s the sense I got from my dream. I was able to access the magic in the symbols for a second or two earlier and I’ll be able to do that again if I need to. A couple of seconds should be enough time for me to toss a coin into the toilet.”

Mr. Hidesato looked from him to Don and back. “You practiced calling for the magic in your symbols?”

“We all did,” Leo said. “We intend to continue practicing until we’re all able to do it. Our
father raised us to be spiritually aware and to connect to our inner selves. It’s simply a matter of finding the right path to connect us to the symbols.”

“Impressive,” Mr. Hidesato said, his manner thoughtful. He changed the subject. “You will find a closet filled with clothing in the first guest bedroom on the second floor. My uncle kept them for guests and for the occasional clandestine trip outdoors. Perhaps the items you require will be in there.”

A hint of dismissal was in his tone and Leo stood up, followed by his brothers. “We’ll go check the closet. I want to be ready to go get the Aka manto tonight.”

“I made a run to the grocers,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Dinner will be at eight.”

“I’ll come down and help you with it,” Mikey said, avoiding a glance in Raph’s direction.

“That would be appreciated. Thank you,” Mr. Hidesato said as the brothers left the office.

Once upstairs, they located the closet and began rummaging through it in search of clothing that would not only fit Leo, but would be suitable to his task.

“I don’t get why ya’ gotta be front and center on this one,” Raph griped at Leo.

“Look at it this way, Raph. You didn’t want to reach into a toilet, and now you don’t have to,” Leo said.

“Spare me the gallows humor Leo,” Raph grumbled. “Ya’ still got a gimp leg full of stitches. How are ya’ gonna move fast if ya’ need to?”

“Moving fast isn’t going to be a problem in a tiny stall,” Mikey said. “Moving smart is. All the fussing in the world won’t change what Leo feels like he’s got to do.”

“Let him speak his piece, Mikey. Someone should give voice to the things we ought to be concerned about,” Leo said. “Otherwise, we might overlook something important.”

“Glad ya’ feel that way,” Raph said. “Cause here’s a concern; what happens if things go sideways? You’ll be in the stall, you’ll have the coin, and you’ll have the wax tool. We’ll be standing outside holding our dicks in our hands hoping ya’ don’t get dead.”

“All of our hunts so far have been joint ventures, Leo. He has a point,” Don said.

“We need a second wax tool,” Leo said, trying on a pair of sweat pants.

“What? What the hell does that have to do with what we’re talking about?” Raph asked.

“Nothing. It was just something that came to mind,” Leo said, tightening the string in the waist band and then doing some squats to ensure he could move. “If we ever have to separate to hunt more than one yokai.”

“We can ask Mr. H about that at dinner,” Don said. “Back to Raph’s point?”

“Don’t stand around outside,” Leo said, looking up at Raph. “We’re assuming the thing will be disguised as an attendant and will let me in, right? So after it follows me in, you follow it. I’ll make sure it stays focused on me. That way you’ll be close if something sounds as though it’s gone wrong. Don and Mikey will have to remain outside to prevent anyone else from entering the building.”
“What happens if something does go wrong? Ya’ want I should skewer it with my non-magical sai?” Raph asked.

“No, I want you to use the other weapon available to you,” Leo said, looking pointedly at the symbol on Raph’s arm.

Raph stared at him. “I couldn’t get it up at all earlier. Now you’re telling me you’re gonna stake your life on me making this shit work?”

“That’s exactly what I’m telling you.” Leo stopped digging through clothes to look Raph directly in the eye. “There’s one thing I can always count on, and it’s that you’ll have my back no matter what. Like Master Splinter said, you’re the most connected to your chi during a fight. Now that you’re aware of the weapon, you’ll be able to use the weapon.”

“This is fucking insane,” Raph said, rolling his eyes. “If this is how we gotta do it, then I’m in. I sure as shell hope I don’t have to break out an ‘I told ya’ so’.”

“So do I,” Leo said, accepting a pullover from Don and trying it on.

His disguise selected, the turtles returned the remaining clothes to the closet and went back downstairs. Tossing his getup over the back of the couch, Leo selected a journal from those on the coffee table and sat down to read. He was happy to note that Mr. Hidesato still hadn’t started returning them to the shelves again.

Don and Mikey went to work scanning journal pages into the new computer program. Raph left the office but returned twenty minutes later with a platter of sandwiches and bottled water.

The remainder of the afternoon and early evening passed in that manner. After Mikey went to the kitchen to help with dinner, Raph took his spot in the war room. He turned one of the televisions to a ball game while he helped Don scan and label journals. Wanting the company, Leo joined them.

At dinner, the brothers discussed football and nothing else. Mr. Hidesato seemed to sense their need for a break from talk of escaped creatures and entered into the discussion, asking questions about the game and how it was played.

After cleaning up the dinner things, the turtles retired to the media room to watch a movie. It felt nice to recline the leather seats and put their feet up, a luxury they hadn’t ever experienced before staying in the Hidesato house.

When it neared time for them to depart, the group met Mr. Hidesato in the office. Leo pulled on his clothes and Don taped the fake shoes to the tops of his feet. With the hood pulled up and cinched, he would pass for a human, as long as he kept his head down.

Raph took Leo’s swords and scabbards, fastening them to his shell so they’d be handy. After Leo accepted the trap coin and wax tool from Mr. Hidesato, the turtles departed the house on their shell sleds.

The turtles did not visit Bryant Park often. It was a popular destination for both locals and tourists and was home to a popular ice rink. The park was also adjacent to the New York Public Library and surrounded by skyscrapers. It was not a great place for mutants who wanted to avoid being seen.

They timed their arrival to coincide with closing hours. Fortunately the lush gardens provided the turtles with hiding places as they waited for the park to completely clear of guests.
Stationed near the bathrooms, the turtles watched as attendants locked the gate that led from the street side to the small building. Having already locked the main door, the attendants left for the night.

Once it appeared they had the park to themselves, the turtles crept out of hiding. Don and Mikey were stationed in positions where they would have views of the street side and park side of the building.

Adjusting his hood, Leo made certain the trap coin and wax tool were within easy reach and set off down the sidewalk. Raphael kept to the shrubbery, remaining out of sight, staying far enough back so his presence wouldn’t be sensed by the entity they hunted.

Leo approached the building which housed the bathrooms, shuffling along at a quick pace as though anxious to reach his destination. An attendant appeared suddenly, watching as Leo drew closer.

The attendant wore the signature gray and green Bryant Park uniform, a ball cap pulled low over his eyes. “Seeking the facilities, sir?” he asked, his voice deep and low.

“Yes,” Leo answered swiftly. “Please tell me you’re open. I’m desperate.”

“Then enter,” the attendant said. With a wave of his hand, the outer door swung inwards, granting Leo access.

Leo hesitated in the hall. “The men’s room. It’s this way?” he asked, pointing to the right.

The attendant followed him inside and nodded. “Yes sir. To the right.”

“You don’t know how grateful I am to find this restroom open,” Leo prattled on, keeping the attendant in the corner of his eye. He was glad to see the man was staying with him. “It’s so late and the park itself is closed.”

Though the attendant stood in the center of the men’s restroom, he did not reply as Leo ducked into the stall on the farthest end of the row.

“This has got to be the nicest public restroom I’ve ever visited,” Leo said, feeling silly at making such inane small talk.

“Yes,” the attendant rumbled, letting Leo know he was still nearby.

For an embarrassing few minutes Leo wondered if perhaps he’d have to sound as if he was actually using the toilet. He turned to face the door and sat down, shifting so that the sanitary wrap on the toilet seat would crinkle.

When he’d entered, Leo had noticed a full roll of toilet paper on the holder, but now when he glanced at it, he saw that it was empty.

Uncertain as to whether he was supposed to ask about the paper, Leo reached towards the empty roll. As he did so, the stall door suddenly opened.

Standing in the doorway was a tall entity, easily eight feet in height. It wore a red cloak that swept the ground, a red turban wound around its head, and a red scarf which covered its mouth and nose. All that showed of its face was very white, its sunken eyes dark red in color.

A strange raspy voice issued forth to ask, “Do you want red paper or blue paper?”
It was then that Leo realized he was in an awkward position and unable to reach the trap coin unless he leaned over and took his eyes off the Aka manto. Standing up, he said, “I choose no paper.”

Jamming his hand into his pants pocket, Leo grasped the trap coin and began to draw it out. That was when the creature announced, “Choice made!”

The air around Leo began to swirl as a hard downdraft hit him. Looking down, Leo saw the floor disappearing into a swirling vortex.

Leaping just before he lost his footing, Leo landed on the toilet seat. The pull of the vortex was incredibly strong, taking the taped felt ‘shoes’ right off his feet, and Leo felt himself being drawn into it.

“Leo! Give me your hand!”

Looking up, Leo saw Raphael leaning over the wall dividing their two stalls. Fighting the turbulence, Leo used every ounce of strength to lift his hand and catch hold of Raph’s.

“Coin!” Raph yelled.

Squinting his eyes against the rush of the wind, Leo managed to pull his hand out of his pocket. Sliding his arm around behind his shell, he held his breath and dropped the coin.

A loud screech of anger sounded from the Aka manto and it rushed forward. At the exact same moment, Raph yanked up on Leo’s arm, snatching him off the toilet seat and slamming him into the dividing wall.

The brothers clung to each other as the Aka manto plunged into the toilet, its garments turning the inside of the bowl a bright red. Slowly the vortex died down and the floor tiles snapped back into place.

Once the flooring was again secure, Raph released his brother. Leo extracted the wax tool from his belt and reached into the toilet to retrieve the coin. He was counting off the seconds when the stall door opened to admit Raph.

“Ya’ got it?” Raph asked.

Leo exhaled heavily and held up the coin. “Got it. Thanks Raph. I guess you didn’t have to use your warder symbols.”

“Are ya’ kidding me? The wind in here was so strong it almost sucked me under the dividing wall. All I could think about was saving your butt and the symbols lit up like a Christmas tree. When I jumped for the top of the wall, it was like I had jets stuck to the bottoms of my feet,” Raph said.

“That’s . . . that’s different from how it worked for Don,” Leo said, astonished.

“No shit. Come on, let’s blow this joint. There’s too many people passing by on the sidewalk and all that foot traffic is making our bro’s nervous,” Raph said.

They exited the men’s room and started for the main door. Before they reached it, Leo stopped his brother.

“Thanks Raph. You were right that I shouldn’t have tried to do this alone,” Leo told him.
“Stow it. Ya’ ain’t never alone and ya’ ain’t never gonna be alone,” Raph said. “Whether that’s a blessing or a curse, it’s just the way it is.”

“It’s most definitely a blessing,” Leo said as they left the building.
Night of the Rokujo No Miyasudokoro

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.  
Word Count: 7,225  
Rated: R 2k3 violence, language, mild tcest

Chapter Notes

Preview art commissioned from the very talented FaithfulWhispers
“So~o, did you two have fun playing in the bathroom?” Mikey asked when he saw Leo and Raph approaching the spot where he and Don were hiding.

“Yeah, it was peachy,” Raph said. “Especially if ya’ like getting sucked down into the underworld by a tornado.”

“By a what?” Don asked, looking from Raph to Leo.

“I’ll tell ya’ when we get back to HQ and see Mr. H so I don’t have to tell it twice,” Raph said. “I need a shower.”

The foursome made it out of Bryant Park without being seen and took their shell sleds back to Mr. Hidesato’s house. Once they were inside, Raph pushed Leo towards the stairs.

“Give me the coin,” Raph said. “I can tell the story while you go take a bath. I know ya’ can’t get them stitches wet or I’d drag ya’ into the shower with me.”

“I could check those stiches now,” Don offered.

“Why don’t ya’ do that, Donny? Go with Leo and help him get cleaned up. Just don’t do anything but bathe,” Raph said. “Leo owes me.”

“And you don’t do anything but turn over that coin and make a report,” Don said. “No fighting with Mr. H.”

Leo handed the trap coin and wax tool to Raph before going upstairs with Donatello. Mikey stayed with Raph and they both headed for the office where they found Mr. Hidesato waiting for them.

“I thought I heard all of your voices,” Mr. Hidesato said as he looked up from the papers he was studying. “Is everyone all right? Was Leonardo able to capture the Aka manto?”

Raph answered the last question by flipping the trap coin at Mr. Hidesato, which the man caught neatly. “We’re all just peachy. Trapping creatures in bathrooms is messy business. My bros went up to take a bath and that’s where I’m headed too.”

Setting the wax tool on the desk, Raph turned to leave. “A moment please,” Mr. Hidesato said, stopping him. “The capture, was it difficult? Did Leonardo access the power in his warder symbols?”

“He didn’t, I did,” Raph answered shortly.

Mikey glanced from his brother to Mr. Hidesato. It was clear the pair was having a war of wills.

“How about some details, Raph? You did say you’d tell the whole story once we got back here,” Mikey said. “I kind of need to know how you worked your mojo if I’m ever gonna get mine going.”

Rather than look at Mr. Hidesato while he recounted the night’s events, Raph kept his eyes on Mikey. When Raph finished speaking, Mikey said, “Whoa, that’s pretty . . . awesome!”

“Your emotions activated the symbols and they in turn enhanced what you already have in
“abundance; your strength,” Mr. Hidesato said. “That is quite fascinating.”

“Glad ya’ think so,” Raph said, sounding unimpressed. “We done with the Q and A? I wanna take a shower.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” Mr. Hidesato said absently. His eyes were on the bookshelves containing warder journals. “Have a restful evening. Please give my regards to your brothers.”

Raph rolled his eyes and left without another word. He and Mikey showered together, scrubbing each other’s carapaces, something that was much easier to do with a little help. Once they had dried off, the pair went to the bedroom they’d shared the night before and found both Don and Leo had beaten them there.

“No bloodshed?” Don asked, directing the question to Mikey.

“None,” Mikey assured him. “Did you get the story?”

“Leo told it to me,” Don said. “So I guess this proves that the warder power is tied to our emotions and our own personal métiers.”

“Yeah, like Raph is strong so it makes him stronger,” Mikey said.

“Thanks for clarifying that,” Raph said, his focus on Leo, who sat cross-legged on one of the mattresses. Kneeling in front of him, Raph wrapped a hand around the back of Leo’s head and leaned in for a kiss.

“Looks like Raph has some adrenaline to work off,” Don said, grinning.

Breaking the kiss, Raph stared hungrily into Leo’s eyes and said, “Ya’ owe me a reward for saving your ass.”

“Really?” Leo asked with feigned innocence. “What exactly do you want?”

“Your ass,” Raph answered.

“Ooh Mikey, maybe we should move our mattresses into the other room,” Don said.

“And miss the show?” Mikey said with mock indignation.

“I don’t care if ya’ stay and watch or join in,” Raph said, a lecherous tone in his voice. “It ain’t like Leo can’t handle it.”

“Grab the lights Mikey, we’re not going anywhere,” Don said.

After an enjoyable hour caring for each other’s needs, the brothers fell asleep together. When Leo next woke, it was mid-morning. As he sat up to look around at his still sleeping brothers, he realized that he hadn’t had any dreams.

Don stirred when Leo untangled himself from his brothers’ limbs to climb out of bed.

“Morning already?” Don asked sleepily.

“Afraid so,” Leo whispered. “I’ll be in the dojo whenever you guys are ready. No rush.”

Murmuring something unintelligible, Don went back to sleep. After paying a visit to the bathroom for a quick sponge bath, Leo went down to the kitchen to brew some tea. While he waited...
for the water to boil, he stood at the kitchen window looking out into the garden.

Leo hadn’t paid much attention to the garden, but he noticed that the older trees growing there were quite tall and provided enough cover that the grounds couldn’t be seen from overhead. The property was surrounded by a high, rock wall, blocking the view into the grounds from nearby homes.

When his tea was ready, Leo returned to the window to drink it while continuing to study the garden. The sunshine was calling to him and after he rinsed his cup, Leo checked the yard maintenance calendar and saw that the grounds crew wasn’t scheduled for the day.

Deciding to go outside, Leo wrote a quick note on the chalkboard so his brothers would know to join him and then exited the house by way of the door in the laundry room.

After carefully checking that there was no way for him to be seen, Leo took a few minutes to stretch and then began to go through a Tai chi routine. He enjoyed how the exercise combined precise movements and breathing techniques, and how the flow from one position into the next was almost meditative.

It wasn’t long before Raph joined him. Without saying a word, Raph stepped into place alongside Leo and picked up his brother’s movements so that they were going through the routine in tandem. Mikey and Don appeared a few minutes later and fell into step with their brothers.

When they reached the end of their routine, the brothers bowed to one another and then Leo noticed that Mr. Hidesato was seated on a bench not far from them. None of the turtles had heard or seen him when he entered the garden.

“I hope you do not mind if I observe your practice session,” Mr. Hidesato said when he realized that Leo had seen him. “I have had no opportunity to review your skill set.”

“You won’t disturb us,” Leo assured him. “We’re used to having someone watch us practice.”

“Review our skill set he says,” Raph said in an aside to Mikey. “We’ve already caught eight of his precious creatures, what the hell is there for him to review?”

“Maybe he just likes the way you move,” Mikey said, teasing his brother. Raph swatted at him, but Mikey back flipped out of reach.

Leo called for their attention and once he had it, said, “Let’s spar for a bit. Mikey, since you’re so determined to face off with Raph this morning, the two of you can go first.”

Moving to one side with Don, Leo gave the command for his brothers to begin. The fresh air seemed to bring an added pep to their movements, with Mikey just edging Raph out on takedowns.

Because of Leo’s stitches, Don refused to allow him to go full out during their sparring session, so they modified it to accommodate Leo’s injury. After they were done, Don faced off with Mikey in order to get in a full workout.

When practice was over, the turtles turned towards the house but Leo stopped when he came abreast of Mr. Hidesato.

“You four fight well,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is easy to see that you have practiced martial arts for most of your lives.”
“All of our lives,” Leo said, correcting him. “Almost from the moment we were mutated. Master Splinter knew that our very survival depended on our ability to master ninjitsu and stealth.”

“Sit with me for a moment,” Mr. Hidesato said, waving a hand towards the bench.

Leo glanced at his brothers, who had paused alongside him. “We’ll start breakfast,” Don said. “Join us when you can.”

“Brunch,” Mikey said as they continued on to the house. “When it’s after ten it’s brunch.”

“Who the hell cares what it’s called as long as we eat?” Raph asked.

After they disappeared into the house, silence fell on the garden. Leo sat down next to Mr. Hidesato and allowed the warmth of the sun to seep into his skin.

“My brothers and I should bring a blanket out here and bask in the sunlight,” Leo said. “It’s not often we get that chance.”

“Uncle Akio liked his privacy,” Mr. Hidesato said. “You need not worry that you will be seen as long as you refer to the posted schedules.”

“At least until the trees begin to lose their leaves for the winter,” Leo said.

“Your brother told me of last night’s capture,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The magic in your symbols seems to not only be accessible through strong emotions, but also by your connection to one another.”

“They are often the same,” Leo said. “We have a . . . unique bond with each other.”

Mr. Hidesato nodded, his eyes fixed on the garden. “I have drawn a certain conclusion from some of your interactions. I am not asking for verification; I simply want to assure you that I understand.”

Leo noticed that he didn’t say whether he approved or disapproved. It didn’t much matter to Leo either way, but he felt the need to be sure that Mr. Hidesato knew the relationship he and his brothers had wasn’t negotiable.

“We aren’t human,” Leo said, “and we are the only four of our kind.”

“It is not necessary for you to justify your activities to me,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“I’m not. I’m offering an insight into who we are,” Leo explained. “We have a long road ahead of us if we’re going to recapture all of the escaped creatures. Our focus and commitment is towards that goal, but you must understand that our first instincts will always be to protect each other. Even if that means allowing a creature to escape.”

“I am coming to realize that more with each passing day,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Raphael has made it clear to me almost from the beginning that he prizes his siblings and friends above all else. I respect his protective nature, though I know he does not do me the same courtesy.”

“My brother is slow to trust,” Leo said. “The two of you haven’t seen eye to eye on how some of our hunts should have been approached.”

“I fear that I am too goal oriented,” Mr. Hidesato said. “My objectives often overlook the means necessary to reach them. If I am to guide your quest, I will have to modify my methods to
take into account your unique . . . relationships.”

“Helping us to know every possible danger offered by any creature we are sent to capture would go a long way towards earning my brothers’ trust,” Leo said. “It’s best if you aren’t the one to suggest that someone act as bait.”

“Thank you, I will keep those suggestions in mind,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Regarding the connection the four of you have, it came to me after Donatello’s remarkable display of power that your bond is the reason you are able to tap into that magic.”

Leo appeared thoughtful. “The way Raph was able to access the warder magic last night has me wondering the same thing. Surely there were members of your clan who were close in the way that we are. Couples with both an emotional and physical bond. You said the ability to tap into the magic contained in the symbols and wield that power as a combat tool was almost unheard of. That means it’s been done before.”

“I have a vague memory of someone in our line with that ability,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Perhaps the account was one I read in a journal.”

Up to that point, Mr. Hidesato had been forthright in his conversation, but Leo noticed that his response now was both short and vague. A shutter had come down to cover Mr. Hidesato’s feelings and Leo had to wonder what the man was still hiding from them.

“Reading through the journals has been one of my priorities,” Leo said carefully. “There are many of them and some are difficult to decipher. If I could find the one that makes reference to the warder symbols, it might help my brothers and me to learn how to more easily access the magic in them.”

“My Father taught me a mental exercise that is meant to focus one’s inner power through the symbols,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It was meant as a way to strengthen the protections offered by the symbols. Perhaps if I teach this to you and your brothers, you can also use it to further enhance your own unique magical weapons.”

“It would be good if we could at least find the switch that turns that power on when we need it, rather than waiting for an emotional overload to do the trick,” Leo said dryly. “In a battle, timing is everything.”

Movement from the direction of the house drew Leo’s attention and he looked up to see Mikey walking towards them. “Hey, food’s getting cold. You coming inside today or what?”

“Please excuse me,” Leo told Mr. Hidesato as he stood up. “Meals are very important to my semi-rude brother.”

“I’m not rude,” Mikey protested, “I’m direct. Have you eaten Mr. H? There’s more than enough.”

“Thank you, Michelangelo. I had breakfast earlier,” Mr. Hidesato said. “There are conference calls I must make in a half hour which will keep me inside for the remainder of the day. I am going to enjoy the outdoors while I can.”

“Boy, do we ever know that feeling,” Mikey said as he walked away with Leo.

Don and Raph were at the kitchen table when Leo came inside and he joined them. Scooping eggs onto his plate, Leo helped himself to bacon and toast, giving Mikey a grateful smile when his brother put a fresh cup of tea in front of him.
“You two seemed pretty cozy. Was he critiquing our performance?” Don asked.

“Since he ain’t shown us anything, he’d do best to keep his mouth shut,” Raph said before taking a bite of toast.

“He wanted to talk about how we access the magic in our warder brands,” Leo told them. “He knows about our relationship.”

Don dropped his fork and Raph set his glass of milk down hard. Only Mikey seemed unperturbed by that revelation, calmly chomping down a slice of bacon.

“How does he know? We’ve done nothing overt in front of him,” Don said.

“What Don wants to know is if he’s spying on us,” Raph said gruffly.

Leo shook his head. “Mr. Hidesato is a man who notices things and reaches conclusions based on his observances. He’s not an easy man to keep secrets from.”

“It didn’t look like knowing we’re together bothered him,” Mikey said.

“Apparently it doesn’t,” Leo said. “He was more fascinated by the idea that our special bond is part of the reason we’re able to turn our symbols into weapons.”

“There had to have been warder couples in the past,” Don said. “Living, loving, and hunting together the way we do.”

Leo took a sip of tea before saying, “I mentioned that as well. To be honest, up until then we were having a nice, open conversation. When I asked about past warders with that ability, Mr. Hidesato got a bit cagey.”

Raph snorted. “So he’s hiding something still. Big surprise. Did ya’ call him out on it?”

“What would be the point?” Leo asked, frowning at his brother. “He’s adept at side-stepping direct questions. I have a feeling that every answer we need is in those journals. Those are what we should spend our free time on.”

“Well the three of ya’ can slog through those journals on your own for a while,” Raph said as he got up to deposit his plate and utensils into the dishwasher. “I’ve got a date with the weights and punching bag downstairs.”

He left his brothers to finish their meal. The remaining three turtles ate in silence for a few minutes and then Don said, “Mr. H is so fixated on recapturing those creatures that we could be ritualistically sacrificing goats in the kitchen and he wouldn’t care.”

“Your point?” Leo asked.

“Don’s point is what’s he gonna be like when we’ve got all those creatures safely locked up in the box again,” Mikey said. “When he doesn’t need us anymore. He talks about us taking over the family business, but maybe he says that cause right now he’s desperate.”

“We can’t join the Warder High Council or even have other warder clans become aware of our existence,” Don said. “How would he explain to them that he’s handing the reins over to successors that they know nothing about? It’s beginning to sound like the proverbial carrot-and-stick approach to getting us to do this job for him.”
“I’ve never expressed an interest in accepting this as a life-long commission,” Leo said. “In fact, I’ve told him that there is a downside to what he’s asking. He shouldn’t be counting on our desire to own a fancy house to keep us in line. We’ve explained that we’re doing this because we protect our city. It’s what we do.”

“We just want to be certain you maintain a healthy skepticism about Mr. H,” Don said.

“Yeah, ‘cause you two looked pretty tight sitting out there on that bench together,” Mikey added.

“The two of you are starting to sound like Raph,” Leo said. “The lines of communication have to remain open between us, he’s our guide and mentor. He was raised in a hierarchy; his clan functioned in that manner and so do all the other warders. Of course he’s going to convey his instructions and concerns through me. You guys shouldn’t read any more than that into it.”

“Speaking of reading,” Don said as he got up, “we have a big task ahead of us. Mikey, you’re going to scan journals for me so I can get to work on the program that will sort and identify entries.”

“As long as I can watch TV while I do it,” Mikey replied. “I guess you’re going to be reading journals again today, right Leo? Hey, you didn’t have one of your dreams last night, did you?”

Leo finished his tea as he stood up and then began gathering dirty dishes. “Yes, I’ll be reading again. No, I didn’t have a dream last night. I realized that earlier. I hope that doesn’t mean we’re not going to track down another creature soon. If we’re not steadily capturing them, they could do a lot of damage.”

“Not to mention the fact that the other warder clans might feel the need to send someone to take over the job,” Don said. “They won’t know this city the way we do.”

“Oh care about it,” Mikey said. “At least according to Mr. H.”

Once the kitchen was tidy, the brothers went directly to the office to begin their various tasks. Going to the coffee table, Leo found that the journals he’d placed there had been tidied into stacks. Seeing that his sorting system had been disarranged, Leo sighed.

“What’s wrong?” Mikey asked, pausing on his way to the war room.

“At least he’s not putting them back on the shelves,” Leo replied. “I need a system like the one Donny uses so I’ll know which of these I’ve read and which hold significant passages.”

“He’s got stacks of those little colored pieces of paper with the sticky stuff on the back,” Mikey said. “Pick a color.”

Eyes twinkling with humor, Leo said, “Blue.”

Mikey grinned. “Why’d I even ask?”

He disappeared into the war room only to reappear a minute later with a cube of blue colored sticky paper and a pen.

“Here, now you can even make notes before you stick these in a journal,” Mikey said, handing over the items with a flourish.
“Thanks, I think I will,” Leo said. Grabbing a journal he sat down on the couch to begin reading.

A couple of hours later Raph entered the office and saw Leo sprawled on the couch, his shell against one arm and his feet up. His brother was so immersed in the journal he was reading that he seemed not to notice Raph’s presence.

“Keep sitting in that spot so often and we’ll have to carve your name into the couch,” Raph said.

“These journals are fascinating,” Leo said, looking up. “It’s not just about the hunt for creatures, it’s the entire history of the clan. Their day to day existence and the world they lived in.”

“It figures you’d get caught up in that stuff,” Raph said, picking up Leo’s feet so he could sit down on the couch. He dropped his brother’s feet onto his lap and leaned back with his hands behind his head. “Find anything that’s actually useful?”

“Verification that the creatures adapt,” Leo said. “You remember that some of the yokai can have multiples? Their behavior changes as their environment becomes more industrialized and the population density increases.”

“What does that mean for us?” Raph asked.

“It means that we can’t be completely literal in how we hunt these things,” Leo said. “There are creatures that primarily inhabit mountains. We have no mountains, but we do have skyscrapers.”

“Oh, yeah, I can see that,” Raph said. “Good to know. Ya’ think they learn to adapt ‘cause they read minds or something? That’s a scary thought.”

Leo closed the journal on his finger to hold his place. “It’s possible that some of them are capable of reading their victim pool. The Aka manto made itself look like a restroom attendant.”

“The next one we meet is gonna be mighty pissed when it goes to read my mind,” Raph said.

That made Leo chuckle. “As if you don’t say out loud exactly what you think.”

“Saves on misunderstandings,” Raph countered with a straight face.

Mikey appeared at that moment. “I’ll make a light lunch if one of you guys gets in there and takes my place scanning journals. Don’s being a tough task master today.”

Raph moved Leo’s feet again and got up. “I’d rather do that than sit here trying to decipher these journals. If you’re making sandwiches, don’t forget the mustard.”

Waving an acknowledgement, Mikey left the room. Time passed and it was after seven when Don received a call from April which worried him enough to gather his brothers together.

“April, I’m putting you on speaker. Could you repeat what you just told me?” Don asked.

“I would have called earlier, but Casey was in the shop with me all day,” April said. “He just left to pick up some dinner. Guys, he’s been acting very strangely since yesterday morning. Did something happen to him night before last when he was out hunting with you?”

“No,” Don said. “He lured a yokai out for us and then got out of the way while we dealt with it. What do you mean by ‘acting strangely’?”
“Any time I mention you guys, he gets . . . angry. Especially if I talk about Donny,” April said. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d say he was jealous. I told him we should go see you and work this out and he absolutely refused. He won’t go near you or Mr. Hidesato’s house. He’s not himself.”

“We’ll come by the apartment, April. Don’t tell him that you’ve talked to us,” Leo said. “Behave exactly as you normally would.”

“I’m scared, Leo. When I make any mention of Donny, Casey’s face gets so twisted with anger that he doesn’t even look like himself.” April said.

“Eat dinner, avoid any subject involving us, and don’t let him leave,” Leo said. “As soon as it’s dark enough, we’ll be there.”

“Thanks guys. I even have to erase my call log because he’s taken to checking my phone,” April said before she hung up.

“We need Mr. Hidesato,” Leo said.

“I’ll check his room,” Mikey said, darting out of the office.

“What are ya’ thinking?” Raph asked his older brother.

“Casey let all of those creatures out,” Leo said. “It’s possible one made its way back to the source and infected him. Our warder symbols give us some degree of protection, but he has none.”

“How do we know which one we’re fighting?” Don asked.

“I’m hoping Mr. Hidesato will have some idea,” Leo answered.

“I can’t find him,” Mikey said as he ran back into the room.

“See if he’s carrying his phone,” Leo said.

“Already on it,” Don responded, his shell cell in hand.

“Dammit, how come I feel like we should’ve known this would happen?” Raph asked of no one in particular.

“No answer,” Don said. “Let’s try to figure this out ourselves. What do we know about what’s happening to Casey? We have symptoms and a drastic change in behavior and a possible infection. I can plug those in as search parameters and see if any of the journals we’ve scanned mentions those things.”

“Do it,” Leo said.

Don trotted off to the war room and Raph started pacing. “Didn’t we tell that asshole to be where we could reach him? Tell me again why I shouldn’t punch him in his mouth?”

“Because that wouldn’t solve anything?” Mikey offered.

“It would make me feel better,” Raph said.

They heard the sound of the front door opening and closing. Leo looked at his brothers and said, “Stay here.”
Going out into the foyer he found that Mr. Hidesato had just come in carrying two large white bags that smelled of food. “I brought dinner.”

“It will have to wait,” Leo told him. “We have a problem.”

Mr. Hidesato followed him back into the office and set the bags down on the coffee table. “Tell me.”

Leo gave him a quick rundown of April’s phone call. Don entered just as Leo finished speaking.

“Oh thank goodness,” Don said upon seeing Mr. Hidesato. “The information we have is too vague. My program couldn’t pinpoint any one creature.”

“I need more facts as well,” Mr. Hidesato admitted. “There are ghost sicknesses, spirit infections, and yokai possessions. Mr. Jones could have any of these. I would need to hear him speak, to know the words he uses, in order to determine a proper course of action.”

“Just great,” Raph grumbled. “He sure as hell ain’t gonna come here and give ya’ a soliloquy.”

“Then we go with the first plan,” Leo said. “We go to him. Where is the phone we gave you, Mr. Hidesato?”

“It is in my room,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I will get it.”

“Don will call you when we get to April’s apartment,” Leo said. “We’ll leave the line open so you can hear everything that transpires. Once you’ve determined what’s wrong with Casey and if it is yokai related, Don can come back here and get the necessary coin.”

“And what’ll the rest of us be doing?” Raph asked.

“Keeping Casey calm,” Leo said.

“If he is possessed, he will fight you,” Mr. Hidesato warned. “The yokai will give him extra strength.”

“Then it’s a good thing there a four of us,” Leo said.

“Take my car,” Mr. Hidesato said, tossing the keys to Donatello. “It is at the curb. The windows are tinted and it has diplomatic plates. You will not be stopped.”

“Let’s go,” Leo said.

Checking the security monitor at the front door, Leo determined that the street was clear before the brothers left the house. Parked at the curb was a black Rolls-Royce Phantom sedan with darkly tinted windows all around. The turtles quickly piled into the vehicle, with Don behind the wheel.

As they sped down the street, Don said, “If this wasn’t such an urgent situation, I’d really be enjoying the way this car drives.”

In the front seat next to him, Raph said, “Maybe Mr. H will let ya’ take it for a spin when this is over.”

“Maybe he’ll give it to you,” Mikey said, running his hands across the leather upholstery.
“How fast can you push it, Donny?” Leo asked.

“With these plates? Ten over without the police looking at us sideways,” Don answered.

“Do it,” Leo said, his expression grim.

“Would’ve been nice if you would have had one of your dreams last night,” Mikey said. “Then maybe we’d know what’s up with Casey.”

“That’s exactly why we can’t count on these powers,” Leo said. “We have to stick with what we do best and rely on our training.”

It wasn’t long before Don turned into the alley alongside April’s shop. Using his key, Don opened the side door and he and his brothers went inside.

They had expected to find April and Casey upstairs, but they immediately heard both of their voices and knew the pair was in the shop itself.

“Casey, this is ridiculous,” April said. “Searching the shop computer to see if Donny is sending me secret messages is too much.”

“Ya’ saying ya’ don’t want me to look? Ya’ saying ya’ got something to hide?” Casey asked.

Don pulled out his shell cell and dialed Mr. Hidesato’s number. The man picked up on the first ring with a curt, “I am listening.”

“I’m saying I have nothing to hide,” April said. “Donatello is my friend and he’s your friend too.”

“So ya’ keep telling me,” Casey said. He started to say something else, but it was cut off by a fit of coughing.

“Casey, come and sit down,” April said, sounding worried. “You don’t look well.”

“Bet ya’ wish I’d die, then ya’ could be with Donatello,” Casey said, his tone ugly.

“Why are you suddenly so fixated on him?” April asked.

Leo put his mouth close to Don’s head and whispered, “Stay back and let the three of us handle this.”

Don nodded, remaining next to a large china cabinet and therefore out of sight. With a gesture, Leo indicated that Raph, as Casey’s best friend, should step out of hiding first.

“Yo Casey, what’s going on?” Raph asked, sauntering towards his friend as though he hadn’t a care in the world.

“What are ya’ doing here?” Casey snarled. His eyes darted down to the symbols on Raph’s arm and he took a step back before looking over at April. “Did ya’ call him?”

“If you’re upset with them for some reason, then you guys should talk it out,” April insisted. “That’s why they’re here.”

“Oh right, they travel in packs. Where’s the girlfriend steal ing one? Did he go right up to April’s bedroom to wait for her?”
“Ya’ know better than that, Case. April’s been with ya’ through thick and thin. She and Donny ain’t never been nothing but friends,” Raph said.

“Stay away from me,” Casey said as Raph took a step nearer. “Ya’ green freaks are done ruining my life. I blame the four of ya’ for what happened with that damn box. Shit like that never happened to me until I met ya’.”

Leo slid his eyes over to Mikey and slightly inclined his head to the left. Mikey winked to indicate his understanding and began moving slowly to the right in order to flank Casey.

“Casey, ya’ gotta help me out here man,” Raph said, working to keep Casey’s focus on him. “Ya’ ain’t acting like yourself. If something’s in there with ya’, I need ya’ to fight your way out enough to give me a clue.”

Suddenly Mikey’s arm began to burn and he yelped, slapping his hand down atop the warder symbols. The sound was enough to pull Casey’s attention off Raph and he saw that Leo and Mikey were moving to cut off his escape routes.

Casey’s face changed. It became twisted and warped until it no longer looked like their friend.

“This one is mine!” Casey screamed, the voice coming out of him shrill and very unlike his own. “He gave us freedom and he will not be taken from me!”

Spinning on his heel, Casey raced past the startled brothers to leap over a display case and smash his way through one of the front windows. Landing feet first on the sidewalk, Casey took off running.

“Mr. H knows what it is!” Don shouted, dashing out of hiding.

“Go to the house,” Leo ordered as Raph and Mikey shot out through the broken window in pursuit of Casey. “Track my phone to find us. Fast as you can, Donny.”

Leo leapt through the window to join the chase and Don turned to the side door. April ran up to him and caught his arm. “What should I do?”

“Stay here in case he doubles back,” Don said. “Keep your phone in your hand and call if you see him.”

He didn’t wait for her to acknowledge the instructions. Jumping into the car, Don backed out and spun the car around, exceeding his own self-prescribed speed limit as he headed back to the house. Don was less concerned with police than with getting to Casey in time to save him.

Sliding into the curb with a squeal of brakes, Don threw the car into park and raced into the house. He found Mr. Hidesato waiting for him with a coin and the wax tool.

“It is Lady Rokujō or also known as Rokujō No Miyasudokoro,” Mr. Hidesato said. “She is the embodiment of repressed jealousy, which transforms itself into a possessing demon.”

“How do I get her out of Casey?” Don asked.

“The coin must be placed at the hollow of his neck,” Mr. Hidesato said, touching a spot on his own throat. “Here. It will draw the dark spirit from him. But be warned, the creature will fight hard to retain her hold on your friend. She will use his body to battle you. In your efforts to avoid hurting him, you may yourselves be hurt. The creature will give him added strength.”
“She’s making him fast too,” Don said as he activated the tracker on his phone. Poised to leave, he asked, “Do I need to know anything else?”

“Draw her out of him as quickly as you can,” Mr. Hidesato said. “This spirit will drain him of vital energy and diminish his life force. The sickness can kill him.”

“I have my phone if you need to call,” Don said, leaving the house as quickly as he’d entered it.

Leo quickly caught up to Raph and Mikey who were trying to avoid the street lights as they chased after Casey. The block where April’s shop was located was quiet at night, which was helpful, but they were heading towards a more densely populated area.

“I don’t see him,” Leo said. “Do you know where he went?”

“He’s moving fast,” Raph said. “Last I saw of him he was staying on this street. We might have to separate.”

“Ow! Ow, ow, ow, ow!” Mikey exclaimed, clutching at the symbols on his arm once more.

“What the hell, Mikey?” Raph asked.

“They’re burning me again!” Mikey yelped. “Wait, it’s fading.”

Leo came to a sudden halt, which in turn stopped his brothers. “Mikey, go down that side street and tell us what happens.”

Though curious, Mikey didn’t waste time asking why, he just did as Leo said. Only partway down the side street the symbols began to glow again.

“Shell! He must have gone this way!” Mikey shouted.

“Keep going Mikey, we’re right behind you,” Leo said. “Let the symbols guide you to him.”

“He’s got a damn demon tracking device?” Raph asked as they ran along behind their younger brother.

“That must be Mikey’s power,” Leo said. “The symbols are showing him the way to a creature, in this case the spirit possessing Casey.”

Mikey made another quick turn, taking them away from the brighter city blocks and into an area containing a couple of older, condemned buildings.

“Where’s he going?” Raph asked.

“She,” Leo corrected. “I don’t think Casey’s in charge of his body right now.”

Clutching his arm again, Mikey made a course adjustment which took him directly to an abandoned factory building.

“He went in there,” Mikey said.

The screech of tires made all three brothers flatten themselves against the building to avoid being seen. They relaxed when they realized it was Mr. Hidesato’s car.

Don parked in front of the building and ran over to join his siblings. “Where is he?”
“Inside,” Leo said. “Mikey can track him with the symbols on his arm.”

“We have to get to him quick,” Don told them. “Mr. H said the spirit will drain his life force until he’s dead.”

Raph pushed back the boards that Casey had already broken through to get inside the building and the turtles entered. The ground floor was mostly open space, with a few cubicle type offices interspersed throughout. It was also very dark.

“Mikey?” Leo asked.

Holding his arm out in front of him, Mikey moved forward slowly. When the glow intensified, it let him know which direction to take.

“Figures I’d get the power that hurts like crazy,” Mikey mumbled under his breath.

“Spread out around Mikey,” Leo whispered. “Be ready for anything.”

Moving in silent formation, the brothers searched for Casey while Mikey kept them going in the right direction. That the man hadn’t exited the building was evident by the brightly burning symbols on Mikey’s arm.

It was quiet. Every few seconds they heard the creak of the building as it lost the day’s heat. Far off a horn sounded. They were halfway across the ground floor, a set of stairs at the back of the building directly ahead of them. Casey must have gone up.

Mikey was grimacing. Leo glanced at him, seeing the look of pain and feeling bad for his brother. This was the first time any of their powers had exhibited a down side.

The smell of dust grew stronger, an indication that someone had recently disturbed the layers that covered the floor. Leo wagged a finger towards the staircase, letting his brothers know they would be taking them.

A piercing shriek suddenly cut through the silence and Casey came barreling out of the darkness. He slammed into Donatello, throwing the turtle to the floor before repeatedly striking him in the face.

Raph leaped forward and wrapped his arms around Casey’s upper body, dragging him off of Don. Casey was growling like a maddened animal as he twisted in Raph’s grip, trying to free his arms.

Leo grabbed hold of Casey’s wrists, pinning them to his sides. Casey kicked him and then tried to stomp Raph’s feet.

“Grab his legs!” Raph shouted, feeling his friend begin to slip free.

Mikey threw himself at Casey’s calves, catching them in his arms and pulling himself flush against the man’s legs.

“Get him down on his back and hold him!” Don yelled, digging the trap coin out of his belt.

“I will destroy you all!” the creature screamed at them as they wrestled Casey to the ground.

All three turtles were practically sitting on Casey to keep him from escaping. He writhed and twisted on the floor, snarling and snapping at the turtles like a rabid beast. Kneeling next to him,
Don flattened him palm against Casey’s forehead to keep his head from jerking, and pressed the trap coin to the hollow point of his neck.

“No!” The shriek reverberated through the building, shaking the windows. Casey fought even harder, his face contorted beyond all recognition.

Then a dark green smoke began to spin inside the interior of the coin, rising up above it to form a small mushroom shaped cloud before being sucked back down into the coin. Casey went completely limp and Don snatched the coin from his neck, placing it swiftly inside the wax tool.

The brothers climbed off of Casey and Raph leaned down, turning his head to listen for the sound of breathing. Touching a finger to his neck, Raph felt for a pulse.

“He’s okay, I think,” Raph said. “Pulse is good, breathing is even. Did we get her?”

Don held up the coin, showing him that the wax seal was in place and Mikey held out his arm. “It stopped burning.”

Casey gasped and opened his eyes, looking around at the turtles with surprise. “What the hell’s going on? Where am I?”

“Ya’ feeling okay, buddy?” Raph asked. Casey started to sit up and Raph helped him.

“My head hurts,” Casey said, rubbing his forehead. “ Somebody want to tell me why I’m sitting on a dirty floor in some old building?”

“What’s the last thing you remember?” Leo asked.

“Leaving you guys’ place with my torn leather jacket,” Casey said. “I don’t even remember explaining that to April. What happened, did she bean me with a frying pan or something?”

“Not quite,” Raph said. “Can ya’ walk? We need to get ya’ home. April’s worried sick about ya’.”

“Someone’s gonna tell me how I got here, right?” Casey asked as he slowly got to his feet. “I feel like I missed something important.”

“We’ll tell ya’ everything as soon as we get ya’ back to April,” Raph said. “She’s gonna want to know what happened too.”

The group left the building and walked over to where Don had left the car. When he saw it, Casey let out a whistle. “Nice car,” he said and then then as Don opened the door and the interior light came on, Casey asked, “What the hell happened to your face, Donny? Ya’ look like ya’ went a few rounds with Juan Marquez.”

“I feel like I did too,” Don said. “We’ll explain it all in a bit. Then I want to go home to an ice pack.”

“Yeah okay,” Casey said, climbing into the back seat. “Weird night, huh?”

“You don’t know the half of it,” Leo replied as Don started the car and began the drive back to April’s shop.

End Rokujō No Miyasudokoro
Night of the Yanari

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
Word Count: 9,145
Rated: R 2k3 violence, language, mild tcest

Chapter Notes
“Is that still bothering ya’?” Raph asked his younger brother.

Mikey gave him a perplexed look before realizing he’d been rubbing the symbols on his arm.

“Nah, I guess it’s just phantom pain,” Mikey said as he studied his arm.

They were sitting next to each other in the back seat of the car as Don drove them to April’s shop. Casey was slumped against the seat on the far side of Raph, his eyes closed. The yokai who’d taken possession of his body had left him with a bad headache.

“What’d it feel like?” Raph asked Mikey, keeping his voice down.

“The closer we got to that thing inside Casey, the worse it burned,” Mikey said. “Kinda like when I was first branded. Guess I have that to look forward to every time we go after one of those creatures.”

“We’ve gotta catch all these creatures, don’t we?” Mikey asked. “I can handle a little pain if it helps get the job done. It’s not doing any damage to me.”

Though Raph did not say it out loud, he did think to himself, “We hope.” They all just assumed that the warder magic branded on their arms wasn’t broiling their insides, but they had no way to know that for sure.

When they pulled into the alley next to April’s shop, they saw her waiting in the doorway for them. She ran to Casey as soon as he got out of the car and he put his arm around her shoulders before walking inside with her. The turtles followed.

The entire group traipsed upstairs to the couple’s apartment. Casey sank down on the sofa with a groan and April sat next to him, her hand automatically going to his forehead to check for a fever.

“Casey, are you all right?” April asked. “What happened?”

“The guys will have to tell ya’ ‘cause I don’t remember anything,” Casey said.

April looked expectantly up at Leo. “Casey was possessed by one the creatures,” he said. “One with a jealous streak.”

“Yeah, and she decided to be jealous about Donny,” Raph said, jerking a thumb towards his brainy brother.

“I did that to your face?” Casey asked, sitting up. “Man, I’m sorry!”

“You didn’t do it, the Rokujō did,” Don said.

“She sent ya’ through one of the windows downstairs too,” Raph said. “Ya’ better rinse off and clean those cuts on your arm.”

“We’ll patch up the window before we leave,” Leo said. “The supplies are still in the basement?”
“Yes, piled against a wall,” April said as she examined the cuts along Casey’s arms and forehead. “Are you all right?”

“Got a pounding headache,” Casey said. “Don’t really feel nothing else right now.”

“Ya’ probably will later,” Raph said.

“Worst part is not remembering anything,” Casey said. “Feels like the morning after I drank too much and I’m waiting for someone to tell me what stupid shit I did.”

“You didn’t do anything terrible,” April assured him. “The creature just kept going on about the guys, especially Don. It said I let them influence me too much and that I always chose them over you.”

“That ain’t how I feel,” Casey said quickly.

“I know that,” April said. “It’s why I knew something was way off with you. That and the fact that you know they are in a relationship, so there’s no way Don would be trying to steal me away.”

“We should let you get cleaned up, take some aspirin, and go to bed,” Don said. “Don’t worry about the window. Like Leo said, we can seal that before we leave.”

“Wait,” Casey said, his tone carrying a certain urgency. “What happened to me, that thing taking control of my body, how do I keep that from happening again? How do I keep one of them creatures from doing the same thing to April?”

The turtles all looked at each other. Finally Raph said, “We don’t know. Maybe Mr. H does.”

“Why did it pick me in the first place?” Casey asked. “Was it in me this whole time since I let those things out?”

“I doubt it,” Don answered. “I think it worked its way back around to you. Mr. H said it would drain you if it possessed you for too long.”

“‘Worked its way back’ would seem to indicate that the creature had an awareness of Casey in the first place,” April said, narrowing her eyes at Don. “What aren’t you telling us?”

Don appeared uncomfortable, but April’s gaze was unwavering. “Remember that she said ‘he gave us freedom’, before sending Casey through the front window? She knew Casey had released the yokai.”

“Then that means they all know it,” April said.

“And that means they could come here to hunt me down at any time,” Casey said. “Ya’ gotta make Mr. H give me and April those symbols.”

“He already proved to you that the warder symbol won’t attach to you,” Don reminded him. “You haven’t the proper training.”

“Then give it to April,” Casey said. “She’s been training with Master Splinter for years.”

“A warder can only be someone who has trained with at least two masters,” Leo said. “The magic won’t attach to her either.”
“Then find another one and train her,” Casey snapped. “How long could it take?”

“That’s another thing we’ll have to ask Mr. H,” Leo said in what he hoped was a soothing tone.

It didn’t calm Casey at all. “Great. Terrific. What do we do in the meantime?” He turned to April. “Maybe ya’ should go live in the big house with the guys.”

“That doesn’t keep you safe,” April said. “Fear is not going to rule my life. Shredder couldn’t drive me away and neither will these creatures.”

“So what keeps them away from Mr. H’s house?” Mikey asked. All eyes turned to him. “Just saying. Gotta be more than just the symbols on our arms, right?”

Don appeared thoughtful. “We might not be able to give you the warder symbols, but maybe we can ward this building.”

“What do you mean Donny?” April asked.

“There are many beliefs about symbols bringing luck,” Don said. “Like hanging a horseshoe right side up over a door or entryway. Or wearing animal totems, like earrings, facing towards your body to bring luck to you. Maybe if we carve the warder symbol above the shop’s main entrance and I can transfer some power into it, then that will keep the yokai away.”

“It’s worth a try,” Leo said. “It can’t hurt.”

“I’ll grab a ladder,” Raph offered, heading downstairs.

Mikey went with him and the others followed, waiting near the shop’s front entrance for them to bring a ladder up from the basement. Raph returned with the ladder and some boards for the front window, while Mikey carried a couple of hammers and a bucket of nails.

Climbing the ladder, Don used one of his kunai to etch the warder symbols into the wooden doorframe. While he was doing that, Raph and Mikey exited through the broken window and began to put up boards to cover the opening.

April swept up the broken glass and disposed of it after insisting that Casey sit down and do nothing.

Holding the ladder to keep it steady, Leo watched as Don placed his hand against the symbols. Closing his eyes, Don concentrated and for a few minutes, nothing happened. Then his arm began to glow, but it was faint and disappeared almost as quickly as it had appeared.

Panting with his efforts, Don said, “I don’t know if I can do this.”

“Ya’ gotta do it Donny,” Casey said, starting to rise. April pressed against his shoulders to remind him to stay seated. “Ya’ gotta protect April. I could have killed her tonight. Next time we might not be so lucky. Next time ya’ guys might not be around to save our butts.”

Those words got to Donatello. Casey was their best friend, but April was like a sister to them. They had to be protected.

Don’s heart beat quickened as adrenaline began to flow through his body. Once more he pressed his hand to the symbols and this time his entire body started to glow. Under his palm, tiny wisps of smoke curled up from the wood and then there was a bright flash before the symbols
themselves began to shine.

Removing his hand, Don let out a breathy sigh as the warder magic infusing his body dissipated. For a second he teetered atop the ladder and then he fell.

Leo caught him. “Are you okay, Donny?” he asked, easing his brother down so he could sit on the floor.

Raph appeared in the open doorway. “What’s going on? We saw a flash of light come from over here.”

“Don has managed to ward the place against the escaped creatures,” Leo said. “April and Casey will now at least be safe in their own home.”

“Maybe once the yokai get that message they’ll stay the hell away from them permanently,” Raph said before going back to help Mikey finish sealing the broken window.

“Phew,” Don said as Leo helped him to his feet. “That power punch takes a lot out of a guy.”

“We should head back to HQ and let Casey get some sleep,” Leo said. “It’s been a rough night for all of us.”

“I’ll lock up and set the alarm when we leave,” Don offered. “Casey, do you need some help getting back upstairs?”

“Nah, I’m good,” Casey told him, standing up and flinging an arm across April’s shoulders.

“I’ll call a glazier tomorrow,” April said. “Thanks guys. I don’t know what we’d do without you.”

“Anytime sis,” Don said, grinning at the honorary title he’d given her.

After the pair headed upstairs, Leo folded up the ladder and Don went outside to survey his brothers’ repair job. Once they had everything sealed up as well as they could, Don connected the window’s alarm contacts to one of the boards.

When the turtles had returned the tools and ladder to the basement, they locked the front door and exited through the one that gave out onto the alley. Don set the alarm and locked that door before climbing into Mr. Hidesato’s car and driving back to HQ.

Despite the fact that street parking was at a premium, no one ever seemed to park near Mr. Hidesato’s house. Don pulled in at the curb and after carefully checking that the street was deserted, the turtles dashed into the house.

“Wonder where Mr. H keeps that car most of the time,” Raph said after they were inside.

“There is a small parking garage on the corner,” Mr. Hidesato said as he came out of the office. “Usually it is parked there. Most of my neighbors are diplomats or business entrepreneurs.”

“In other words, the rich and snooty,” Raph said.

“How is Mr. Jones?” Mr. Hidesato asked, ignoring Raph’s jibe. “Has he suffered any ill effects from the possession?”

“Just a headache and a mild case of paranoia,” Don said, handing over the trap coin and wax
“Don carved a warder symbol over the door at April’s,” Mikey said. “Then he ramped it up with some of his magic mojo.”

Mr. Hidesato looked confused. “You were able to apply a magical shield to her building?”

“I think so,” Don said. “All I did was concentrate on pushing energy from my symbol into the one I carved into the wood.”

“Astonishing,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Well Don ain’t the only one who put on a magic display tonight,” Raph said. “Mikey’s extra power kicked in too, but it’s no walk in the park. It hurts him. How come ya’ didn’t think to mention that some of these powers come with a downside?”

“These are not gifts with which I am familiar,” Mr. Hidesato said. “What power has manifested itself now?”

Leo explained the situation they’d found themselves in while trying to deal with a possessed Casey and how Mikey’s warder brand had suddenly acted like a homing beacon.

“The way his brand reacted to the proximity of a yokai helped us flush her out of hiding,” Leo said as he finished the story, “but it was painful for him. There has to be a way to turn it off.”

Mr. Hidesato frowned. “Having a way to track these creatures will give you a great advantage in hunting them.”

“Put your listening ears on,” Raph snapped. “It hurts like hell. We can hunt the damn things without having to burn the shit out of my little brother.”

“It’ll be okay, Raph. I can handle it,” Mikey said.

“Now ya’ think ya’ gotta take one for the team?” Raph asked, growling angrily at his brother. “Ya’ don’t know if that’s burning your insides while it’s sending ya’ signals. None of us knows what these damn powers are doing to us.”

“I have worn my symbol for most of my adult life without suffering any ill effects,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“With all due respect, you haven’t experienced any of these advanced powers either,” Donatello said. “Granted, they do provide us some advantages, but at what cost? Once we’ve recaptured the creatures, can the symbols and their attached magic be removed?”

“No one has ever tried,” Mr. Hidesato said. He looked at Leo. “Without the symbols, one cannot be a Warder.”

Leo understood the implications of that statement. Without the symbols, they could not take on the Hidesato clan responsibility for safeguarding the coffer and captured yokai. Mr. Hidesato would be left without heirs to the family line.

Deciding whether or not retain the symbols or to accept a lifelong commitment to essentially become jailers required some hard thought. Contemplating all of the pros and cons wasn’t something that they needed to attempt at midnight when they were all tired.
“We’re not going to solve this right now,” Leo said. “Our answer might be in the journals we haven’t yet read. I’d suggest we all get some sleep and start off fresh in the morning.”

“I second that,” Don said quickly, hoping to head off a confrontation between Raph and Mr. Hidesato. “Mikey’s had a hard night.”

The reminder of what Michelangelo had endured brought out Raph’s protective instincts. “Come on little bro’, let’s get ya’ tucked into bed.”

He wrapped an arm around Mikey’s shoulder and started him towards the stairs. Mr. Hidesato took that as a dismissal and returned to the office.

Raph had one foot on the bottom step when Mikey pulled away from him. “I’m too wired to sleep. You guys wanna hang out in the media room with me?”

He was already moving in that direction as he offered the invitation. Raph rolled his eyes and followed. “We might have to move a bed in there for him,” he said to no one in particular.

When his brothers caught up to Mikey after detouring to the kitchen for an ice pack, they found him searching the area housing the video equipment. “What are you looking for?” Don asked him.

“Where’s the gaming hardware? We’ve got a big screen, we’ve got speakers, but where’s the rest of it?” Mikey asked, darting to the other end of the room.

Don laughed. “Mikey, Mr. Hidesato Senior was an old man. I doubt that he played video games.”

Mikey looked crestfallen. “How am I supposed to relax?”

“How’s about we order up one of those movies on demand?” Raph asked, dropping into a seat next to Leo.

“Fine,” Mikey said with a huff. “As long as I pick the movie.”

Leo tossed the remote to him. After finally settling on a movie, the lights were dimmed and the brothers put their feet up.

Not quite a third of the movie had played before it became clear that Raph and Leo were more interested in each other than the film. Though they tried to be quiet, the occasional churr could be heard above the sound system.

Mikey squirmed in his seat, trying to pretend he was still engrossed in the movie. Taking the ice pack from his bruised face, Don reached for Mikey’s hand. With an understanding smile, he turned his brother’s arm and leaned in to kiss the symbol branded on the inside of Mikey’s forearm.

“We can always watch this movie some other time,” Don whispered as Leo and Raph got out of their seats and left the media room. “I’m sure I can find another way to help you wind down.”

The words were barely out of his mouth when Mikey bounced out of his seat and turned the television off. Leaving Leo and Raph to the nest in the main bedroom, Don and Mikey utilized the guest room for their activities.

A little over an hour later the pair returned to the shared room, finding Leo and Raph soundly sleeping. Crawling into bed with them, the two were soon asleep as well.
Rattling and pounding.

The sounds were giving Leonardo a headache. They wouldn’t stop; it felt as though a dozen hammers were slamming into objects all around him. To make things worse, the floor began to shake beneath his feet.

Leo looked around for the cause of all the noise. Movement flickered to his left and when he turned, there was movement to his right.

Clasping his hands to his head, Leo attempted to block out the sounds, grimacing as they only seemed to grow louder. Within seconds the crashing, drumming noises felt like they were right inside his skull.

With a gasp, Leo’s eyes snapped open. Raph lay partially draped across Leo’s body, his soft snores the only sounds in the bedroom.

Breathing deeply, Leo’s slow exhale took some of the residual headache away. He knew that he’d had another prophetic dream. They had a different feeling to them that was quite unlike regular dreams, both during the dream and after he’d awakened.

Turning his head slowly, Leo located both Don and Mikey, ensuring himself that he hadn’t disturbed their slumber. Shifting one of Raph’s arms into a more comfortable spot, Leo closed his eyes and went back to sleep.

In the morning, the turtles grabbed a quick breakfast and decided to spend a few hours with Master Splinter. It was a Monday, a day when April opened her shop later and usually trained with their father in the morning. Though they weren’t sure she’d be there after the previous night’s experience, they hoped she would be.

When the brothers entered the lair, they found that April was already training with Master Splinter. After depositing some supplies in the kitchen, the turtles joined the practice session.

April used the opportunity of their presence to spar with them. She had progressed enough to be a real challenge, and her adopted siblings were more than a little proud.

Leo mulled over April’s accomplishments a while later, as the group sat down to lunch together. The brothers took turns catching Master Splinter up on their activities and telling him how Raph and Mikey’s warder powers had manifested.

“Is Michelangelo the only one of you to have suffered ill effects from your powers?” Master Splinter asked.

“Don’s power packs a wallop but it takes a lot out of him,” Raph said.

“Makes me feel like I’ve gone ten rounds with the heavyweight champ of the world,” Don said.

“Mine leaves me feeling somewhat disoriented for a little while,” Leo said. “I’ll sometimes have a mild headache as well.”

“Guess mine’s the only one without an after effect,” Raph said.

Mikey snorted. “You were pretty eager to jump, uh . . . .” he paused, realizing what he’d been on the verge of saying in front of Master Splinter and April.
“What Mikey’s trying to say in his usual less than subtle way, Raph, is that your power made you frisky,” Don said. “At least, it made you more eager than normal.”

“Wouldn’t call that a bad side effect,” Raph said with a cocky grin.

“Speaking of side effects,” Leo said, looking at April, “how’s Casey doing?”

“He’s doing fine,” April said. “He slept well and his head doesn’t hurt anymore. He still has no memory of what happened while he was possessed. He was working with the glazier this morning to get the front window replaced. My part-time clerk is opening the shop.”

“Leo, I’ve been giving some thought as to why you didn’t dream about the Rokujō,” Don said. “I’m wondering if by inhabiting Casey’s body, it managed to cloak itself from your emerging psychic ability.”

“Wouldn’t that presuppose that the creature had a certain level of intelligence?” April asked.

“They do adapt,” Don said. “We’ve talked to Mr. Hidesato about that. He said that some of them are cunning and can become acclimated to their surroundings. The Rokujō knew that Casey was the one who freed her, so she also probably knew that warders would come hunting her again.”

“Stands to reason that if she’s a product of magic, she’d know what kind of magic might be hunting her,” Mikey said. “Don’t you think?”

“If they can adapt and change, then you must be able to do so as well, my sons,” Master Splinter said. “You must embrace your new gifts and learn to manage them so that they do not manage you.”

“And just how do we manage Mikey’s power?” Raph asked. “He glows. Shell, Don glows too. How are we supposed to be ninjas if that thing on Mikey’s arm is glowing like a neon sign and giving away our locations? He sure ain’t gonna go undercover and lure one of them creatures out when his symbol is screaming ‘hey, I’m a Warder’.”

“Finally, the pain has an upside,” Mikey said, ducking as Raph reached over to smack the back of his head.

“Mr. Hidesato views our powers as gifts that give us an advantage. He seems adamant that we don’t try to turn these powers off,” Leo said.

“That’s ‘cause he don’t want us to quit this job,” Raph said. “He couldn’t care less how much pain Mikey’s in ‘cause of his power.”

“Rather than trying to bypass Mikey’s power, maybe it would be possible to control its effects,” Leo mused. “Like Master Splinter says, manage the gift. If there is a way to focus the power, then maybe it wouldn’t burn so badly.”

“That sounds a lot like meditation,” Mikey groused.

“It’s probably no different than focusing our chi the way the tribunal taught us,” Don said.

“I’m pretty sure you were the only one who enjoyed that exercise, Donatello,” Mikey said.

“Every time that three of us use our symbols, they light up,” Raph reminded them. “How do ya’ propose we manage that? How come the symbols were designed to do that in the first place?”
“I’m guessing that our warder predecessors weren’t as worried about hiding in the dark as they were about bringing the yokai out of the shadows,” Leo said. “These weren’t ninja, just practitioners of the martial arts.”

“Like me, but without the additional training,” April said.

Leo leaned towards her. “That was something I was thinking about earlier. You’ve already met half the requirement for becoming a Warder. Would you consider training with a second Master in order to achieve the other half? That is, if all this talk of painful powers hasn’t turned you off of the idea completely.”

“I’d love to be able to help you guys,” April said, her eyes shining with excitement. “How long do you think it would take?”

“That’s not a bad idea, Leo,” Don said, straightening in his chair. “If April was a Warder, she could become a member of the Warder High Council and represent the clan.”

“Warder High Council?” April asked.

Don launched into the history of the warder clans as Mr. Hidesato had explained it to them, along with the role played by the Warder High Council. He told her of their dilemma and how Mr. Hidesato was actively fighting the Council to prevent them from sending warders from other clans to help capture the escaped creatures.

“As far as how long it would take for you to become a Warder, I have no idea,” Leo said once Don had finished the story. “Perhaps Mr. Hidesato could answer that question. I’d also suggest that he be the second Master you train with, April.”

“Ya’ want Mr. H to train April?” Raph asked sharply. “What the hell for?”


“Becoming a Warder takes specialized training,” Leo said. “We’re learning on the job, but April doesn’t have to if Mr. Hidesato is willing to take her on as a student. He can train her at the house and we’ll be right there to keep an eye on things.”

“He might be more open with April than he is with us,” Mikey said.

“He’s a closed mouthed jerk. What makes ya’ think he’ll be less secretive with her?” Raph asked.

“‘Cause she’s human,” Mikey said. “And she’s a lot better looking than you.”

“Do you think I’d gain special gifts too if I become a Warder? Since I’m human, as Mikey pointed out, and not a mutant,” April said.

“Dreams,” Leo said suddenly, not looking at anyone in particular.

“What? Ya’ think she’ll get dreams too?” Raph asked, looking confused.

“No, I just remembered that I had one last night,” Leo said. “I don’t know why I wasn’t reminded of it earlier.”

He told them of his dream, of the noise and the shaking, and of the flashing images just inside his peripheral vision.
“Does that make any of you think of anything you’ve read in a journal?” Don asked. “It doesn’t strike a familiar chord with me.”

The others shook their heads. “I guess that means we go back to HQ and hit the books,” Mikey said with resignation. “There’s gotta be a better way to find them after we figure out which one Leo’s dreams are pointing out. I mean, it’s a big city and people disappear all the time. Fights break out, gangs do stuff, and you can’t tell if it’s them or yokai pulling stuff.”

“Oh wait,” April said quickly as the turtles started to rise. “There was something I meant to tell you, something that might help you track down the creatures.”

“We’ll take all the help we can get,” Don told her.

To their surprise, April’s face reddened. “All right, but don’t tease me. There’s a radio program, a local one on the University radio station, called ‘Other Worldly’. It’s sort of a guilty pleasure of mine. The show is on late at night, and New Yorkers call in to talk about weird things, like ghosts and alien encounters.”

“Or run-ins with legendary creatures?” Mikey asked with a wink.

“Exactly,” April said. “I haven’t listened in a few nights, but you could easily hear the previous shows via podcast. If nothing else, you’ll probably find them entertaining.”

“We can listen while we’re reading journals,” Leo said.

“And while we’re scanning those journals into my new program,” Don said. “We haven’t even made a dent in the number of those books that need to be input. Has anyone besides me been writing in theirs?”

His brothers looked guilty and said nothing. Don frowned at them and shook his head.

“Well geez, sorry Donny,” Raph said. “We’ve been kinda busy.”

“We have the rest of the afternoon,” Don said in a stern tone. “Even if we quickly find out which creature it was that Leo dreamt about and where to find it, we can’t do anything until the sun goes down.”

“Homework,” Mikey lamented in an exaggerated manner. “This job is bad enough, but now it comes with homework.”

April laughed. “Personally, I think you guys are doing very well. Let me know what Mr. Hidesato says to the suggestion that he take me on as a student. If he won’t, then I’ll start looking around for someone who’s suitable. I suppose that means I can’t train with Master Splinter anymore.”

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other,” Master Splinter quoted. “Since I do not wish to be despised, it is best that you devote yourself to whoever serves as your next Master.”

Raph and Don walked partway with April as she left the lair. Mikey began cleaning up their luncheon things and Leo changed seats in order to sit next to his father.

“How have you been doing, Master Splinter?” Leo asked.

“Very well, thank you for asking Leonardo,” Master Splinter said. “I would not be speaking
the truth if I did not say I have missed you all. When you are out of my sight, I cannot help but worry.”

“The invitation to come and stay at the house with us is still open,” Leo said.

“Perhaps if the weight of my concern grows too heavy to bear, I will accept that invitation,” Master Splinter said. “Tell me what you have withheld.”

As always, Master Splinter’s astuteness surprised Leo. “Donny broached the subject of removing the warder symbols to Mr. Hidesato. Raph was angry that the magic in Mikey’s proved to be so painful. Mr. Hidesato was less than enthusiastic, even though Don had asked about removing them after we’ve recaptured the creatures.”

“Mr. Hidesato wishes this to become a lifelong commitment for the four of you,” Master Splinter said. “He is dedicated to his clan and its continued survival is his primary concern.”

“My primary concern is the safety and health of my brothers,” Leo said. “We really don’t know what this magic is doing to us. Mr. Hidesato behaves as if we haven’t anything to worry about, but I don’t think he actually knows. He’s already admitted that other than mine, he’s unfamiliar with these powers.”

“But perhaps his ancestors were not so ignorant,” Master Splinter said. “Familiarizing yourselves with the contents of those journals may answer many of your questions, including that one. I would suggest that become your first priority.”

When Don and Raph returned, the turtles bid their father goodbye and journeyed back to Mr. Hidesato’s house. They did not encounter the man, but there were signs that he’d been active while they were out. A note on the kitchen chalkboard stated he’d be bringing dinner later and when Don glanced out through one of the front windows, he saw that the car was gone.

There were also the usual indications that Mr. Hidesato had tidied up the office. Though he’d shifted journals around again, he had not removed any of the sticky notes that the brothers had used as color codes.

After Mikey dashed upstairs to retrieve their personal journals, the brothers settled in to the office to work. The first thing Don did was to locate the radio program April had told them about and then create an account which would give him access to the podcasts.

Playing them on the office sound system allowed everyone to listen to them. While Don was in the war room scanning journals, his brothers dived into their research.

After a while the scratching of a pencil drew Raph’s attention from the journal he was reading. He glanced towards the desk where Mikey was seated and saw that his brother was hard at work on his journal. Mikey’s tongue protruded from one side of his mouth as he concentrated. Curiosity made Raph set his book aside and get up to see what Mikey was doing.

Going around to Mikey’s side of the desk, Raph peered over his shoulder. Mikey was drawing in his journal, creating a perfect replica of the Itsumade they had captured.

“That’s damn good, Mikey,” Raph said, impressed at his brother’s skill.

“Pictures help, dude. There’s hardly any pictures of these things in the old journals,” Mikey said. “Figure future warders could use the head’s up so they know what they’re looking for.”

“I’m hoping future warders won’t need them,” Raph said. He looked up and saw Leo
standing at one set of bookcases. His older brother was pulling out one book after another, flipping through it quickly, and putting it back on the shelves. “What’s Leo doing?”

Mikey lifted his head to locate Leo and then shrugged. “Got no idea. Ask him.”

He returned to his drawing and Raph sauntered over to Leo. “You lose something?”

“I’m beginning to think so,” Leo said. He set a hand on the bindings of the shelved books. “After our first capture, when we caught the Dodomeki, I made a notation about it in the journal that Mr. Hidesato Senior had been keeping. I wanted to copy that note into my personal journal, but I can’t find the other book.”

“Think Mr. H took it?” Raph asked.

“He must have,” Leo answered. “I can’t think why unless it was for sentimental reasons. I’ll broach the subject first chance I get. It’s not important; what I wrote was pretty short and I intend to do a better job of recording our adventures. I only wanted it so I could make a note that future records could be found in our sets of journals.”

Raph decided to let the matter drop since Leo seemed unconcerned. Though he didn’t want to worry his brother unduly or be told he was overly suspicious, Raph couldn’t help but wonder if there was more to the missing journal than Leo fathomed.

“Ya’ listening to this stuff?” Raph asked instead, indicating a speaker with his thumb. “Man, I knew New York was full of basket cases, but these people take the cake. That one guy was downright positive that the dirt in his yard was an alien life form ‘cause it wasn’t the same color as his neighbor’s dirt. The best was when he insisted the dirt gave birth to him and the humans who raised him were his adoptive parents.”

Leo laughed. “I’m only half listening. The theories some of the show’s guests are spouting are just a little too far out there for me.”

They both got comfortable on the couch again. Raph went back to reading the journal he’d started on, and Leo began writing in his. For an hour the only sounds were Mikey’s art pencil, the radio program, and the occasional turning of a page.

Then the volume on the radio was suddenly turned up and Don popped out of the war room looking excited. “Listen, listen.”

“. . . I mean really, it’s a new building,” a caller was telling the host. “I know that it’s affordable housing, but it shouldn’t be shaking at night like it’s about to fall down.”

“Are any of the buildings around you shaking?” the host asked.

“Just ours,” the caller said. “Then there’s all the weird noises at night. Only at night. And I keep finding stuff broken. It’s all small stuff, but still. How’s that happening? It’s hard to sleep because of the pounding and hammering and crap.”

“Have you called the police?” the host asked.

“Sure, a few of us have,” the caller said. “Only a third of the apartments have been rented out, but we’re starting to think the place is haunted. The cops never find anything and now they think it’s some kind of joke.”

The call went on in that vein for another minute before the show took an advertising break.
When the host returned, he moved on to other callers.

“That’s what you described from your dream, wasn’t it, Leo?” Don asked.

“It was, right down to the shaking,” Leo said. “I don’t suppose the guy gave his address when he first started talking?”

“No, but he did mention when it started,” Don said. “Since he said they’ve called the police about it, I can access the police call logs and find out where units were dispatched. According to the caller, the police came out more than once, so it should be no problem narrowing down an address.”

The sound of the front door opening and closing barely registered to the eager turtles.

“Then all we have to do is figure out what we’re hunting,” Mikey said.

“I think I might have just done that,” Raph said, sitting forward on the couch, his finger on a page of the journal he’d been reading. “I think we’re after something called Yanari.”

“Yanari?” Mr. Hidesato said, standing in the doorway. He was carrying a pair of large bags smelling of food. He lifted the bags. “I have dinner. Please, come to the kitchen and tell me what has transpired.”

Raph brought the journal with him as they followed Mr. Hidesato to the kitchen. He set out containers of food on the kitchen counter while Mikey took plates from the cupboard.

While they served themselves buffet style, Leo told the man about his dream, and then Don explained how April had suggested they listen to the local radio show. Sitting around the kitchen table, the group ate their dinner while Don concluded with how they’d heard the caller describe exactly what Leo had experienced in his dream.

“I’ve been reading journals all afternoon,” Raph said, thumping the one he was balancing on his lap. “This one talks about house squeakers, things the writer calls miniature oni. It says they love making noise.”

“Yanari,” Mr. Hidesato said again. “Yes, they are quite mischievous and delight in their work, taking it very seriously. They come out of from the floors, ceilings, and woodwork late at night after everyone has gone to bed. Carrying miniature weapons or tools, they bang on anything that will make noise, even to the point of breaking things.”

“And the shaking?” Leo asked. “I felt the shaking in my dream.”

“That is the Yanari as well,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Anything to disturb a person’s slumber. They travel in groups, but you need only capture one in order to trap all of them.”

“What’s the catch?” Raph asked. “There’s always a catch. The journal says it took this warder three nights to capture one, but not why it was so hard.”

“They are fast,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“How fast?” Mikey asked.

“Very fast,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Fortunately, they are also reluctant to leave a home once they have infested it. Certain variables draw them, particularly homes of cheap or new construction.”

“New affordable housing,” Don said, looking at his brothers meaningfully.
“How do we trap it once we’ve caught one of the Yanari?” Leo asked.

“How do we trap it once we’ve caught one of the Yanari?” Mr. Hidesato said. “That is the center of most noise makers. It will pull all of the Yanari inside the one you’ve caught, and then draw the final Yanari inside the coin with its mates.”

Raph took a big bite of food. “Sounds easy enough,” he said around the mouthful.

Mr. Hidesato shook his head. “Do not underestimate them. Their penchant for mischief is not confined to making noise.”

“The point is moot if we can’t find where this building is,” Leo said.

They finished dinner quickly, excusing Donatello from clean up detail so he could begin his search for the address of the building the Yanari had taken over.

It didn’t take long to put the kitchen back in order. After that was done, the turtles and Mr. Hidesato returned to the office. Since Don was busy, Mikey found the podcast they’d listened to and replayed it for Mr. Hidesato, who verified that what the caller described sounded exactly like a Yanari infestation.

Mr. Hidesato was examining the drawings that Mikey had made when Don came out of the war room.

“Do you guys have any idea how many call outs the police in this city go on each night?” Don asked. Since it was clearly a rhetorical question, no one bothered trying to answer.

“Did you find the address?” Leo countered, looking at his brother expectantly.

“Of course I did,” Don said; not boasting, just stating a fact. “I’ve got some history on the building too. The apartments have only been available for rent since the first of the month. Not only is the building new, but they’ve had problems passing inspections during each phase of the development. Apparently, they were trying to take short cuts on certain code requirements.”

“The perfect environment for Yanari,” Mr. Hidesato said. “As with the other yokai, these have adapted as well. Donatello, is there a way for you to learn which apartment the caller lives in? He is the one finding items broken, so his is the home the Yanari have settled into.”

“I already have that,” Don said. “The man’s name and apartment number were in the police call logs.”

“Somebody want to tell me how we go into an occupied apartment so we can catch these things?” Raph asked.

Everyone fell silent. After a moment Leo realized that all eyes, including Mr. Hidesato’s, were on him.

A plan had only just started to form, but their expectant gazes told Leo that something in his expression must have told them he had an idea.

“Spill,” Raph said.

“Radio shows give things away all the time, don’t they?” Leo asked. Without waiting for confirmation, he continued, “Mr. Hidesato, I’d suggest that you purchase a two night, all-expense paid stay in one of the city’s nicer hotels, then we tell the occupants of that apartment that they’ve
won a prize. Add some pocket money as an incentive to get them out of the place within the hour.”

“Maybe Mr. H could drive them to the hotel in his Rolls Royce,” Mikey suggested. “They’d be less likely to think it was a joke if he showed up looking like a chauffeur with some cash in an envelope and a fancy car at the curb.”

Now four pairs of eyes were aimed at Mr. Hidesato. “Y~es,” he said slowly. “This might work. I believe there is a chauffeur’s livery in the upstairs closet. It is a bit old fashioned in style, but it should fit me. How will the four of you get into the apartment once it has been vacated?”

“Drop us off in the nearest alley and we’ll get in through a window,” Raph said.

Leo looked at Don. “Can you find out if there are tenants in the apartments to either side of the one we’re targeting? The closer someone is, the sooner the noise we’ll make will prompt someone to call the police.”

“I’ll check,” Don said. “Anything else?”

“Call the people first,” Leo said. “Try to sound like a radio personality and tell them a chauffeur will pick them up at nine.”

“Inform them that they will be staying at the Park Hyatt on West 57th,” Mr. Hidesato said. “If they are native New Yorkers, they will recognize the prestige immediately.”

“I don’t know how good I am at sounding like a radio pro,” Don said doubtfully.

“No sweat, Donny. I’ll do it,” Mikey said, clapping his brother on the shell and pushing him back towards the war room.

“I shall retrieve the man’s name from Donatello and then book a suite at the hotel,” Mr. Hidesato said. “There should be sufficient time for me to change into my disguise and retrieve the Rolls.”

“We’ll meet you around back,” Leo said. “We don’t need to use the front door any more than necessary.”

Before he left the office, Mr. Hidesato gave the wax tool and the trap coin that was designed to hold the Yanari to Leonardo. After placing the coin into his belt, Leo handed the wax tool over to Raph.

They didn’t see Mr. Hidesato again until they climbed into the back of the Rolls Royce. In his disguise, with a black hat pulled down over his eyes, he was remarkably nondescript.

“You’ll be picking up a family from apartment seven H,” Don told him. “A man, his wife, and their three year old. There’s an elderly man in seven A, but that’s way on the other end of the hall and around the corner. The remainder of the floor is vacant.”

“Mikey will keep his eyes on the Rolls,” Leo said. “He’ll signal us when you have the family in the car and have driven away. After that, we’ll be in the apartment.”

“I have the cell phone you gave me,” Mr. Hidesato said. “If for some reason the family changes their mind and wishes to return to their apartment, I will call to warn you.”

“They won’t change their mind if ya’ brought enough cash to make it worth their while not to change their mind,” Raph said.
Mr. Hidesato glanced at him in the rear view mirror. “I have with me an envelope containing
one thousand dollars. I hope that is a large enough incentive.”

“It is if you don’t give it to them until they’re all checked in to the hotel,” Mikey said.

That was the end of the conversation until they reached the apartment building. Mr. Hidesato
drove past it slowly, giving the turtles the opportunity to get a lay of the land, and then pulled into a
nearby alley.

As the brothers clambered out of the car, Mr. Hidesato rolled down his window and said,
“Good luck, warders.”

He backed out of the alley and drove towards the apartment building. The turtles climbed up
to the nearest roof top and then leaped from roof to roof until they were atop the apartments.

“Seven H?” Leo asked Don.

“Three floors down on the west side of the building,” Don said. “Fourth apartment from the
corner.”

Mikey had jogged to the side of the building that overlooked the street. “Mr. H is going
inside,” he called out.

“We go in when Mikey gives the all clear,” Leo said. “Mikey, let us know as soon as they
pull away from the curb. Watch the car until it’s out of sight and then join us in the apartment.”

“On it,” Mikey replied.

While they waited, Leo, Don, and Raph did some reconnaissance, checking the area around
the apartment complex and observing the neighboring building for activity.

In less time than they thought it would take, Mikey said, “He got them! They’re driving
away.”

His brothers were off the roof before he finished speaking. Don unerringly found the
balcony for apartment H and picked the lock on the sliding glass door.

They quietly entered a bedroom, hoping the Yanari would think the family asleep and come
out of hiding. Almost as soon as they’d spread out, the building began to shake.

“Damn!” Raph exclaimed, widening his stance for balance. “Feels like a fucking
earthquake!”

A framed picture flew off the wall, whipping past Raph’s face and smashing into the opposite
wall.

“Guess they know we’re here,” Leo said.

“Then where are they? Why can’t we see them?” Raph asked.

“Because they know who we are and they’re hiding,” Don said. “We really have to find a
way to cover these symbols.”

A loud pounding came from atop a dresser. All three turtles looked in that direction, but
though they could still hear the noise, they couldn’t see anything.
“Hiding my ass,” Raph growled. “The fuckers are invisible. That wasn’t in the journal.”

“Mr. H didn’t mention it either,” Don said, sweeping his bō across the top of the dresser. He came into contact with air and the pounding noise resumed on the other side of the room.

“Ain’t that a surprise,” Raph said. “Marvelous. Turtle luck running true to form.”

“Ow!” Mikey yelped as he entered the room. He was lifting his arm out towards the room, the symbols glowing brightly. “Ow, ow! Make it stop!”

“How’s he supposed to hunt when he’s in pain?” Raph demanded.

“Focus, Mikey,” Leo said. “Try to turn it down.”

Mikey grimaced. “All right, already! We found them, you can stop now!” he screamed, staring at his arm.

“Hey!” Don shouted as a book bounced off of his head.

A crashing of glass followed and then the bedroom door slammed back against the wall. Thudding noises came from the room beyond and the turtles raced from the bedroom to the living room.

"Where are they?" Mikey asked, clutching his arm.

“Shit! Little fucker!” Raph yelled, grabbing his foot and hopping up and down. “Smashed my foot!”

“Keep moving,” Leo ordered. “Don’t give them a target.”

“They’re invisible,” Don told Mikey as the TV remote hit his chest. “And I guess they’re angry.”

“Fuck!” Raph fell with a hard thump, a welt already forming on top of his other foot. He lifted his arms to protect his face, and his brothers could see that something was striking him.

“Stop!” Mikey cried out, aiming his symbol covered arm in Raph’s direction.

His eyes started to glow with a blue brilliance and then suddenly a dozen tiny creatures became visible, half of them pounding on Raph’s body with mallets and clubs.

The glow faded from Mikey’s eyes and then the burning sensation in his arm diminished, though the symbols continued to shine.

Leo snatched at one of the creatures standing on Raph, but it zipped out from under his hand. When Don poked at one with his bo, the creature raced up his staff and clouted him on the head with its mallet.

Shaking three of them off of him, Raph started to sit up. Before he could rise more than a foot, a thin cord appeared out of nowhere, draped across his chest, and snapped tight.

Raph was knocked back flat, the cord surprisingly strong. One of the Yanari produced another cord and swinging it like a lasso, roped Raph’s wrist and yanked his arm down to the floor.

His brothers didn’t notice Raph’s dilemma because they were racing around the room, chasing the tiny creatures. Don and Leo nearly smashed into each other as they both grabbed for the
same Yanari.

The foot rest on a recliner swung out in front of Mikey as he raced past it, nearly knocking him down. Only his quick reflexes saved him as he hopped over the furniture when it swept into his path.

One of the creatures pounded on the dining table with its club, while another had gotten into the china cabinet. It began flinging cups and plates at the turtles, forcing them to dodge missiles.

Raph tried to grab for his sai with his free arm, but two of the creatures wrapped cords around his forearm and forced it down again. They hammered the ends of the cords into the floor and then quickly trussed Raph’s legs.

More cord wound around his body and then one of the intrepid Yanari pinned Raph’s mask tails to the floor. Unable to move, Raph bellowed, “A little help here!”

“Hands full!” Leo sang out. He was backing swiftly as a high chair pursued him across the dining room, two tiny creatures pushing against its legs.

Don was hopping from foot to foot as Yanari attempted to pound his feet with their mallets.

“Don’t let ‘em knock ya’ down!” Raph yelled.

“Oh, thank you for that advice,” Don retorted. When he tried to hit the creatures with his bō, they slipped around behind him and attacked his ankles.

Mikey pulled his nunchucks, whirling them as he approached the Yanari hiding inside china cabinet. It threw a glass pitcher at his head and he batted it aside, then deflected a cup coming straight at his face.

The Yanari began to throw things at him as fast as it could. Nunchucks spinning, Mikey repelled the oncoming projectiles. Soon the creature was delving into a tray containing silverware and launching the knives and forks at the oncoming turtle.

Leo kicked the high chair aside and leaped over the Yanari. Running to Raph’s aid, he sidestepped as a creature swung a club at his feet, and twirled out of the path of a lasso aimed at his leg.

Children’s plastic building blocks began pelting Don’s head and shoulders as the Yanari got into a box of kids toys. Using his bō, Don slammed the box top down, and then dodged the vase that was flung at him.

Reaching the china cabinet, Mikey dropped one of his nunchucks, his gaze fixated on the Yanari. The creature seemed to suddenly realize it had trapped itself inside the cabinet and darted at the opening.

Quick as a flash, Mikey snatched the Yanari out of midair. Caught in his tight grip, it struggled and wiggled, gibbering shrilly what was probably a distress call.

“Leo! Coin!” Mikey shouted.

Pulling the coin from his belt, Leo flipped it to Mikey. One of the Yanari leaped off the dining table and reached for the coin. Don lunged forward and slugged the creature, knocking it away.
Deftly catching the trap coin, Mikey slapped it on the Yanari’s mouth.

When the coin touched the creature, its mouth opened impossibly wide. All of the Yanari in the room began to squeal. The nearest one was lifted into the air before flying right down the gullet of the trapped creature.

Each Yanari in turn was yanked from its spot and swallowed. As they disappeared from around Leo, he rushed to Raph’s aid, slicing the cords holding him down.

Freed, Raph jumped to his feet as the last of the Yanari was gulped down by its mate. Taking the wax tool from his belt, Raph stomped over to Mikey’s side, watching as the final Yanari disappeared into the trap coin.

“Gimme that,” Raph said.

Mikey handed the coin to his brother, who placed it inside the wax tool and counted off the seconds with more than a little satisfaction.

Looking around them, the turtles frowned at the mess they were leaving behind. Broken objects littered the floor, furniture was tipped onto its sides, and utensils protruded from the walls.

“Think we should try to clean this up?” Don asked.

The open balcony door allowed them to hear the clear sounds of approaching sirens.

“Nope,” Leo said, quickly leading the way out of the apartment.

Once they were atop the building opposite the apartment complex, the turtles stopped to watch as police officers responded to a call about the noise they’d made.

“Bro’s, I’ll tell you one thing that’s certain,” Mikey said as they started back towards Mr. Hidesato’s.

“What’s that, Mikey?” Don asked.

“Tonight’s gonna cost Mr. H more than two nights at a fancy hotel and a thousand bucks,” Mikey said.

His brothers had to laugh in agreement.

End Yanari
Night of the Ao nyōbō

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
Word Count: 7,209
Rated: R 2k3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The turtles had to travel several blocks over rooftops before they could meet up with Mr. Hidesato for a ride back to headquarters.

While he drove, they told him they’d captured the Yanari and explained that the apartment was something of a wreck. Since the police had been called, they would probably track down the occupants and report the apparent vandalism.

“Would it be possible to send an anonymous donation to the family to take care of repairs and pay for replacing the things that were broken?” Donatello asked.

“Such expenditures are not the norm for warders,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Resources must be utilized wisely.”

Raphael had been sitting silently in the back seat, his arms crossed. It was easy to see from his expression that he was brooding about something. Now he sat forward and in a belligerent tone said, “So it’s okay to pay to get them out of their house but it ain’t okay to make it livable enough for them to move back in, is that what you’re saying?”

“The former is the cost of recovering a yokai, the latter is not,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“I don’t think we can break this down to a simple bookkeeping equation,” Don argued. “If the responsibility for the creatures is ours, then I believe it is incumbent upon us to make that family whole again.”

“They had Yanari in their apartment through no fault of their own, Mr. H,” Mikey said.

“Leonardo?” Mr. Hidesato asked, glancing at the elder turtle.

“I agree with my brothers,” Leo said, answering the unasked question. “It’s only right that we fix what we’ve broken.”

“Then it shall be done,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Ya’ know what else was fucked up tonight?” Raph asked with a scowl. “The fact that neither the journal nor you said a damn thing about Yanari being invisible.”

“They were not visible?” Mr. Hidesato asked, sounding surprised.

“No they weren’t visible,” Raph snapped. “If it wasn’t for Mikey’s power, they’d still be
invisible and we wouldn’t have caught the little suckers.”

“That is a divergence from their normal behavior,” Mr. Hidesato said slowly. “One that has never in hundreds of years been demonstrated.”

“You’ve hunted them?” Leo asked.

“With a cousin once, many years ago,” Mr. Hidesato said. “They were quite visible, though they moved so quickly that only the sharpest eyes could track their progress.”

“Is it possible that the invisibility was due to the adaptation process?” Don asked. “Perhaps the way our buildings are clustered together made invisibility a necessity. There aren’t the same types of crawl spaces and wall separations in modern apartment buildings as there would have been in conventional fifteenth century Japanese homes.”

“Nor in the villages where I hunted the Yanari,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“In horror movies, a lot of monsters are invisible until they let you see them,” Mikey said.

Raph frowned at him. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“What we talked about before,” Mikey said. “You know, the tul . . . tul . . . what did you call it, Donny?”

“Tulpa,” Don supplied.

“Yeah, that,” Mikey said. “So what if the Yanari get into the people’s apartment, make noises that the people can’t figure out, and the people start thinking the place is haunted. Word gets around and everyone in the building starts to think the place is haunted. Haunted equals invisible.”

“And the Yanari then become invisible,” Don finished. “That’s pretty smart, Mikey.”

“See, there’s more to me than just good looks,” Mikey said smugly.

It was a little after two in the morning when Mr. Hidesato dropped the turtles off behind the house and left to return the Rolls to the parking garage.

The first thing that Mikey did upon entering the house was to make a beeline for the kitchen and the refrigerator. “Anybody else want a snack?” he asked.

“My stomach wouldn’t mind a shipment,” Raph said.

“Sit down and let me take a look at your stitches, Leo,” Don said.

“Not on the table,” Raph said quickly.

Leo sat on one the chairs and Don kneeled in front of him after grabbing an antibiotic ointment from the medical closet. Don first examined the cut on Leo’s cheek, deeming the wound that had been inflicted by the Hari onago to be healed enough so the bandages could be removed.

Don was applying ointment to Leo’s leg when Mr. Hidesato returned. “How is the injury?” the man asked.

“Fortunately we heal quickly, so I should be able to remove the stitches soon,” Don answered.
Mr. Hidesato appeared curious. “Is that a benefit of your mutation?”

“I believe so,” Don said as he stood up. “We know very little about the substance that caused our mutation other than the fact that it was created by an alien race.”

Eyes widening in surprise, Mr. Hidesato asked, “The Triceratons who invaded our planet?”

Raph snorted. “Nah, a different group. There’s a whole lot of ‘em out there in space and it’d make me happy if they stayed out there.”

“If this house is going to be our base of operations until all of the creatures are recaptured, then we should have a proper medical room,” Don said. “Something I can set up the way the infirmary is at the lair. I’d rather not perform any more operations on the kitchen table. I’d rather not perform any operations at all.”

“We could always convert the media room,” Raph suggested.

“Oh heck no!” Mikey exclaimed, waving an oven mitt covered hand at the group. “That’s not happening. I’ll go on strike. I’ll barricade myself in there. I’ll spike every drink in the house with hot sauce. I’ll . . . .”

“Thank you, Mikey. We get the idea,” Leo said.

“I think one of the storage rooms in the basement would work,” Don said. “The one right by the stairs and across from the bathroom.”

“That gets my vote,” Mikey said before turning to extract a baking tray from the oven. “Who wants some chicken wings?”

“I will leave you four to your snack,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Shall I put away the trap coin?”

Raph handed it to him along with the wax tool. After he left them the brothers sat down to eat their early morning snack and then tidied the kitchen before heading up to bed.

Darkness.

Leonardo realized he was dreaming almost immediately. It wasn’t the first time in his life that he’d had a lucid dream, but it was the first since becoming a warder. That this was also a prophetic dream was clear by the way it felt and smelled.

There was a musky, dank scent in the air. Not the sort of smell he was familiar with from living in the sewers, but that of an older, abandoned building. He couldn’t actually see anything, though he turned in a full circle in an attempt to get his bearings.

When he stopped moving he noticed an area some distance in front of him now seemed clearer. Leo began walking towards it, finally discovering that what he was seeing was light spilling through an open doorway.

He knew that whatever the dream was trying to show him would be in that room. With a sense of growing dread, Leo nevertheless entered the room without hesitation.

The floor beneath his feet was now covered in tatami mats. The illumination came from lanterns which hung from thick beams in the ceiling overhead. Though the room appeared as though it belonged in a home of wealth and status, it looked decayed. Cobwebs festooned the lamps and beams; a thick dust had settled over everything.
Near a wall decorated with a mural was a woman in tattered kimonos, seated with her back to Leo. To either side of her, on low tables, were cosmetics. She held a small mirror in her hand, though it was angled in such a way as to prevent Leo from seeing her face.

Leo wanted to stop walking towards her but he could not relay that message to his feet. The sense of foreboding increased as he drew closer to her, for she did not acknowledge his presence. Instead she continued to reach for items from her tables, constantly applying cosmetics without ever pausing.

Heart pounding, Leonardo stopped only a few feet behind the woman. As if suddenly realizing that she was no longer alone, the woman lowered her mirror and began to turn.

With a gasp, Leo jerked to full wakefulness. His sudden movement woke Mikey, who had fallen asleep with his face burrowed against Leo’s neck.

“Bad dream?” Mikey whispered. Raph and Don lay on the other side of him, the pair tightly cocooned in each other’s arms.

Leo took a deep breath, held it for a count of ten, and then slowly released it. “Yes,” he murmured, keeping his voice down. “Prophetic.”

“Wanna talk about it?” Mikey asked.

“It will keep until morning,” Leo said, turning onto his side so he could wrap an arm around his brother. “I don’t want to wake the others and I’d rather not tell it twice.”

“Your choice,” Mikey said, turning his head so he wouldn’t yawn in Leo’s face. “Can you go back to sleep?”

“M~hm,” Leo mumbled. “Halfway there already.”

Leo woke the next morning to the feeling of Mikey’s toe digging into the back of his neck. Slowly getting out of bed, Leo looked down at his brother and smiled. It had taken awhile to get used to how much Mikey moved while he slept and to ignore it enough not to wake each time his younger brother shifted.

He was just sitting down with a cup of tea when Raph shuffled into the kitchen. After yawning and stretching, Raph said, “Morning.”

“Good morning,” Leo responded. “Sleep okay?”

“Yep. You?” Raph asked as he took the jug of milk from the refrigerator, removed the top, and began to tip it towards his mouth.

“Glass,” Leo said.

Raph set the milk on the counter and said, “Yes mom.” After pouring himself a full glass, he came over to join Leo at the table.

“Ya’ had a dream, didn’t ya’?” Raph asked after studying Leo’s expression.

“I did,” Leo answered. “How long do you think it will be before Don and Mikey get up?”

“We could go roust them right now,” Raph said. “Do we need to?”

“Half an hour,” Leo said. “If they’re not up by then, we will. I want to get in some practice
and then we’ll need to hit the books. My dream had some pretty specific features that we should be able to recognize.”

“Or ya’ could just tell them to Mr. H and see what he says,” Raph said.

Leo nodded towards the bulletin board. “He left a note. He’s going to be out for an indeterminate amount of time taking care of business obligations. His words.”

“He knows a lot of them,” Raph muttered. “He likes using them to avoid answering direct questions.”

Don had wandered in and heard the tail end of their conversation. “That’s probably his diplomatic training,” he said as he began his morning ritual with the coffee maker.

“If he keeps talking without saying anything then one of these days I’m gonna pop him in his diplomatic mouth,” Raph stated.

“That might not be as easy to do as you seem to think,” Leo said mildly. “Donny, is Mikey still conked out?”

“I nudged him when I got up,” Don said, turning to lean against the counter. “He’s in the bathroom. He said for you to wait for him before you started telling us your dream. I’m guessing that means you had another one.”

Leo nodded. “It woke both of us up. This time I knew I was dreaming as soon as it started.”

Mikey came racing into the kitchen. “What did I miss? You didn’t start without me, did you?”

“No. I just told them that I knew I was dreaming this time,” Leo said.

He continued, explaining the dream in as much detail as possible. Unlike regular dreams, his prophetic ones were vivid in his mind even hours later.

“How come ya’ woke up before she turned around?” Raph asked when Leo had finished talking.

“I really don’t know,” Leo said. “I’ll be honest, I didn’t want to approach her in the first place. For some reason I didn’t seem to have enough control of myself to stop.”

Don had taken a seat at the table and after enjoying a sip of coffee said, “Maybe it wasn’t you.”

“What the hell does that mean?” Raph asked.

“Oh, oh, I know,” Mikey said excitedly. “You were dreaming someone else’s experience. Right, Donny?”

“That wouldn’t be a prophetic dream then,” Leo said, frowning. “Not if it’s already happened to someone.”

“It probably hasn’t,” Don said. “You dreamt about the young couple being killed by the Jubokko before it happened.”

“I saw that dream as though I was watching a movie,” Leo pointed out. “This time I was an active participant.”
“You were viewing a future occurrence through the eyes of a victim,” Don said. “The reason you had no control was because the body belonged to someone else. I’m going to guess that when the woman turns around, something catastrophic occurs. That’s why you woke up. At that point, your connection to the victim is broken.”

“Next time, pull out a wallet so we can get a name,” Raph said.

Leo pushed back from the table and got up. “Hopefully there is enough detail from that dream to tell us what we’re after. Time for practice. The ground’s crew is supposed to be here today, so it’s the dojo for us.”

Shoving thoughts of his dream and a potential yokai victim from his mind, Leo led his brothers through a training session. Afterwards, they each hit the showers to get cleaned up and then regrouped in the office.

“I gotta say one thing about this house, it sure is nice having a lot of bathrooms to choose from,” Raph said. “No standing in line or running out of hot water.”

“Mr. Hidesato hasn’t returned yet,” Don said. “I used the second floor bathroom and knocked on his door when I got out.”

“I’ll start on the journals,” Leo said. “Don, run the information from my dream through your computer and see if you get a match. Also scan all the local papers for any news of weirdness that might fall under our purview.”

“I guess I’ll tackle journals too,” Raph said. “We can listen to that wacky radio station and see if anything came up last night.”

“I can check the news channels,” Mikey said quickly.

Leo moved over to a bookcase and Don disappeared into the war room. Raph snapped his fingers as though remembering something and said, “I saw some steaks in the freezer. Be back in a minute, I’m gonna take them out to thaw.”

He left the room, glad that nothing in his tone had alerted Leo. Raph was on the staircase when Mikey nipped out of the office.

“I took those steaks out last night,” Mikey said. “What are you up to?”

“Keep it down,” Raph said. “Mr. H ain’t here and this is my chance to see if I can find the missing journals. I’m gonna search his room and see if he’s hiding them from us.”

“Leo’s not going to like that,” Mikey said.

“If they ain’t there, no harm, no foul,” Raph said. “Nobody needs to know I looked. If they are there, then we got bigger problems than my invading his privacy.”

Mikey grimaced. “We never had this conversation,” he said before slipping back into the office.

Raph took the stairs two at a time but slowed down once he was on the second floor. He silently approached the door to Mr. Hidesato’s room and pressed his head against it to listen. Though Don’s knock hadn’t been answered, it didn’t mean that the man was not inside.

Hearing nothing, Raph tried the door. It wasn’t locked the first time Raph had taken it upon
himself to search the room and it wasn’t locked now either.

Opening it just enough to stick his head into the room, Raph glanced around to verify that it was empty. The entrance to the bathroom was open and the lights were off, so Raph slid into the room and shut the door behind him.

A quick yet thorough check of the bedroom and bathroom turned up no journals, so Raph applied himself to the walk-in closet. This took a little longer because either Mr. Hidesato or his uncle was a bit of a clothes hog.

When he found nothing, Raph moved on to the hidden security room. There was one locked filing cabinet inside but picking the lock was child’s play. There was nothing of note in the cabinet and the journals were nowhere to be found.

Frustrated, Raph decided that Mr. Hidesato was too sly to keep anything suspicious in his own room. The search was going to have to be expanded. One thing was for sure; Raph stubbornly held onto the belief that Mr. Hidesato was trying to keep something from them. Leo might be willing to give the man the benefit of the doubt, but Raph was determined to find out what Mr. H was hiding.

Sure that he’d left everything just as he’d found it, Raph exited the closet. When he turned around he found himself face to face with Mr. Hidesato.

Arms crossed, Mr. Hidesato asked, “Have you misplaced something, Raphael?”

“I’m looking for something I think you must have misplaced,” Raph said, unfazed at being caught in the act. “We’re missing at least one journal and something tells me you’ve got it.”

“You had only to ask,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I have no journals.”

“Leo started writing in one he said belonged to your uncle,” Raph said. “It ain’t in the office now. Why did ya’ take it?”

“My uncle’s journal? I do not recall seeing one written by him,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Perhaps Leonardo is mistaken.”

“Are ya’ calling my brother a liar?” Raph asked, his tone dangerous.

“Not at all,” Mr. Hidesato said, appearing unruffled. “There have been other people in the house. Perhaps someone on the cleaning staff mislaid a journal or two. I am not at all certain my uncle even kept a journal.”

“I thought that was a tradition in your clan,” Raph said. “I thought that was part of the job when it came to catching creatures.”

“No two warders do things in exactly the same fashion, Raphael,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I have ancestors who were unable to read and write.”

“Your uncle could do both,” Raph snapped. “Leo saw his damn journal. What’s in it that ya’ don’t want us to know about?”

“I cannot answer your question,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Can’t or won’t?” Raph demanded.
“Let me assure you that your suspicions of me are unfounded,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I am withholding nothing of import.”

Raphael clenched his fists. “Now why don’t I believe ya’?”

“Raph!” Leo called from the doorway. “What are you doing in here?”

“What do ya’ think I’m doing?” Raph countered. “I don’t like being lied to and I don’t like when people hide things from me.”

“This isn’t the way to solve differences,” Leo said in a measured tone. “We have to work together and we need to trust each other.”

Raph scowled at him and marched towards the door, shoving past Leo. “Ya’ be sure and let me know when I can trust him.”

Leo remained where he was as Raph tramped downstairs. He and Mr. Hidesato stared at one another for a couple of minutes, neither saying anything.

It was Mr. Hidesato who spoke first. “This issue of trust cannot be resolved as long as Raphael is certain that I am withholding information from the four of you.”

“To be very frank, you have withheld knowledge from us,” Leo said. “The existence of a Warder High Council for one thing. Would you have told us about them if we hadn’t forced you to be forthcoming?”

“If you had needed to know of them, I would have told you,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I was dealing with them and your involvement was not required. Should anything arise that I believe you have a need to know, then I will immediately share it with you and your brothers.”

It did not escape Leo’s notice that Mr. Hidesato had said ‘that I believe you have a need to know’.

“The threat of other warders coming to New York was something we needed to know,” Leo said. “For obvious reasons we can’t have contact with them. You don’t know us well enough to decide what information to withhold. I truly hope that Raphael’s suspicions are unfounded. If you want to assuage them, you’re going to have to be more accessible and communicative.”

“Were you in need of my expertise?” Mr. Hidesato asked. “Perhaps you had a dream last night?”

“I did,” Leo said. “Could you join us in the office when you get a chance? We need help finding a starting place for this hunt.”

Mr. Hidesato bowed his head in acknowledgement. “I will be down shortly.”

The interaction left Leo feeling unsatisfied, but an all-out war with the man wasn’t something he wanted. Saying they would walk away from their task as warders was one thing, doing so another.

If they could even walk away at this point. It was no longer just a question of protecting the city or trying to keep Casey from wallowing in guilt and attempting to do the job himself. All four of them had somehow acquired powers that they couldn’t control. Not only that, they weren’t sure if those powers could be removed.
Raph was pacing the office when Leo entered. As soon as he saw his brother, Raph demanded, “Did ya’ ask him about the missing journal?”

“No I did not,” Leo said. “You invaded his privacy to search for it and came up empty. I’m not going to throw around accusations without any proof.”

“What are ya’ gonna do, let him call the shots even though he’s keeping secrets?” Raph asked, clearly aggravated.

“We’re going to be smart and find out what we need to know without going straight at the man,” Leo said.

Raph’s eyes narrowed. “Ya’ got something up your sleeve?”

“I’ve got a couple of ideas,” Leo said. “He’s going to be down here at any minute. Let’s shelve this discussion until we know that we’re alone.”

Leo called Don and Mikey into the room when Mr. Hidesato arrived. Raph was seated on the couch with a journal and pointedly ignored the man as Leo explained his dream.

“I am certain that what you experienced was an Ao nyōbō,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Ao as in blue?” Leo asked. “She wasn’t blue.”

“The reference has nothing to do with color,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It comes from a lack of maturity or experience. Nyōbō were the court ladies of old Japan. They served in palaces until they could be married off to a worthy suitor. Ao nyōbō refers to low-ranking women of the court who could not seem to catch a husband or to elevate themselves enough to escape poverty. The term is an insult but is very befitting of this yokai.”

“What’s her deal?” Mikey asked.

“Ao nyōbō inhabit the abandoned homes of once wealthy people or people of stature,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “They wait inside the home, constantly adjusting their image in anticipation of the arrival of some guest who never shows up, usually a lover who has lost interest or a cheating husband. Anyone else who visits the home is devoured by the Ao nyōbō and then she goes back to vainly waiting.”

“The mirror, the makeup,” Leo said. “She was preening herself.”

“Exactly. The Ao nyōbō wears the white face of ancient courtiers and her body is covered in the many-layered kimonos of older eras. Her clothing will be tattered, her body aged and wrinkled from years of waiting in musty ruins. She is no longer beautiful, only bent and twisted and most horrifying to look upon,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“How do we capture the Ao nyōbō?” Don asked.

“The trap coin must touch her mirror,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It will affix to the mirror and thus pull the yokai inside. There is nothing more important to this yokai than her mirror.”

Mikey raised his hand. “Next question, how do we find her?”

“That is more difficult,” Mr. Hidesato said. “She will have settled into a house of some opulence, but one which has been abandoned. It will not have been abandoned due to a structural issue or because a family has traded up. This yokai is drawn to a particular despair, that of ruined
“Bankruptcy,” Don said. “Foreclosure. Homes seized because the owners couldn’t pay their mortgage.”

“That’s something ya’ can search records for, ain’t it?” Raph asked, addressing his brother.

“Of course,” Don said. “The problem is, there are bound to be a lot of them in this city. We don’t even know if it’s a house, a condo, or an apartment building.”

“In my dream, the interior design was distinctly Japanese,” Leo said. “Would those records give descriptions of the residences?”

“If the bank wanted to sell the home then they would,” Don said. “It’ll take a lot of winnowing, but I think I can find likely candidates.”

“Who’d be going into these houses by themselves?” Raph asked. “I mean, Leo was in the house on his own. Whoever’s eyes it was that he was looking through had a way into the house. If it was a buyer wouldn’t someone be tagging along with them?”

“A realtor,” Don said. “Certainly if someone was going to sell such a residence, they’d want to inspect it first.”

“Mikey can check the news outlets to learn if any realtors have gone missing,” Leo said. “Don, run down a list of homes that fit the criteria we’ve discussed. Would there be interior pictures?”

“Not in its current state,” Don said. “If the people who owned it were prominent citizens, then there will probably be pictures in online archives.”

“Raph and I can jump on computers and look for those,” Leo said. “I’ll recognize that room if I see it.”

“And what about him?” Raph asked, jerking a thumb in Mr. Hidesato’s direction. “It ain’t like he don’t have a dog in this hunt.”

“I will make some phone calls,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I have sources in the banking industry from whom I can learn if there are any homes which have not formally gone on the market.”

“Let’s get to work then,” Leo said. “We probably only have until dusk to locate the yokai or she’s going to claim the person in my dream as her next victim.”

Mr. Hidesato excused himself to use the phone at his desk upstairs. The four brothers gathered in the war room to begin their respective tasks.

They had been quietly working for about ten minutes when Raph asked, “Donny, could ya’ check real quick to see if ya’ scanned in anything about the Ao nyōbō?”

“Nothing popped earlier when I plugged in the description of Leo’s dream,” Don said. “I’ll try it with her name. Can I ask why?”

“I want to check the journal entry against what Mr. H told us,” Raph said. “Call it covering all our bases.”

“Because you don’t trust him,” Mikey said.
“’Cause he leaves stuff out,” Raph said. “Invisible yokai with lassos. Pfft.”

Mikey’s eyes twinkled mischievously. “I kinda liked their idea of tying you down. I vote we give that a try. Anyone else with me?”

There was a chorus of ayes from Leo and Don. “The ayes have it,” Mikey said with a grin. “I wonder where Mr. H keeps the rope.”

“Shut up,” Raph growled good-naturedly.

Before long Donatello had compiled a list of possible addresses, to which Mr. Hidesato added some additional ones. Exhaustive searches uncovered images of home interiors which one by one were discarded by Leo as not fitting what he’d seen in his dream.

No realtors, housing agents, or bank representatives had shown up on a missing persons’ inquiry. Time was slipping by and Leo found himself growing anxious.

“If we don’t get her tonight, she’s going to claim her first victim,” Leo said, pushing aside uneaten the sandwich that Mikey had brought to him a half hour earlier.

“You still have to eat bro’,” Mikey said. “Do you want something else? Some fruit maybe?”

“What I want is the Ao nyōbō’s location,” Leo said. “Are there any more clues in the journal?”

Don’s computer program didn’t have an entry for the yokai, but Mikey remembered seeing something in one of the books he’d flipped through. He’d found the journal and Raph was reading it through for a second time.

Raph closed the journal with a snap. “None. All is says is what Mr. H already told us.”

“I’m starting to think that tracking them down is worse than actually trying to catch them,” Mikey said. “Well, almost.”

“Look, we’ve got it down to four houses that might fit the bill,” Don said, glancing at the clock. “There are no interior pictures of them anywhere. Two had been owned by Japanese businessmen, one by a former ambassador to Japan, and another by a well-traveled archeologist.”

“All four homes were foreclosed on?” Leo asked.

Don nodded. “Yes, and all within the last two months. How do we decide?”

“Split up and break into all four of them?” Raph asked. “Check for the room Leo saw and if it ain’t there, get the hell out.”

“If one of us is alone when the realtor shows up, then what?” Leo asked. “Expose ourselves to get him out of the house? If we don’t catch him in time and we’re not the one carrying the trap coin, there would be no way to stop the yokai from devouring him.”

“I don’t know any other way to do this, Leo,” Don said.

Mr. Hidesato had been sitting quietly to the side as the turtles worked. Now he leaned forward and said, “Perhaps this would be a good time to learn if you can access your power in a more conscious way, Leonardo.”

“How do you mean?” Leo asked, turning towards the man.
“Your foresight in the dream belonged to another person,” Mr. Hidesato said. “If you can access that person’s thoughts again, perhaps who can learn something about them which would tell you the house they will be visiting.”

“It’s worth a try, Leo,” Don said. “We’re going to lose the sun in about forty minutes.”

“Meditation,” Leo said as he got out of his chair. “I’ll go to the dojo.”

“Go with him, Donny,” Mikey said. “Fire up some candles and turn out the lights. You’re the mellowest of us so you can use that soothing voice of yours to help him reach the right state quicker.”

“I will get the car and have it standing by,” Mr. Hidesato said, leaving the room.

After Leo and Don departed for the dojo, Raph said, “Let’s get the coin and wax tool. I have a feeling every second is gonna count.”

While Leo got into a comfortable position on the mats in the dojo, Don fetched some candles from one of the storage rooms. After setting them down near Leo, he lit them and then turned out the lights.

Sitting down across from his brother, Don said, “Okay Leo, I want you to focus on the sound of my voice. There is nothing but my voice. Allow all thoughts to slide away. Your body is weightless. There is no light or dark. There is no sight or sound other than my voice.”

He continued speaking in a low, even monotone, watching as Leo’s face and body relaxed. Once he was certain that Leo had reached a suggestible state, Don carefully chose what to say next.

“You’re going into an old home,” Don said. “Do you see the home?”

The symbols on Leo’s arm began to glow and his head tipped forward in acknowledgment.

“You open the door,” Don instructed. “The first thing you notice is the smell. Do you smell it?”

Leo nodded, his face wrinkling slightly as if assailed by an unpleasant odor.

“You want to be sure you’re in the right place,” Don said. “Can you step back outside?”

Once more Leo nodded, his expression smoothing out again.

“You look for a number,” Don said. “A number on the house. Do you see one?”

Leo’s head turned from left to right, stopped, and then straightened as he nodded.

“Tell me the number,” Don said.

“Five fifty-two,” Leo responded.

“Good, very good,” Don said, trying to quell his excitement. That was the number of one of the four homes on their final list. “Come back to yourself now. Move away from the house. It’s not time to go inside.”

“Not time,” Leo repeated. The glow from the warder symbols faded and a moment later Leo opened his eyes.
“It worked,” Leo said.

“Yes it did, hurry now,” Don said as he blew out the candles. Leo seemed a little out of sorts and Don helped him to his feet. “Are you okay?”

“Slightly disoriented, like with my dreams,” Leo answered. “It’ll pass.”

They ran upstairs to find their brothers waiting for them.

“I’ve got the coin and wax tool,” Raph said. “Mr. H has the car idling at the curb.”

“We’ve got the address,” Don said, heading for the front door. “It’s the small mansion in Brooklyn Heights.”

Don gave the address to Mr. Hidesato as soon as the turtles were in the car. He drove quickly, following Donatello’s directions in order to take the fastest route. Dusk had arrived and full darkness would descend in only minutes.

“We’re not going to be on time,” Leo said suddenly.

He had seemed withdrawn since coming out of his trance. Don glanced at him and saw that the warder symbols on his arm were beginning to glow again.

“Leo?” Don asked. “Leo, what are you doing?”

“Connected,” Leo said, slowly closing his eyes. “Linked. Slow him down.”

He became silent, the glow from his symbols brightening the interior of the car.

“Leo? Leo, what the hell?” Raph asked, leaning towards his brother.

“I don’t think he can hear you,” Mikey said.

Raph looked towards Don, who was in the front seat. “How long, Donny?”

“Couple of minutes,” Don said.

Mr. Hidesato took a turn quickly, jostling the car’s occupants, but Leo barely moved. He was statue like, his head down and hands clasped in his lap.

The house loomed up in front of them, five stories tall with hedges lining the sidewalk. A dark colored town car was parked at the curb and Mr. Hidesato pulled in behind it.

“We’re here Leo,” Raph announced. He got no response from his brother.

“I will stay with him,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Go quickly. The realtor is already here.”

Don, Raph, and Mikey dashed up the front walkway, unconcerned about showing themselves to whoever was inside. As they reached the stairs going up to the house, they saw a man standing there watching them. He did not move or seem startled at seeing three huge mutant turtles hurtling towards him.

It was Don who realized what was happening. “Is that you, Leo?”

“This was the only way to stop him from going inside until you got here,” Leo/realtor said.
“Put him back in his car and snap out of it so ya’ can join us,” Raph said.

“I can’t do that,” Leo/realtor said. “The Ao nyōbō won’t come out for us. Once I’m inside, she’ll sense a human presence and put in an appearance. You’ll come in then and capture her.”

“You sure about this, Leo?” Mikey asked.

“Positive. Give me a couple of minutes and then follow me,” Leo/realtor said as he unlocked the front door and stepped inside.

“Man, I do not like this,” Raph said, his fingers twitching against the handles of his sai.

“No more do I,” Don said. “That’s a lot of control that Leo’s trying to maintain.”

Mikey peered into the dark interior of the house. “I can’t see a thing.”

“That’s it, I ain’t waiting any longer,” Raph said, striding inside.

The brothers had only taken a few steps when Mikey’s symbols lit up. “Looks like he drew her out.”

“Then where the hell is he?” Raph demanded.

“There,” Don whispered, pointing ahead and to their right. Standing in the doorway of a lighted room was the occupied body of the realtor.

Don grabbed Raph’s arm as his brother started forward. “Slow,” Don instructed. “We need for Leo to get out of the way.”

The trio moved cautiously, watching as Leo began moving farther into the lighted room. By the time they gained the doorway, he’d reached the midpoint, his gaze fixated on a woman seated on a low stool. Her back was turned to them and to either side of her were jars and tubs filled with cosmetics.

Tattered robes splayed out around her and her jet black hair hung nearly to the floor. She dabbed a brush into a bowl containing something of a bright reddish hue and brought the brush around to her face, which none of them could see.

Leo was still walking towards her, looking almost mesmerized.

“Time to stop, Leo,” Raph hissed at his brother.

For a second it seemed as if Leo had not heard him. Then with one foot off the ground, Leo froze.

As he did, the Ao nyōbō whipped around, coming to her feet in one smooth motion.

Rising to a height that brought her head nearly to the ceiling, her vividly tinted mouth stretched impossibly wide. Her countenance was horrific, the white paint cracking over wrinkles that hung from her face and neck.

Her eyes were sunken, black things highlighted by false eyelashes. Her nose and chin drooped and jiggled as she moved.

Clawed fingers easily three feet in length reached for the body of the man who stood before her.
Mikey was a blur of orange as he bolted into the room. Grabbing Leo around the waist, he flung both himself and his brother to one side as the clawed fingers closed on the spot where they had just been.

A shriek that shook the room informed them that the creature had recognized their symbols.

The sound seemed to activate Donatello’s warder magic and its radiance suffused his entire body, traveling along the length of his bo.

“Mirror!” Don yelled, darts forward and batting the Ao nyōbō’s hands aside with his weapon.

“Which one?” Raph shouted.

Ducking out of the yokai’s reach, Don looked towards the makeup tables. Scattered on the floor around them were several hand mirrors. Mirrors began to appear on the walls, blinking into existence almost faster than the eye could see.

Mikey dragged Leo from the room, pushing him down on a nearby staircase. “Stay there,” he ordered before returning to help the other two turtles.

Don continued to battle the Ao nyōbō, using his bo to counter her height advantage and keep her away from them. “Start smashing them!” he called out. “If it doesn’t break, it’s hers!”

Nunchucks in hand, Mikey began shattering the mirrors on the wall. Raph used his sai to splinter the ones scattered around the tables, stomping on others with his bare feet.

“Ow!” Don yelped as one of the claws swept past his protection and raked an ugly trench across his upper arm.

In the split second that his concentration was broken, the yokai twisted towards Raphael. Throwing himself into a forward roll, Don came up under her outstretched arms and slammed his staff against her elbows.

“Ya’ okay, Donny?” Raph asked.

“Yes! Mikey, it’s the mirrors on the floor! Help Raph!” Don exclaimed.

Dancing past the clutching, screeching demon, Mikey joined Raph and began crushing the hand mirrors strewn across the floor. The tip of a clawed finger caught the end of one of Mikey’s mask tails and jerked his head back, but Don dislodged it with an upwards sweep of his bo.

The tips of Raph’s sai came down simultaneously on two mirrors. One immediately shattered; the other did not.

“Got it!” Raph yelled.

Dropping one of his weapons, he yanked the trap coin from his belt and smacked it against the mirror.

The yokai’s scream was near deafening. Slapping their hands over their ears, the turtles cringed as the sound cut to their very core. Suddenly the Ao nyōbō’s body rolled upwards, struck the ceiling and then in its entirety sped towards the mirror.

Raph shoved Mikey backwards, leaping aside as well when the yokai hit the trap coin. Her
feet entered first, her gown fluttering grotesquely before it was swallowed.

The last thing to disappear was her hideous face and the wide black maw which was still screaming as it disintegrated.

Springing forward, Raph snatched up the coin and placed it into the wax tool.

Around them the mirrors and makeup all vanished. The lights went out, leaving them standing in darkness.

Mikey took out his flashlight and shone it around the room. There was no longer any sign that the space had been occupied by anything. Don was clutching his arm, blood dripping over his fingers and Mikey rushed to his side.

“Here,” Mikey said, removing his mask and using it to tie off the cut. “That’s gonna need stitches.”

“Leo,” Don said, unconcerned with his injury. He all but ran to the foyer, where he found the realtor still sitting on the steps.

The man looked up at his approach and Don could tell that Leo remained inside of him. “It’s done,” Don said softly, squatting in front of his brother. “Go back to your body now.”

Nodding, the man’s eyes closed and Don backed away, signaling for Mikey and Raph to do the same. Mikey switched off his flashlight when the man began to groan and all three of the turtles quickly exited the house.

In the Rolls they found that Leo was just coming to. Mr. Hidesato had already started the car and once the doors were closed, he pulled away from the curb.

“How ya’ doing, Leo?” Raph asked.

“My head hurts,” Leo said groggily.

“How about you, Donny? You had to use your powers too,” Mikey said.

“I feel like I just went through one of Master Splinter’s seven hour training sessions,” Don said, sounding tired.

“We got that bitch,” Raph said, “but these fights ain’t getting any easier.”

“The price,” Leo murmured.

“What’s that, bro’?” Mikey asked.

Lifting his head, Leo said, “We can save people, but there’s a price to be paid.”

“He means the downside to our gifts,” Don said. “The plus and minus to everything.”

“I just call it turtle luck,” Raph said. “Keep crossing your fingers that ours holds out.”

End Ao nyōbō
Night of the Oboroguruma

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
Word Count: 8,822
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Chapter Notes

These aerial views of the first floor and basement of the Hidesato House were created by the very talented Sherenelle.
Upon their return to the house, Mikey had to help Leo inside. Not only was Leo exhausted, but when he moved his head too quickly, the world started to spin.

“Stick his ass in bed and don’t let him argue with ya’ about it,” Raph told his younger brother as the four turtles stood in the foyer.

“Come on, Leo. Up we go,” Mikey said, turning Leo towards the stairs. Leo walked a couple of steps and then pulled back. “Donny’s arm . . . .”

“I’ll take care of it,” Raph said. “Lie down before ya’ fall down.” Leo started to nod and then thought better of it. Everything was spinning enough without
him jerking his head up and down.

Confident that Mikey would see to it that Leo was settled into bed, Raph touched Don’s shell to get him moving. When they were in the kitchen, he indicated that Don should hop up on the table.

After he grabbed medical supplies from the closet, Raph came back to where Don patiently waited.

“We sure as hell need to get the new medical bay done. Like tomorrow,” Raph said as he carefully removed Mikey’s mask from Don’s arm. “Way too many butts have been sitting on this table lately.”

Don chuckled and then inhaled sharply as Raph set to work pulling the wound together with stitches. “I’m not fond of these unsanitary conditions either.”

Raph worked silently for a couple of minutes before asking, “Ya’ think Leo’s okay?”

“I’d like to say yes and feel confident about my answer,” Don said. “Leo just took control of another person’s body.”

“That’s some shit, ain’t it?” Raph asked, pausing for a second to look up, his golden eyes filled with worry. “What if . . . what if his head is messed up permanent like?”

“I don’t think that’s anything we need to worry about,” Don said, hoping he sounded reassuring. “I’m sure that after some sleep he’ll be right as rain again.”

“Ya’ just said that ya’ ain’t confident about that,” Raph said. “Don’t sugar coat stuff for me, Donny. If you’re afraid I’m gonna lose my temper and start lashing out at Mr. H again, I can tell ya’ right now he pisses me off plenty without your help.”

Don pursed his lips. “Getting in Mr. Hidesato’s face doesn’t do anyone any good. It just means more work for Leo in trying to keep the peace.”

“Sorry, that’s my nature,” Raph said. “Something all of ya’ should know by now. That sly diplomat game works for Mr. H and Leo, it don’t work for me. When I want answers, I want ‘em now, not forty chess moves later.”

“Your aggression hasn’t worked,” Don said.

“Shows how much ya’ know, Donatello,” Raph said with a grin. “Me and Leo got this whole tag team thing going. I get Mr. H focused on me and my threats, then Leo comes to back me down. Once I ease off, Mr. H tells Leo the shit he’s been hiding.”

Sudden understanding shone in Don’s eyes. “Because he thinks Leo is siding with him. Clever.”

“That ain’t saying Leo isn’t pissing me off still. There’s times when I think he is siding with the man,” Raph said. “Damn Casey for opening that stupid box. This is a royal mess I’d sure as hell like to be done with.”

Don had a feeling that Raph was fooling himself on his concept of what constituted a tag team event involving Leo, but he said nothing about it. Let sleeping dogs lie was one of the mottos he liked to live by, especially when it came to Raphael.
“I read a quote once that in part said ‘be careful not to wish your life away’,” Don said. “We’re going to have to settle in for the long haul, because there are still a lot of creatures roaming around free.”

Raph bit the thread after tying it off and then wrapped a bandage around Don’s arm. “I don’t know what that even means.”

“It means that time passes quickly enough without us wishing to speed it up,” Don said. “Don’t be so busy wishing that you don’t stop long enough to enjoy the present.”

“Ya’ know what I’d enjoy right about now?” Raph said, one hand on the table behind Don and the other on the table between Don’s legs. He leaned closer. “Some stress reduction.”

The pair hadn’t heard the front door open and close, but the sound of packages crinkling separated them. Raph was packing up the medical supplies when Mr. Hidesato entered the kitchen.

“I went for take-out food since we missed dinner,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Would anyone care to eat?”

Don glanced at Raph’s shell as his brother went back into the medical closet to put things away. “I think we’re all too wrung out to eat, Mr. H. Thank you though. Leo and Mikey are already upstairs and that’s where we were headed too.”

Mr. Hidesato bowed his head in acknowledgment. “The food will keep. How is your arm?”

Hopping down from the table, Don said, “A few stitches, nothing major.”

“You do not take pain killers or numb the area before making repairs?” Mr. Hidesato asked.

“Now where the hell would we get that kind of stuff living down in the sewers?” Raph asked. “We spent most of our lives patching each other up without the aid of drugs, why should we start taking them now?”

“I’d rather suffer a little pain and keep a clear head,” Don said quickly in order to prevent Raph from becoming belligerent. “Considering who we are, being ‘under the influence’ is not an option.”

“I understand,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Out of necessity, most warders do not take anything that might be mind-altering. There are however, instances when certain herbs are required. Times when a sort of second sight can be beneficial.”

“Sounds groovy,” Raph quipped. “Bet Woodstock went over big with your crowd.”

“Okay Raph, I think it’s time for bed,” Don said, stepping in front of his brother and backing him towards the door. “Goodnight, Mr. H.”

“Goodnight Warders,” Mr. Hidesato replied.

As they went upstairs, Don held Raphael’s attention by wagging his tail practically in front of his brother’s face. After quickly peeking into their shared room and finding Leo and Mikey curled together in peaceful slumber, the pair headed for the guest room.

Donatello made certain that Raph enjoyed as much ‘stress reduction’ as he required before the two of them fell into a deep sleep.
The next morning the pair followed the smell of grilling steaks down to the kitchen and found Mikey at the stove. Leo was seated at the table, a steaming cup of tea in front of him. He appeared paler than usual.

“Steak and eggs for breakfast bro’s,” Mikey announced. “There’s coffee.”

Raph grabbed two cups while Don took a seat next to Leo. “How’s your arm?” Leo asked.

“My arm is fine,” Don answered. “The bigger question is, how does your head feel?”

“Right as rain,” Leo said, taking a sip of tea.

Raph plunked a cup of coffee down in front of Don and then sat down on Leo’s other side. “The truth, Leo. Not what ya’ think we want to hear, but how you’re really doing.”

Leo looked at him with a steady gaze. “Honestly, I feel absolutely fine physically. Mentally, I’m still just a little freaked out about what I did last night.”

Balancing four fully laden plates, Mikey joined his brothers at the table. “He slept right through,” Mikey reported. “No dreams.”

“None?” Don asked Leo. “Nothing at all?”

“Nothing,” Leo said. He frowned. “I hope that doesn’t mean I’ve somehow burned out my ability to dream of future events.”

“You were the one who said we couldn’t count on our powers,” Mikey said.

“Ya’ had one night without a dream,” Raph said around a mouthful of food, pointing his knife at Leo for emphasis. “Ain’t the first time ya’ didn’t dream about a creature before we ran into it. Probably won’t be the last.”

“But that time it was ‘cause the creature cloaked itself by possessing Casey,” Mikey said.

“We have to accept that the yokai will find ways to cloak themselves from us,” Don said. “They are adapting just as we are. Past warders developed techniques for locating yokai. The communication equipment in the war room proves that Mr. Hidesato’s uncle had his own information network. If you don’t dream about the creatures Leo, then we’ll rely on more traditional methods for locating them.”

“We found the Yanari by listening to a wacked out radio show,” Raph said.

Mikey straightened in his seat as an idea hit him. “We should talk to Angel. She’s a college freshman this year and knows a lot of people. I’ll bet she hears things.”

“I’m good with that as long as she only passes along the info she gathers,” Raph said. “We don’t need her getting involved with the hunting part of this venture.”

“We have to be careful with how many people know about the yokai,” Leo said. “We can’t afford for the knowledge of their existence making them stronger than they already are.”

“Or creating new ones,” Don said. “If we enlist Angel’s help, then we shouldn’t give her any information about creatures being loose in the city. We should just tell her to ask her friends that if they hear of any strange happenings, they should let her know as much about them as possible.”

“You’d better tell April and Casey about Angel too, or Casey will spill the beans,” Mikey
From the corner of his eyes, Raph had been studying Leo. Though his brother had said he felt fine, Raph could tell that he was more than just ‘freaked out’ by what he had done the evening before. Raph also knew that Leo needed to talk it out, and the only one who would be capable of getting him to fully open up was their father.

“I say we go home for a little while before we do anything else,” Raph said. “We haven’t talked to Master Splinter since day before yesterday. Mr. H brought a bunch of food home last night and we should haul that with us for lunch.”

“There’s steak leftover from breakfast too,” Mikey said. “Master Splinter would enjoy that.”

“Shouldn’t we leave something for Mr. H?” Don asked.

Raph snorted. “There’s more food in this kitchen than even Mikey could eat in a year.”

“Hey!” Mikey protested.

“Heading home is a good idea,” Leo said, standing up and gathering his dishes. “According to the schedule on the board, the housecleaners are coming in today.”

“Actually, I could use some things from our infirmary at home,” Don said. “When we get back here, you guys can help me clear out that basement room so we can turn it into an infirmary.”

After the brothers cleared up the breakfast things, Mikey packed a picnic basket with food and Leo left a note on the white board telling Mr. Hidesato that they’d gone home for the day. Then all four of them left by way of the basement sewer exit, using their shell sleds to transport them back to the lair.

Master Splinter stood at the top of the service bay stairs, looking towards the water way entrance as the brothers arrived. Though they hadn’t called him, it was clear that he’d sensed they were coming.

“My sons,” Master Splinter said after they’d parked their shell sleds and approached him.

“Are you all right, Sensei?” Leo asked.

“I am fine,” Master Splinter said. “My concern is with the four of you. During meditation I perceived that one of you had experienced a transformative event. Donatello, you are injured.”

“It’s only a small cut, Master Splinter. I’ve had worse sparring with Raph,” Don said. “That transformative event you are concerned about happened to Leo during last night’s hunt.”

Leo tried to shoot a warning glance in Don’s direction, but his brother ignored him. Turning his head to find Master Splinter staring expectantly at him, Leo said, “It was nothing, Father. My gifts are simply evolving.”

“Why don’t ya’ for once be honest with yourself?” Raph demanded. “Those ‘evolving’ gifts took a toll on ya’ and freaked out the rest of us. Mr. H ain’t never seen anyone do what ya’ did last night and he obviously don’t care about the hows as long as it gets the job done. He also don’t care what these powers might be doing to us.”

“He isn’t as insensitive as you make him out to be,” Leo said.
“He’s not overly solicitous either,” Don said. “His inquiries as to our health seem more geared towards whether we can continue functioning as warders or not.”

“Just because he’s not a demonstrative person doesn’t mean he’s completely thick-skinned and self-serving,” Leo argued. “If he has a breakdown every time we’re slightly injured or encounter something new, he won’t be able to guide us on our quest.”

Raph opened his mouth, clearly ready to continuing debating the point, but Master Splinter spoke first. “Leonardo, please come with me. My concern at the moment is not with Mr. Hidesato’s emotional disposition, but with yours.”

“Yes, Sensei,” Leo responded, following his father.

The other three turtles went to the kitchen, saying nothing until Master Splinter had entered his chambers with Leonardo in tow.

“I can’t believe that Leo thinks jumping into someone else’s body ain’t gonna fuck with his head,” Raph griped.

“Leo has always spent a lot of time in his own head,” Don said. “Maybe that’s why he was the one gifted with the prophetic dreams and prescience.”

“I would’ve thought you’d be the one getting that power,” Mikey said. “You’re the genius.”

“I don’t spend my time contemplating my nonexistent naval,” Don replied with a smile. “That’s Leo’s thing. Always has been.”

“Don’s head is already full, there’s no room in there for images of future events,” Raph said, nudging his brother good-naturedly.

Leonardo liked the space that Master Splinter had created for himself in this newest, and hopefully last, lair. He especially liked the small pool that flowed next to Master Splinter’s meditation corner. It had a very calming effect, even upon a mind that was sometimes filled with chaotic thoughts.

Master Splinter kneeled on one side of the rug which sat in the center of that corner and indicated that Leonardo should kneel opposite him. Once his son was comfortably situated, Master Splinter spent a moment scrutinizing him. Leo met his gaze unwaveringly.

“Tell me what happened to you last night,” Master Splinter finally said.

Knowing better than to attempt to downplay the changes that were occurring in him, Leo began by telling his father of the dream he’d had. He explained how the dream had not only foretold a future event, as had happened before with one of his dreams, but how he also seemed to be the person experiencing the occurrence.

Then he told his father how Don had partially hypnotized him so that he could find the address of the home that the yokai was inhabiting.

When he got to the next part of his tale, Leo’s voice took on a different tone. His father noticed, but offered no comment, preferring that his son speak uninterrupted until he had said everything that he considered to be relevant.

“Fortunately, I was able to exit the realtor’s body as easily as I took it over,” Leo said as he finished speaking.
“Was that a concern for you while you were attempting the possession, or did that thought come to you after you returned to yourself?” Master Splinter asked.

“After,” Leo admitted. “Beforehand I was too invested in trying to save the man’s life.”

“So you had little worry for your own safety or well-being,” Master Splinter said. “It is commendable, but perhaps now would be a good time to explore the possible effects or tolls these gifts are taking not just upon you, but your brothers as well.”

“Even if I believed there was some detriment to my mental health, I couldn’t prevent myself from having these prophetic dreams,” Leo said.

“Possibly not,” Master Splinter said. “You could however, avoid utilizing this latest manifestation of your powers. Tell me how you felt upon returning to yourself.”


“That is the physical symptoms of such a powerful psychic link,” Master Splinter said. “I want you to explore deeper, Leonardo. I want to know the after effects of astral travel upon your psyche.”

After a moment of silence, Leo said, “While I was establishing the connection to the man it felt very much like deep meditation. But during meditation, I’m still aware of my physical form to a certain extent. Controlling the man’s actions meant stretching almost to the point of snapping that tenuous tether to my physical being. It was . . . jarring. Pushing aside the man’s will so that I could take over his body was strenuous, as was maintaining control over him. The process left me drained.”

“And now? It has been hours since you utilized this power. You have slept, you have eaten, you have interacted with your family. What changes do you sense within yourself?” Master Splinter asked.

“An unsteadiness,” Leo said. “It’s almost as if a part of me is still residing in a different plane of existence.”

“As though you have left something of yourself behind?” Master Splinter asked.

Leo pressed his lips together, his brow furrowing. “Yes,” he finally acknowledged.

Master Splinter’s eyes bored into him. “You have not wanted your brothers to become aware of this?”

“No,” Leo answered.

“Why?” Master Splinter asked, when it became apparent that his son was not going to be forthcoming unless pushed.

“I need for them to be confident in my mental state,” Leo said. “I’m not certain how much trust Don or Mikey have in Mr. Hidesato, but Raphael is extremely suspicious of the man and his motives. I’m not sure how much I trust him, but we need him if we’re going to complete this mission. It’s on me to maintain a constructive dialogue between Mr. Hidesato and ourselves. It’s my job to keep my brothers safe and to accomplish what we’ve set out to do.”

“You lead them, Leonardo, but it is not necessary for you to do everything,” Master Splinter said. “A team cannot function properly if its leader does not delegate or accept the assistance of his
team members. Your brothers are as invested in this mission as you are, let them carry an equal portion of the weight.”

Leo’s laugh was more one of self-deprecation than actual amusement. “You would think I’d never spent time with the Ancient One from the way I’ve been talking. I don’t want to continuously beat myself up.”

“That you will have to find that middle point,” Master Splinter said. “The place where you have balanced what you are able to do with the acceptance of what you cannot. These labors that the four of you have agreed to take on require you to embrace the world of magic. Doing so has given you access to powers whose full extent none of you yet knows. Just because these powers have attached to you does not mean you need to allow them to change you in any fundamental way.”

“We have to embrace and then manage them, as you told us before,” Leo said.

Master Splinter nodded. “Yes, exactly. If you choose to utilize the power to project your consciousness into another person, then you must learn how to retrieve all of your psyche once a task has been completed.”

“How do I do that?” Leo asked.

“Through silent illumination,” Master Splinter said. “Open meditation calms the mind. You must withdraw from exclusively focusing on a particular sensory or mental object. Doing so will allow your mind to become a conduit into which any part of you that still inhabits the ethereal plane can funnel itself back into and once more become a part of your whole self.”

“And my brothers?” Leo asked.

“They each require techniques individualized to the specific manifestation of their magical gifts,” Master Splinter said.

“I think Mikey has already found a way to do that,” Leo said with a laugh. “He told his power to stop hurting him and it did.”

“Verbalization has always been Michelangelo’s strong suit,” Master Splinter said dryly. “I will leave you now so that I may speak with your brothers. You are home, Leonardo. Relax your mind and body in the comfort of familiar surroundings. Reconnect with that part of you which has become lost.”

His words were soft and soothing. As he rose, he noted that Leonardo had already closed his eyes.

Master Splinter found that his other three sons were in the infirmary, helping Donatello gather supplies. The inventor of the family had created medical equipment that was geared towards their unique physiology and they would need it at their temporary headquarters.

“We’re setting up an infirmary in Mr. H’s house,” Donatello explained when he saw their father. “He’s got medical supplies, but we’ve been performing patient care in the kitchen. I guess we’ll still have to use a table, but at least it won’t be the kitchen table.”

“We brought lunch,” Mikey announced.

“How’s Leo doing?” Raph asked.

“Your brother is meditating,” Master Splinter said. “His newest power causes a certain
disconnect to occur within his mental essence. I have provided him with a technique that will allow him to become whole again.”

“Does that mean we don’t have to worry about him going off the deep end?” Raph asked.

“Your brother is not going to ‘go off the deep end’ if I understand your use of the terminology,” Master Splinter assured him. “Leonardo’s mental health is not an issue. Rather than focus on him, please tell me how your own challenges have been affecting you.”

“Other than Leo, Don’s the only one who’s used his gifts very much,” Raph said. “Mikey’s have kicked in a couple of times, mine only once so far. Haven’t had a chance to find out if my magical hat trick is gonna get a power boost.”

“Mine did. I turned the invisible, visible,” Mikey said.

“Leonardo informed me that you were able to control the pain your gift had caused you,” Master Splinter said. “Do you know how you accomplished that?”

“Not a clue,” Mikey said, almost as if proud of that fact. “I needed it to do something other than burn me, so I told it that.”

“And you, Donatello?” Master Splinter asked.

Don appeared frustrated and said as much. “My so-called gifts refuse to work unless I get a sudden boost of adrenaline. It would be great as an offensive tool, but it only seems to function on defense.”

“Tell me, Donatello, when you fight with your staff, do you plan out each move?” Master Splinter asked.

“I did when I was young,” Don said. “Now it’s as much a part of me as one of my arms.”

“Practice has made it so,” Master Splinter said. “Your new power is emotionally driven. Of all my sons, you have always had the gentlest nature. Your ability to feel compassion for others is limitless, your curiosity and wonder at the world around you often fills you with a childlike sense of awe. It came as no surprise to me that the magical gift which attached to you is one that takes its cue from your emotions. When others are in danger, you do not stop to think about that danger, you merely react to the threat.”

“Or not,” Mikey said. “Like with Jhanna, you kinda just knew she was defending herself and wasn’t there to hurt us.”

“And that poor city worker who got mutated by Bishop’s alien ooze,” Raph said. “Ya’ knew the thing that was attacking us wasn’t bad; it was a victim. That’s why ya’ stopped me from going after it.”

“How does any of that help me get a handle on my warder magic?” Don asked.

“Allow your instincts to guide you,” Master Splinter said. “Intelectually you know these creatures are a danger and that they are deadly. Tap into the part of you that feels compassion for others and let your protective nature guide you in turning your gift into an offensive weapon. Practice turning it off and on.”

“It’s pretty tiring,” Don said.
“For now,” Master Splinter said. “As your abilities increase, so will your strength.”

“Like when we were kids and would get worn out after an hour of practice,” Raph said. “The more we practiced, the longer we could last.”

Don rubbed his chin. “You know, that makes sense. When I get anxious that someone is going to be hurt, the power just sort of clicks on, like a flashlight. I just have to find that switch and learn how to turn it on any time I need to.”

Walking to the doorway, Raph glanced in the direction of Master Splinter’s room and then back at his father. “Ya’ think Leo’s doing okay? Should we check on him?”

“He will come to us when he is ready,” Master Splinter said, placing his hand on Raph’s shoulder. “I know you are worried, my son. The challenges that your brother faces because of his gifts are difficult ones, but they are not insurmountable. Leonardo will be all right.”

Leonardo had taken to heart his father’s advice and rather than focusing on any particular mantra, he simply sat quietly. The Ancient One had been fond of this type of meditation and Leo had practiced it under his tutelage.

He soon felt himself floating away from his corporeal form. Without the weight of his physical body placing its limitations on him, Leonardo’s mind opened itself fully to the realm of pure consciousness known as the unity plane.

Spiritual awareness brought with it the knowledge that Leonardo’s self was not intact. It was what had caused his disorientation and sense that he was no longer whole.

Rather than attempting to search for what was lost, Leonardo remained unfocused, allowing this region of reality to wash over him. Soon a stronger presence than any other began to approach him and Leonardo recognized the manifestation to be that part of his psyche which had become detached.

An intense feeling of great peace and tranquility infused the whole of Leonardo’s perceptions. With it came the knowledge that he was whole again.

It was difficult to remove himself from a plane of such beauty, but Leo’s duties called to him. He reluctantly turned his focus to his physical being and slowly floated down from his current sphere.

As he reentered himself, but before he could open his eyes, Leonardo suddenly saw a vision unfold within his subconscious mind. In it, a partially translucent carriage, sans horse, rolled past a background that looked very much like Central Park.

The carriage began to gain speed and Leo realized that it was chasing a horse drawn carriage. That carriage’s driver was wide-eyed with fear and was pushing his horse to run all out. When the driver looked back over his shoulder, Leo found that he could see through the man’s eyes.

An enormous, grotesque face glared back at him.

Leo’s eyes snapped open. The sights and sounds of his premonition slowly faded. After taking a deep breath and releasing it, Leo stood up and exited his father’s room.

He found Master Splinter and Michelangelo in the kitchen. Mikey was heating the food they’d brought with them and Master Splinter was setting the table.
“Leo!” Mikey exclaimed upon seeing his brother. “How’re you doing?”

“Good,” Leo said. “Better than good.”

Master Splinter studied him and then said, “I can see that you are whole again.”

“Yes, Sensei. What you suggested I try worked,” Leo told him. “Where are Don and Raph?”

“Loading med stuff on the shell sleds,” Mikey said. “Here, put the garlic toast on the table.”

Leo accepted a platter from Mikey and took it to the table. As he set it down, Don and Raph appeared from the direction of the service bay.

Raph’s relief at seeing Leo was obvious. “Damn, ya’ look a shell of a lot better now than when we first got here.”

“I feel better too,” Leo admitted. “Master Splinter said that I’d left a piece of me behind when I returned to myself after possessing the realtor. He was right. I just had to take the time to retrieve it.”

“You’ll have to do that any time you take possession of someone, won’t you?” Don asked.

“I will,” Leo said with a nod. “At least I know how.”

“Food’s ready,” Mikey said. “You guys sit down.”

After they were gathered around the table and had passed the food around, Leo said, “I had a premonition just before I came out of my meditation.”

“Ya’ had a what?” Raph asked, staring at him.

“A premonition,” Leo repeated. “It was exactly like one of my prophetic dreams, only this time I wasn’t asleep.”

“Your mind was still open, the connection between the conscious and subconscious remained in place,” Master Splinter said. “That is very similar to what occurs when one is sleeping.”

“What did you see?” Mikey asked.

“A carriage without a horse chasing one of the horse drawn carriages that take tourists through Central Park,” Leo said. “The phantom one was partially see-through and on its front was a huge, misshapen face. It was incredibly fast.”

“What happened to the other carriage?” Don asked.

“I don’t know,” Leo said with a frown. “I came to during the chase itself. I never saw if the yokai caught up to the other carriage.”

“So maybe it hasn’t happened,” Raph said. “Ain’t that the definition of premonition? Something that’s about to happen but ain’t happened yet?”

“Yes it is,” Don said. “It’s also specific enough that we should be able to find which creature we’ll be going after.”

“We should get back to Mr. Hidesato’s as soon as possible,” Leo said, starting to stand.
Raph reached over and caught his shoulder. “Cool your jets, Leo. Relax and enjoy the meal. HQ is full of cleaning people, plus it’s midday; ya’ know these things wait until dark to come out and play. We’ve got hours.”

“You’re right,” Leo said, settling back into his seat. “I’m feeling really energetic right now. Maybe we could even spar a little after we eat.”

“You’re on,” Raph said with a grin, happy to have Leo back to his old self again.

A couple of hours later the brothers said their good-byes to Master Splinter and returned to Mr. Hidesato’s house. Coming back in through the basement, they dropped off the medical equipment near the entrance to the room they were going to turn into an infirmary and went upstairs.

As they came through the hall they noticed there were two large items sitting in the foyer. The first was an extra wide exam table, complete with drawers, and the second was a recovery bed with retractable side rails.

Donatello’s eyes lit up and he practically pounced on the new pieces of furniture. “Look at these you guys! We can have a real infirmary in one of the storage rooms and the other can be converted to a recovery room.”

“All we need now is a storage room,” Raph said sarcastically. “Where are we supposed to put all the stuff that’s currently cluttering up those two spaces?”

“We can partition off part of the tunnel,” Don said. “No big deal.”

“Uh huh,” Raph said, sounding much less enthusiastic about the proposed work as Don was.

“Ah, I see you have discovered the new equipment that I ordered for you,” Mr. Hidesato said as he stepped out of the office. “I hope they will suit your needs.”


“I was not sure what time you would return, so I did not ask the delivery people to take these things downstairs,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“That’s okay,” Leo said. “We can take care of that ourselves. Actually, the first thing we’d planned on doing was to identify one of the escaped creatures.”

“By all means, that should be the priority,” Mr. Hidesato said, leading the way into the office. Leo explained how he’d come to have a premonition and then described what he’d seen. Partway through his recitation, Mr. Hidesato began to nod.

“I recognize that yokai,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is an Oboroguruma. When Kyoto was Japan’s capital city sightseeing was extremely popular, much like sightseeing through Central Park is these days. This sightseeing was accomplished by means of oxcart taxis.

“When Kyoto became crowded, as it did during festival season, the taxi drivers got into carriage fights. They slammed their carriages into one another as they attempted to obtain the prime sightseeing locations. Much ill will and resentment formed amongst the nobility whenever they lost out on the best sightseeing locales.

“Negative feelings are a powerful force of their own. Many a yokai has been created from such feelings, and the Oboroguruma was one such creature.”
“So it came into being because people were carriage fighting and that’s what this Oboroguruma still does?” Raph asked.

“Resentment, envy, and anger have been responsible for the creation of many an object-turned-yokai,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Where does the coin go?” Mikey asked.

“Here,” Mr. Hidesato said, touching the spot between his eyes. “Unfortunately, the Oboroguruma will not remain still while you attempt to capture it.”

“I’m going to guess that it will be moving at a high rate of speed,” Leo said.

“On paths through Central Park that aren’t designated for motorized traffic,” Don added.

“Best way to catch it is to give it a target,” Raph said. “We can borrow a couple of carriages and when it comes after us, block it in. Jump on board, slap the coin between its eyes, and jump off again.”

“Why does that sound way easier than it’s probably going to be?” Mikey asked of no one in particular.

“Central Park is a big place,” Don said. “Any idea how we find the Oboroguruma?”

Leo and Raph turned towards Mikey and with a look of understanding, Don did as well.

“Figures,” Mikey said with a not too enthused expression on his face. “One turtle tracking device ready for action.”

“Borrowing two carriages is going to be more difficult,” Leo said. “The drivers groom and then stable the horses immediately after their final tour of the evening.”

“We can’t let anything happen to the horses. If it looks like they might get hurt, we scrap the plan and come up with a new one. That ain’t negotiable,” Raph said, looking directly at Mr. Hidesato.

“I can book two carriages for the last tour of the day,” Mr. Hidesato said, ignoring Raph’s inference. “In the medical cabinet you will find sedatives that could be safely administered to the drivers. You can adjust the dosage based upon how long you believe you will need in order to capture the Oboroguruma.”

“The sun sets at about six minutes after seven today,” Don said. “How late do the carriages run?”

“I understand that there are evening rides,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Let me phone one of the better rated carriage services and ascertain how late a ride can be booked.”

His laptop was open on the desk, and after looking up a phone number, he made a call. After talking for a couple of minutes, Mr. Hidesato placed the call on mute and said, “I can reserve two carriages for nine-thirty. That is the last of the evening rides. They are also the only company that offers rides this late in the day.”

“Book them,” Leo said. When Mr. Hidesato returned to the phone, Leo told his brothers, “That works out well. We won’t have to compete with any other carriage service for the Oboroguruma’s attention.”
“It is done,” Mr. Hidesato said as he disconnected from the call. “The pick-up location is at 7th Avenue and 59th Street, Central Park South.”

“Pretty open spot,” Raph said.

“Pretty busy spot,” Don added.

“Disguises then,” Leo said. “We’ll wait until we’re in the park before dosing the drivers.”

“That leaves us about five hours to kill,” Don said. “Plenty of time to work on setting up the infirmary and recovery rooms downstairs.”

The brothers set to work clearing out both of the basement storage rooms. Because there wasn’t time enough to create the partitioned space in the tunnel, they placed the items from the storage rooms to one side of the dojo.

Once the spaces were clean, the turtles carried the exam table and bed downstairs, arranging them according to Donatello’s directions. With medical supplies on shelves and in cabinets, Don pronounced the infirmary complete.

Patting the top of the exam table, Don told Leo, “Hop on up here. You can be my first patient. Your stitches are ready to come out.”

Leo dutifully sat on the table. As Don began to remove his stitches, Leo said, “You can be the second patient. After you’re done with me, we can trade places so that I can change the bandages over your stitches.”

Leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed, Raph said, “Ya’ know, that’s a pretty sad commentary on our lives. Donny gets excited over medical supplies and one of us is always getting patched up.”

“That’s the turn our lives took from the moment the mousers destroyed our first home,” Leo said. “Every step on that path took us right to where we are today. Would you want to change any of it, knowing that doing so would take us in another direction entirely?”

He and Raph stared into each other’s eyes. They didn’t have to exchange words for either of them to understand the implications.

“Hell no,” Raph finally said.

“Me either,” Mikey said. He was leaning on the table behind Leo and brushed a kiss to his older brother’s shoulder.

“Done,” Don announced.

He and Leo traded places. Once Don’s bandages had been changed, the four turtles went back upstairs. They found that Mr. Hidesato was preparing dinner and he declined any assistance, encouraging the brothers to relax until the food was ready.

The suggestion sent them to the media room, where they watched a movie until it was time to eat.

After dinner they donned disguises similar to those that Angel had given them years earlier when they’d had to rescue Casey from Hun and the Purple Dragons. Though slightly confining, they covered the turtles from head to toe.
They met up with Mr. Hidesato in the office. “I will drive you to the pick-up location. The rides have already been paid for, but here is cash that you can give to the drivers as tips.”

“Kind of generous of ya’, ain’t it?” Raph said as Mr. Hidesato handed several large denomination bills to Leo.

“We are paying them for their silence,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is preferable that they do not report their drugging or the hijacking of their carriages to the authorities.”

He then handed two small rectangular cases, around the same size as sunglass cases, to Don. Inside each was a syringe.

“The sedative?” Don asked.

“Yes,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “I have calculated the dosages based on a man weighing around one hundred and ninety pounds. Through inquiry, I have ascertained that your two drivers will be men and from the company’s web site I have made an educated guess as to which drivers you will be assigned.”

“Getting close to that time,” Raph said, glancing up at the clock.

Mikey opened the coffer and found the trap coin that was meant for the Oboroguruma. Leo accepted the wax tool from Mr. Hidesato and then the group filed out of the house and into the car.

The area where they were to meet the carriages was still lively even at nine-thirty at night. It was across from a popular hotel and taxis rolled up to its entrance every few minutes.

Mr. Hidesato drove past the horse carriage stand, verifying that both of the carriages were there. When he came back around, he dropped the brothers off at the sidewalk just beyond where the first carriage waited.

“We’re supposed to be eccentric Hip Hop recording artists,” Mikey said. “That’s the cover Mr. Hidesato told me he’d given us.”

“Guess that’s meant to explain why the four of us needed two carriages,” Raph said.

“And why we’re dressed the way we are,” Don said. “How are we splitting up?”

“You and I will take the first carriage,” Leo said. “Raph, you and Mikey take the second one. I’ll whistle when we’re in a good location to drug and hide the drivers.”

Don handed one of the syringe cases to Mikey and then he and Leo approached the first carriage. The driver stood next to it, holding the horse’s bridal to keep him steady.

“Welcome gentlemen,” the driver said. “You are going to enjoy your ride through our Central Park. I’ll be pointing out landmarks as we go and sharing the history of Central Park. Is this your first visit?”

“Yes,” Leo replied as he and Don stepped into the carriage.

The fact that his tourists weren’t talkative didn’t seem to bother the driver. He climbed into the driver’s seat and took up the reins. “Feel free to ask me questions. Our photo stops will be at Cherry Hill and Strawberry Fields. There’s a nice thick blanket on the seat in front of you if you start to get cold.”
As the carriage turned onto Center Drive, Don glanced back and saw that Raph and Mikey’s carriage was following right along behind them. Their driver began to talk about the various features they were passing, but the brothers weren’t listening to him.

“This ride is going to take us past The Dene,” Leo whispered. “That’s an ideal place to relieve the drivers of their carriages.”

“The Willowdale Arch has thick shrubbery on either side of it,” Don replied. “We pass right over it.”

“Then that’s where we’ll make the exchange,” Leo said. “That area will be the most deserted. If the Oboroguruma is going to attack, that’s probably where it will happen.”

After making the decision, the brothers grew quiet. It was a pleasant night and they found themselves actually enjoying the ride. Beneath the blanket, Leo and Don held hands, knowing this would probably be the only time they’d get to experience a guided carriage ride.

As they neared the area of Central Park known as The Dene, Don took the syringe out of its case. Leo folded the blanket and moved it out of their way. When they were within sight of the Willowdale Arch, Leo whistled.

Don immediately sprang forward and pushed the needle into the driver’s neck. The drug acted almost instantaneously and the man slumped over on the seat.

Grabbing the reins from the driver’s hands, Don pulled the horse to a stop just before they reached the bridge. Leo jumped down and gathered the driver in his arms, quickly carrying him down the embankment and hiding him in the heavy shrubbery.

He looked up to see Raph carrying his carriage driver as well. Once the two men were out of sight, the pair divested themselves of their disguises and waited as Don and Mikey did the same. After those two had tossed their clothes down, their brothers folded everything together and hid the bundles near the drivers before returning to the carriages.

Don and Mikey had both taken up positions in the driver’s seats. “We’ll go slowly from this point,” Leo said. “We shouldn’t encounter anyone as long as we avoid going near Bethesda Fountain. If we don’t see the Oboroguruma by the time we reach Terrace Drive, we’ll turn around and head back in this direction.”

“Got it,” Raph said. He strode back to his carriage and climbed up next to Mikey.

Leo joined Don on the driver’s seat and the two carriages set off. Don kept his horse to a slow gait, noting that Mikey stayed close behind them.

It wasn’t too long after that when Mikey called out, “It’s coming!”

Don glanced around but saw nothing, nor did he hear anything. Next to him, Leo said, “Get ready. Mikey’s receiving an advanced warning.”

Those words had barely left his mouth when their horse became skittish. Don took up the slack on the reins, fearful that the horse would bolt.

Behind them they heard Mikey’s horse snort and then whinny, its voice high and frightened sounding. Don’s horse responded by pulling at his reins and then tossing his head.

Then from one of the side paths there was a sudden flash of movement and a carriage came
barreling towards them.

Don snapped the reins and yelled “Hiya!” His horse leaped forward, pulling their carriage out of the way and barely avoiding a collision.

Leo stood up, turning and grabbing hold of the seatback in order to steady himself as he located the Oboroguruma. It was coming up behind them, the horridly grotesque face of the yokai grinning maniacally at their carriage.

Long strands of hair were looped around the vehicle shaft, as if the Oboroguruma used that as a way to guide the carriage. Huge luminescent eyes that seemed to bug out of their sockets stayed fixed on their carriage as the Oboroguruma gave pursuit.

Looking beyond the yokai, Leo saw his brother’s carriage moving up on the creature. Leo signaled for them to pull up alongside the Oboroguruma so that they could begin to box it in.

“A little slower, Donny!” Leo shouted. “Let it gain on us!”

That was easier said than done. Don pulled back on the reins to get the horse under control, but it was frightened and fought him. As it turned out, he didn’t need to slow his horse because the Oboroguruma sped up in order to catch them.

When the yokai drew even with the back wheels on Leo and Don’s carriage, it crashed into them. The carriage tilted as the driver’s side wheels came off the ground and then slammed down hard.

In a panic, Don’s horse tried to veer off the road, causing the carriage to sway dangerously. Only the strength in Don’s arms and wrists kept the horse on the road, but he was afraid the bit was cutting into the poor animal’s mouth.

Don had barely gotten the horse under control when the Oboroguruma smashed into them again, this time at the carriage’s midway point. All four wheels left the ground and for a breathless millimeter of a second, it hung in the air. Then the carriage landed with a bone jarring thump, causing Leo to lose his grip on the seat and plummet over the side.

Lunging for his brother, Don caught hold of Leo’s hand and yanked him back into the carriage. His horse, feeling the reins go slack, bolted off the roadway and onto the grass.

The carriage began to slow and the Oboroguruma changed course, barreling directly towards them. Jumping to his feet, Leo waved at Mikey and shouted, “Get him!”

As soon as Leo’s arm lifted, the Oboroguruma emitted a high pitched shriek and swerved away from them with a burst of speed.

“It saw your warder symbols!” Don yelled as the yokai flashed by him.

Raph and Mikey watched as the Oboroguruma pursued and attacked their brother’s carriage. Though Mikey slapped the reins against his horse’s hips, it was clear that the other horse was the faster of the two.

“We gotta catch them, Mikey,” Raph said, gripping the seatback and leaning forward.

“I’m giving her all she’s got, Captain,” Mikey responded, parodying a character from Star Trek.
“Then we’re gonna have to try something else,” Raph said as he watched the other carriage careen off into the grass. “Gimme the coin.”

Just as Leo shouted to them, Raph’s warder symbols lit up. Grabbing the coin from his brother, Raph stood up and glanced at Mikey. “Keep it steady.”

“What are you going . . . ?” Mikey didn’t get the chance to finish the question as Raph jumped out of the carriage and onto the back of their horse.

Raph grabbed hold of the bridle’s cheekpieces and leaned down close to the horse’s neck. “We gotta go fast buddy.”

The horse snorted as all of Raph’s body began to glow a bright red, the magic in his symbols enveloping the animal as well.

With a burst of power, the horse shot forward. Mikey flew back against his seat, the sudden momentum pinning him there for a moment. Just as he was straightening again, he heard a shout and looked around to see that they were passing Leo and Don.

“Catch!” Leo yelled.

The wax tool came spinning through the air at him and Mikey grabbed for it, catching hold as they swept past the other carriage.

“I have a need, a need for speed!” Raph whooped as they bore down on the Oboroguruma, who was in full retreat.

Mikey clung to the reins for dear life as their carriage whipped along the road in pursuit of the Oboroguruma. Their horse was running at near super speed, its legs a blur.

Bit by bit they gained ground on the yokai. As they began to draw alongside it, Raph rose onto his feet, balancing himself on the speeding horse.

“Yee~freakin’~haw!” Raph shouted and then leaped onto the Oboroguruma.

Long, foul smelling hair lashed Raph’s body as he grasped the top of the carriage. Dropping onto his plastron, Raph braced himself with his feet as the Oboroguruma rocked from side to side, trying to buck him off. Ahead of them was the park’s boat pond and the yokai was headed right for it.

Inching forward, Raph moved up until he was directly above the creature’s face. Holding onto the carriage with one hand, Raph draped his upper body over the top of the Oboroguruma’s head and slapped the trap coin down right between its eyes.

The wheels immediately snapped off of the carriage, bringing the Oboroguruma to a grinding halt. Still in motion, Raph went flying off of the top of the carriage. Curling into a ball, he hit the ground on his carapace and rolled for several yards before coming to a stop.

Mikey pulled back on his horse’s reins as soon as he saw the Oboroguruma freeze in the middle of the road. After setting the carriage brakes, he hopped down from the seat and watched as the Oboroguruma began to come apart.

As each piece broke off of the possessed carriage, it was sucked into the trap coin. Soon all that was left was the monstrous face, which began to roll up from the chin and disappear into the coin.
The last to go was the creature’s eyes, which drooped and then melted inward. It was over in less than a moment and then the coin fell to the pavement.

Mikey rushed forward to snatch up the coin and press it into the wax tool. As he counted off the seconds, Don and Leo drew up alongside his parked carriage. Leo jumped out and ran over to Raph, catching hold of his arm and helping him stand.

“Are you all right?” Leo asked.

“Hell yeah,” Raph said, smiling widely. “Did ya’ see that ride? I think we broke the sound barrier.”

“You’re lucky you didn’t break anything else,” Leo said dryly. They walked back to their brothers. “What happened?”

“Guess my power decided to kick in,” Raph said. “Damn, that was fan-fuckin-tastic! What a rush! Whoo!”

He threw back his head and howled at the moon. Mikey handed the coin to Leo and then went to check on the horse.

After running his hands along its sides, Mikey said, “He doesn’t look any worse for wear. He’s not breathing hard and he isn’t even lathered in sweat.”

“He earned his hay tonight,” Don said. Patting his own horse’s flank, he added, “They both have.”

“We need to reconnect them with their drivers before those men wake up,” Leo said. “Let’s head back to the Arch.”

As they climbed back into their respective carriages, Raph snatched the reins from Mikey’s hands. “I’m driving,” Raph said, snapping the reins to get the horse moving.

“Nice and steady, Raph,” Leo called out. “These horses have had enough excitement for one night.”

“Well I haven’t,” Raph proclaimed, his eyes gleaming. “When we get back to HQ, I’m gonna show all three of ya’ how much more excitement I can dish out.”

End Oboroguruma

Chapter End Notes
Night of the Yonaki babā

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
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Chapter Notes

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Though the capture of the Oboroguruma hadn’t taken up much of the night, none of the turtles rolled out of bed early.

Raph’s gift had manifested in a powerful way, leaving him both energized and extremely enthusiastic. At his insistence, they’d all gone to bed as soon as they’d gotten back to HQ, but it was hours before anyone actually slept.

When they finally did come out of their shared bedroom the next morning, three of the
brothers were walking funny.

In the kitchen, Mikey started to lower himself onto a chair, but immediately sprang up again. “Ow,” he groaned. “Why is it that three of us have to suffer for our powers and for Raph’s too?”

“You weren’t complaining last night,” Raph said as he took a jug of milk from the refrigerator.

Mikey gave him a sour look. “Next time your power kicks in, I’m gonna spend the night somewhere else.”

“No you won’t,” Don said. He stood next to the coffee maker as he waited for his preferred brew to be ready.

“Have you tried to sit down yet?” Mikey asked.

“Nitroglycerin ointment,” Don said. “I’m starting to feel just fine.”

“Bogart,” Mikey said. “Where are you hiding that stuff?”

“Bathroom cabinet,” Leo said, sitting at the table with the morning paper.

“Et tu, Leo?” Mikey started towards the door, then stopped to look back at Don. “What’s the stuff called?”

Don poured himself a cup of coffee. “Rectapair.”

“I don’t know what you guys are bitching about,” Raph said. He plunked down a bowl of cereal on the table and sat across from Leo. “I feel great.”

“Mikey is right,” Don said. “Your power has a distinct upside.”

“I’m right being the operative word,” Leo murmured as he turned a page.

Don gave him a look then turned back to Raph. “The point is, the powers that Leo, Mikey, and I have are emotionally or spiritually based and we pay for them. Yours is based more on your instincts. You don’t have to work to activate them, they just happen when they’re needed.”

“No my job to plan a fight,” Raph said with a shrug. “Like I’ve told Leo before, I prefer just getting the job done.”

“I know that you do,” Don said. “That was my point. I wasn’t disparaging your intellect. No offense intended.”

Raph grinned at him. “I’m in too good a mood, Donny. Nothing ya’ can say will offend me.”

A movement in the doorway drew Donatello’s eyes. “Oh, good morning, Mr. H.”

“I take that back,” Raph muttered.

Mr. Hidesato moved towards the coffee maker. “May I?”

Don took down a cup from the cabinet and poured coffee into it before handing it to the man. “I hope that it’s okay, I like my coffee strong.”
“By strong he means you can stand your spoon up in it,” Leo said.

The tea pot began to whistle and Leo folded his paper, setting it on the table in front of Raph before getting up.

“Leo’s making tea if you’d rather have that,” Don told Mr. Hidesato.

“I prefer to fortify myself with coffee this morning,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I am meeting with my company’s business manager. I can stop at the market on my way back, if anyone needs anything.”

“Nothing that I can think of,” Don said.

Mikey came back into the kitchen, appearing much livelier than when he’d left. “’Morning, Mr. H.”

“Mr. Hidesato is going out on business for a while,” Leo said. “He wanted to know if he should stop at the market on the way home.”

“We’re out of garlic and onions,” Mikey said. “Oh, and we’re running low on rice.”

Raph ignored all of them, his face buried in the sports page of the paper. On the drive home the night before, it had been Leo who had described the outcome of their yokai hunt to Mr. Hidesato.

He sat in the front seat and did his best to hold Mr. Hidesato’s attention because Raphael was more than a little frisky in the back. It took all of Don’s and Mikey’s efforts to keep Raph from being overly demonstrative in Mr. Hidesato’s presence.

Despite his good mood, Raph still felt a lingering resentment over being rushed upstairs as though he were some errant child. It didn’t matter to him that Don had pointed out how they kept their PDA’s to a minimum in front of Master Splinter too.

Mikey sat down next to Raph and stared at his brother while drinking his orange juice. After Mr. Hidesato bid them all a good day and left the room, Raph said, “What?”

“Nothing,” Mikey said. “I guess ignoring him is better than fighting with him.”

“No it ain’t,” Raph said, slapping the paper down on the table. “The problem is that I’m not supposed to say what I really think.”

“You can say it all you want,” Leo told him, returning to the table with his tea. “Just say it to us.”

“What good does that do?” Raph asked.

“Helps to get it out of your system,” Leo said. “That’s more useful than your constantly barking at Mr. Hidesato.”

The smile returned to Raph’s face. “Remember what Donny said. I gotta go with my instincts.”

Don came over to join his brothers, putting a plate of toast in the center of the table before sitting down. “Did you have any dreams last night, Leo?”

“I barely had time to sleep,” Leo said, humor pulling up the corners of his mouth.
“Weren’t we supposed to talk to Mr. H about training April?” Mikey said.

“We’ll try to do that when he returns from his business meeting,” Leo said.

“Yeah, business meeting,” Raph said as he reached for a piece of toast. “Right. He’s probably off telling that Council of his that we caught another creature.”

“If it keeps them away, what does it matter?” Mikey asked.

“All we have is Mr. H’s word that they do need to be kept away,” Raph said. “It ain’t like we’re in a position to ask them ourselves.”

“April could,” Don said. “She could attend a meeting with Mr. H on our behalf.”

“She ain’t a warder,” Raph pointed out.

“They don’t know that,” Mikey said.

“They will if they don’t see the symbols on her arm,” Raph said. “Maybe you’re supposed to show them at every meeting to prove you’re a warder.”

“Gimme some ink and I can paint them on her arm,” Mikey said. “I’ll bet I can make them real looking enough to pass inspection on a video link.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Leo said slowly. “It would be very helpful for us to have someone who we trust represent our interests before the Warder High Council.”

“Now you’re talking my language,” Raph said.

“I have no proof that Mr. Hidesato is being untruthful, Raph. I do agree with you that he might be keeping some things to himself,” Leo said. “What he thinks we need to know and what we actually do need to know could be completely different.”

“Point of view,” Don said. “Priority differences.”

Raph leaned towards Leo. “So what happens if we do find out he’s not just withholding things? What are ya’ gonna do if we catch him in an outright lie?”

“I’d want to know why he lied,” Leo said, maintaining steady eye contact with his brother. “We’re talking about needing to trust him, but remember that trust is a two-way street. Not only does he not know us well, but we resemble the things he’s spent his entire life capturing. In his mind he might be struggling to keep mutated turtles separate from supernatural creatures.”

“He accepted us quickly enough,” Don said.

“That’s ‘cause April vouched for us,” Mikey said. “Right, Leo?”

“His need for someone with a specific skill set led her to suggest us for the job,” Leo said. “If he’d become aware of us under any other circumstances, he might have thought we needed capturing.”

“We don’t know that he doesn’t think that now,” Raph said. “Maybe at the end of this he’ll get the Council to send some warders here to stick us in a cage.”

“Another reason for April to get in tight with Mr. H,” Mikey said. “I’ve got another question. How did the Council find out about the creatures escaping? Mr. H said they learned about
it, but he never said how they learned about it.”

“I meant to ask him that myself,” Don said. “But I got sidetracked when we found out about the other warders.”

“Maybe they’re spying on Mr. H,” Mikey said. “Maybe they were spying on his uncle too for some reason.”

“Too bad we can’t find the uncle’s journal,” Raph said, looking meaningfully at Leo.

In response, his brother rose from the table. “Looking for it can be our priority this morning. You’ve already established that it’s not in his room. We should start by searching every shelf in the office. There are bookcases in the basement workspace too. If we don’t find it in the obvious places, then we’ll look everywhere else.”

“And if he took it out of the house?” Raph asked.

“Then that will be something else we’ll need to apprise April of,” Leo said. “If Mr. Hidesato agrees to take her on as a student and allows her to accompany him to Council meetings, then she’ll be able to search the other places he regularly visits.”

Though the turtles spent the better part of two hours searching for the missing journal, they finally had to admit defeat. It was abundantly clear that the journal was nowhere in the house.

When they met back in the office after their search and realized that no one had found the journal, Raph said, “That probably ain’t the only one that’s missing either. I’ll bet Mr. H knows the journals a lot better than he’s letting on. If any of them said something he didn’t want us to know, he’s removed it.”

“We’ll have to depend on April to find that out for us,” Leo said. “Since we have to table that for the moment, we should probably try to track down another escaped creature. I saw no reports of anything unusual in this morning’s paper.”

“Considering the strange case of the missing journal, I should probably try to scan in some more of the ones that are still here,” Don said. “I can listen to ‘Other Worldly’ while I’m doing that.”

“I’m going to call Angel and see if she can come over,” Mikey said.

“I thought we agreed not to tell her too much about what we’re doing,” Don said. “She’s going to have questions if she sees that we’re spending all our time in this big house.”

“We can tell her we found a do-gooder benefactor,” Mikey said. “I mean, Mr. H isn’t all that different from Casey, except for the secrets, the money, the lack of a bad temper, and the really nice house.”

Raph rolled his eyes but refrained from commenting on Mikey’s comparison. Instead he turned to Leo and asked, “What are ya’ going to be doing, reading more journals?”

“I’m going to meditate,” Leo answered.

“Uh, that’s gonna help how?” Raph asked.

“Hopefully by providing me with a premonition or vision of what we’re going to encounter next,” Leo said. “Our powers are changing, developing, and expanding. Since I haven’t dreamt of any yokai in the past two nights, maybe my gifts have moved beyond my subconscious into my
superconscious mind.”

“If I ever start talking that casually about my conscious, subconscious, and superconscious mind, just shoot me,” Raph said.

“Leo shouldn’t meditate by himself,” Don said, looking pointedly at Raph.

“Since when? He does that by himself all the time,” Raph said.

“I’m standing right here,” Leo said.

“Since he started getting visions,” Don said as though Leo hadn’t spoken. “Since he had to meditate just to retrieve a part of himself that was out there floating in another realm.”

“Point taken,” Raph said. “Come on Leo, let’s go burn some candles and meditate.”

The pair went downstairs together and set out a few candles. After Leo had lit them, Raph turned out the lights and joined his brother on the floor mats.

Raph’s technique for meditation was different from the ones his brothers employed. Once he was in a comfortable position, he closed his eyes and focused on different parts of his body, slowly easing the stiffness out of each muscle in turn. He had no interest in exploring the astral plane or whatever it was that Leo did. Raph’s goal was to stay as much in touch with his own body as possible.

The exercise always left him feeling refreshed and stronger. He had once explained to Donatello that after an injury, his type of meditation helped him to heal faster. His smart brother had been of the opinion that there was no doubt scientific fact to back up that theory. Raph had told him not to bother looking it up because he didn’t need the confirmation.

Leo breathed deeply and slowly relaxed. With each breath he inhaled his brother’s scent and was calmed by it. When they were younger, their father had insisted that the family meditate together in order to strengthen their bond. Though they did that less often now, Leo still found that meditating with one or all of his brothers gave him more peace of mind than anything else he’d tried.

The room around him faded rather quickly and soon Leonardo’s mind escaped his physical form. It began to drift, to break the bonds of reality and stretch outward as it sought for his better self.

Whatever true ‘enlightenment’ meant to others, the only need that Leo wished to fulfill during meditation was to strip away lingering feelings of guilt, anger, and doubt. This trio of emotions were the ones that plagued him the most and the ones he found to be the most dangerous.

In turn he relinquished his unintended hold on those feelings, gratefully letting parts of each scatter to the cosmos. He hoped that a day would come when he would be able to banish all of them and then shield himself from collecting more. That day was not today, but he did manage to lighten the load.

It was as Leo began to return to himself that a flash of something caught his attention. Drawn to it and unable to turn away, Leo recognized that it was the beginning of some sort of premonition. Whatever it was, it remained just beyond his ‘sight’. Though it refused to become visible to him, Leo did hear something that sounded like muffled weeping.

The sound left him feeling unutterably sad, a sadness that went bone deep. Leonardo did not
want to experience that type of sadness; it was made of the stuff that haunted his most horrifying imaginations. It was the sadness of loss and of ruin.

“Leo!”

A voice filled with strength and love tugged at him, pulling him away from the hold that the sadness had upon him. Leo grabbed onto that voice like a lifeline.

“Leo, dammit, snap out of it!”

Leo’s eyes sprang open as his mind fell back into his body, jarring him out of meditation. Raphael was kneeling in front of him and shaking him, hard.

“I’m back,” Leo sobbed and then realized that he was crying.

“Ho~ly crap,” Raph said, wrapping his arms around Leo. “Ya’ scared the shit out of me.”

The aftereffects of the premonition lingered and Leo clung to his brother, drawing enough vigor and hope from Raph to counteract the sadness. Finally he felt strong enough to pull out of Raph’s embrace and remove his tear stained mask.

“What the hell happened?” Raph demanded.

“A premonition,” Leo said as he dried his eyes.

Raph sat back on his heels so that he would be eye to eye with Leo. “Did ya’ see something happen to one of us?”

“No, nothing like that,” Leo answered. “It was more a feeling that something terrible had happened. I didn’t see anything, but there was a sound like someone weeping in the distance, and it just tore right through me.”

“Damn,” Raph said, catching one of Leo’s hands between his own. “Damn,” he repeated after a moment, unsure as to what he should say next.

“I’m okay now,” Leo said. “Let me get my spare mask and then we can tell Don and Mikey about my premonition.”

“Ya’ sure?” Raph asked, staring hard at his brother.

Leo knew he wasn’t asking whether they should share the premonition but whether Leo really was all right.

Touching Raph’s cheek and offering him a smile, Leo said, “I’m sure.”

“Okay then.” Raph stood up and pulled Leo up too. “I’ll deal with the candles and meet ya’ in the office.”

Five minutes later they were in the office and Leo was recounting his premonition for the two brothers who hadn’t been present. When he finished, Raph told them how he’d heard Leo sobbing and had to force him back to reality.

As Raph talked, Leo realized he hadn’t fully shaken that leaden feeling brought about by the premonition. It was as though some residual sadness clung to him, refusing to relinquish its hold. Time would no doubt strip that away, so he didn’t relay those sensations to his brothers.
“So who was crying, a victim or a yokai?” Mikey asked. “Kinda vague there, Leo.”

“I wish I knew,” Leo said. “Now I understand why psychics are ridiculed. You only get unclear messages that require interpretation for them to make any sense.”

“And you don’t know who’s supposed to do the interpreting,” Don said. “The psychic or the victim. Let me run what we have through my search program and see if I’ve scanned anything dealing with weeping or feelings of sadness into the system.”

He walked quickly into the war room. After he’d gone, Raph pushed lightly against Leo’s arm, encouraging him to take a seat on the couch.

“I talked to Angel,” Mikey told them. “She’s coming by at six-thirty and staying for dinner. If Mr. H is home by then, I’ll tell him not to say anything about creatures in front of her.”

Don rushed from the war room, darted over to the bookshelves, and skimmed them quickly before pulling down one of the journals. As he flipped through the pages, he said, “I found it. That was a yokai in your premonition, Leo.”

“Which one?” Mikey asked.

Finding the page he wanted, Don came back to where his brothers waited and sat on the couch next to Leo. “It’s called a Yonaki babā, or Weeping Hag,” Don said. “According to this journal entry, the hag appears outside of houses where tragedy has struck. She is attracted by the sadness of others and will remain outside of the house, weeping loudly all through the night.”

“Skip to the part where that makes her dangerous,” Raph said.

“It says here that the Yonaki babā’s weeping is contagious,” Don said, looking up at Leo. “It says that she will return to the same house night after night until the family has fallen into ruin.”

“How does her crying make that happen?” Mikey asked.

“There’s no mention of that in here,” Don said. “It only tells how one captures her. The trap coin has to be placed atop whichever of her eyes the tears are flowing from.”

“We have to stick it in her eye?” Mikey asked. “I hate eyeball stuff.”

“On her eye,” Don said, correcting him. “The instructions regarding that are very specific.”

“Whatever,” Raph said. “That ain’t the hard part. Finding her is the hard part. There sure as hell wasn’t any clue on how to do that in Leo’s little premonition.”

“That’s where accessing our information resources comes in,” Don said. “I didn’t pick up any clues from our new favorite radio program, but we can scan internet news, radio news programs, and the televised news broadcasts for the past few days.”

“Divvy it up, Donny,” Leo said. “With any luck we can track her location by nightfall.”

“Who wants some chicken and rice soup for lunch?” Mikey said. “I need to use some leftovers so there’s room in the fridge.”

His suggestion was accepted and Mikey trotted off to the kitchen. When he returned about forty minutes later with soup bowls on a tray, his brothers had not managed to track down the Yonaki babā.
By the time Angel Bridge arrived at six-thirty, the brothers still hadn’t discovered a single
cue as to the yokai’s whereabouts. Mikey opened the door to her and was immediately enveloped in
a hug.

“I haven’t seen you guys in forever,” Angel said.

Mikey returned the hug and then waved her into the foyer. Before closing the door, he
glanced outside at her ride parked against the curb. “Nice scooter.”

“Thanks,” Angel said, flipping her hair off her shoulder. The pigtails she had worn when the
turtles had first met her had been replaced by a single long braid. She looked around the foyer.
“Wow, this is some house. What’s the story?”

“Come on into the office and my bros and I will explain,” Mikey said, leading the way.

The other three turtles had made certain they were all in the office and that the entrance to the
war room was closed and hidden. Michelangelo had started dinner preparations, but when Mr.
Hidesato arrived around six and learned that they would have a guest, he’d offered to finish making
the meal.

Mouth-watering smells emanated from the kitchen, but did not reach beyond the foyer.
Angel hugged each of the brothers in turn, clearly happy to see them.

She took a seat on one of the chairs and looked at Mikey expectantly. “I am dying to know
how you guys managed to get access to such a posh house. Give.”

“It’s kind of a long story,” Mikey said. “April introduced us to the guy who owns the house.
She was doing a job for him and when he ran into some trouble, we helped sort it out.”

When he paused, Don took up the tale. “We came to find out that Mr. Hidesato, who you’ll
meet at dinner, has an interest in crime fighting. When he learned that we’ve been keeping the streets
free of certain gang elements for years, he offered to back our efforts.”

“What we do is look for the more unusual crimes, the things that go right past law
enforcement’s normal radar,” Leo said. “We search for patterns in victimology or behavior . . . .”

“Red flags,” Raph offered.

“Yes,” Leo said in agreement. “When we learn of something that might fit what we’re
looking for, we investigate.”

“And this is your what? Headquarters? Base of operations? Bat cave?” Angel asked.

Mikey chuckled. “All of the above.”

“So what can I do?” Angel asked. “Are you in need of a Bat Girl?”

“We’re in need of another information conduit,” Don answered. “We’ve got the printed and
broadcast news outlets covered. April has business and social services network contacts, while
Casey covers the streets. What we’re lacking is access to younger people, like on college
campuses.”

“Or grade schools,” Angel supplied with a slight smile. “I haven’t heard you mention social
media. If you want to know what’s going on with the thirteen to twenty-four year old crowd, you
need to go online.”
Don smacked himself on the forehead. “I hadn’t thought of that.”

“See, I’m already being helpful,” Angel said. “Do what’s left of your enemies know you guys have become a highly funded crime fighting team?”

“Not yet,” Raph said. “We haven’t had to deal with any of them since we started doing jobs for Mr. H.”

“He does know how to keep his dealings with you guys on the down low, doesn’t he?” Angel said. “If not, he’ll be inviting a whole lot of trouble not just from our old friends the Foot clan, but also from our not so favorite government dark horse Agent Bishop.”

“Trust me, Mr. H wrote the book on keeping secrets,” Raph said.

“Are there any particular sites I should access?” Don asked, still focused on information resources.

“I’ll make you a list,” Angel said. “I’ll also give you my user names so you can follow or watch me. When we have chat sessions, I’ll invite you in and between us we can turn the conversation to whatever you’re trying to find. If anyone knows anything, you’ll learn about it pretty fast.”

“Hey, if Donny gets to be on social media, then I want a profile too,” Mikey said.

“The more the merrier, Mikey,” Angel said diplomatically. “How about giving me a tour of this place? The only other big house I’ve ever been in was the Volpehart building, and we all know how that turned out.”

Mikey jumped to his feet. “Come on. We’ll start upstairs and work our way down.”

Raph and Don trailed along with them to not only savor Angel’s reactions but to make certain that Mikey didn’t give away any secrets that might prove dangerous to the girl.

Leo used the excuse of helping Mr. Hidesato with dinner in order to apprise the man of the true reason they’d asked Angel to visit. As he’d suspected, Mikey hadn’t explained much, so Leo filled Mr. Hidesato in on the story they’d given Angel and why they needed her help.

He also took the opportunity to tell Mr. Hidesato about his premonition and that they had used the clues from it to determine which yokai they were to encounter next. Before they could get into a deeper discussion regarding the Yonaki babā, they heard the others coming back downstairs.

Mr. Hidesato began plating the meal and Leo set the table. By the time the group came up from the basement and moved into the media room, the food was being transferred onto the dining table.

Upon exiting the media room, the group of four found Leo and Mr. Hidesato waiting for them in the hall. Introductions were made and Mr. Hidesato took over the duties of host, treating Angel very courteously and helping her to her seat at the table.

During their meal, Mr. Hidesato encouraged Angel to tell the story of how she’d come to meet the four turtle brothers. She did so with great enthusiasm, embellishing on certain aspects and proving that she had a very sharp wit.

When her tale was finished, she and Mr. Hidesato became engaged in a lively discussion on college life in the States and Japan. Mr. Hidesato was knowledgeable on the subject and also very
charming to their guest.

In all it was an enjoyable evening. As the meal neared its end, Angel suddenly turned to Don and said, “You know earlier when you talked about patterns, something tickled at the back of my mind. I’ve just realized what that was. Would you say that a rash of unexpected suicides among a certain group of people was one of those types of patterns?”

“Yes I would,” Don said. “Which group of people and where?”

“College students,” Angel said. “I know that there is a percentage each year of kids who take their own lives because they can’t handle the stress or fear disappointing their families. But this is far beyond the average and it’s only happening in one on-campus co-ed dorm.”

“Do you know if they said anything in their suicide notes about why they killed themselves?” Leo asked.

“They didn’t leave suicide notes,” Angel said. “I overheard some detectives talking about it.”

“Don’t people usually leave notes?” Mikey asked.

“Actually, only fifteen to thirty-eight percent of suicides leave a note,” Don said.

“What percent of kids living in the same place kill themselves during one school year?” Raph asked.

“Other than some sort of suicide pact? Too low to accurately measure,” Don said.

“Angel, do you know anything else about them?” Leo asked.

“No, just that,” Angel said. “It was odd enough to catch my notice.”

Leo looked across the table at Mr. Hidesato. “That’s not enough information to know if this is a case for us.”

“Their friends might know more,” Angel offered. “Like if it was a suicide pact or a dare or something. Is that the kind of thing you need to find out?”

“That would help us,” Mr. Hidesato said. “However, we do not wish for you to become involved. If this is the type of case that is within our purview, it would be much too dangerous for you.”

“I’ve helped the guys before,” Angel said.

“Our work right now requires . . . specialized training,” Leo told her.

Angel gave him a knowing look. “Is this like when you guys were fighting that Tengu Shredder? Weird evil magical beings?”

The brothers exchanged glances. Of course Angel would figure out the ‘cases’ they were taking were more than just unusual.

“We’d prefer that you didn’t become a target,” Leo said. “You can’t talk about this with anyone, not even your brother Ryan.”

“Got it,” Angel said. There was a thoughtful look on her face as she added, “The college provides grief counselors, but most of the students handle this stuff better by talking to each other.
They won’t do that where people might hear them.”

When she paused, Don said, “They do it online, don’t they?”

Angel nodded. “I know a girl who lives in those dorms. She’s on the same floor as one of the suicides. They were good friends. I can get into the chat room she’s on and bring you in too. You could ask the questions that will tell you if this fits the odd stuff you guys look for. The thing is, you’ve got to be super sensitive.”

“Donny does super sensitive really well,” Mikey said.

“How soon can we start?” Leo asked.

“Right now,” Angel said. “We can get into the chat room as soon as Donny has an account and profile.”

She and Don excused themselves from the table and went to the office. Using his laptop, Don created an account on the site that hosted the chat room. While he did that, Angel used her phone to log in to the site and go into the chat room so that she could send Don an invite.

Within minutes of entering the chat room, Don was conversing with a group of people who either lived in the dorms or were friends of the deceased kids.

After establishing Donatello’s bona fides, Angel sat back and watched him work. As she suspected, his gentle and caring nature came through in the way he used words. Soon Don had people telling him details of their lives and their friends’ lives that they probably hadn’t even shared with authorities.

It was a little after nine when Angel logged out of her account. Don was still online and Angel dropped a kiss on his head before turning to his brothers, who were waiting nearby.

“I’d love to see this through, but I have an early class and a paper to finish,” Angel said.

“We appreciate the help, Angel,” Leo said.

“Anytime, and I mean it,” Angel said. “If there’s anything I can do, let me know.” She turned to Mr. Hidesato, who had risen from his chair when she’d gotten up. “Thank you for the wonderful dinner, sir. You have a lovely home.”

“Please allow me to drive you home, Miss Bridge,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“I’ve got a scooter,” Angel said.

“We can put it into the trunk of my car,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is late and I would not be much of a gentleman if I allowed you to venture out alone.”

“Take his offer,” Mikey said. “Wait until you see his car.”

Angel smiled at Mr. Hidesato. “Since you so graciously offered, I’ll accept that ride. Thank you.”

Don remained at his laptop, but the other three turtles walked to the door with Angel and Mr. Hidesato. He went out before her, going to his car, but she turned to the brothers.

“Don’t think I didn’t notice those new symbols branded on your arms,” Angel said. “Please be careful, guys. I know from first-hand experience that joining the wrong club can buy you a world
of trouble.”

She skipped down the stairs before any of the turtles could respond. After the two humans drove away, the trio rejoined Don in the office.

Raph took the chair next to Don that Angel had vacated and asked, “Ya’ got anything brainiac?”

“I think so,” Don said, watching conversations scroll across the screen. He typed something and then continued, “Each one of the suicides were healthy, happy kids. They made good grades for the most part and were settled into college life. But get this, all of them had experiences recently that saddened them. One had his car broken into and trashed, another lost a childhood pet, and one learned that she wasn’t going to get a scholarship she needed. Another had broken up with her boyfriend and the fifth lost his place on the basketball squad.”

“Those are a far cry from tragedies,” Raph said. “A car break-in? Geez, that’s a regular occurrence in the city. How do we figure these are yokai related?”

“I’m not finished,” Don said. “Three out of the five told someone that they kept hearing a woman crying during the night and actually saw the old woman. It wasn’t too long afterwards that they killed themselves. And get this, one of my new online friends said she was with Lisa, the girl who’d split from her boyfriend, when Lisa claimed to be looking at a crying old hag. The friend couldn’t see or hear her.”

“That’s gotta be it,” Raph said excitedly. “Let’s go, we can trap that bitch tonight before she kills anyone else.”

“How do we find her?” Leo asked. “Slow down, Raph. If she’s in that dorm, she’s got a larger victim pool to choose from now. The kids there have lost friends, that’s real loss, but her newest target will be the only one who can locate her.”

“Which means what?” Raph asked.

“It means that she probably can’t be seen by us,” Don said. “Maybe only the intended victim can look for the source of the weeping and see the Hag.”

“Big deal,” Raph said. “We sneak into that dorm building and Mikey uses his power to make her visible. All the Hag does is cry. I figure we have her caught inside an hour, and that includes travel time.”

Don rubbed his chin. “She does seem less imposing than the other creatures we’ve gone after.”

“Sure she is,” Raph said. “We can have this done by the time Mr. H gets back.”

He got up and opened the hidden door into the war room. After a minute he returned with the wax tool and a trap coin.

“I’ve downloaded the college campus map and the floor plans for the dorm onto my phone,” Don said. “The campus is in the Bronx.”

“Let’s go then,” Raph said, quickly leading the way downstairs and out to where they’d parked the shell sleds.

“Don’t you guys think we’re moving a little too fast?” Leo asked as they raced towards their
destination. “How are we supposed to get into a building full of college kids?”

“Naomi, one of my new online friends, says that they have a ten o’clock curfew for all students to be in the building, and they’ve imposed a ten-thirty curfew for everyone to be in their rooms,” Don said.

“How many floors are there in this building?” Leo asked.

“Eight,” Don said. “The ground floor has a café, computer lounge, laundry, and fitness center. The housing units are on the second through eighth floors.”

“That means the Hag could be hiding anywhere on seven floors,” Mikey said.

“Glad ya’ can do math,” Raph said sarcastically.

“She seems to be moving upwards,” Don said. “Her first victim was on the second floor. She got two of them on the third floor, the fourth on the fourth floor, and the latest one on the fifth floor.”

“Which means she’s either still on five, or has moved up to six,” Leo said. “At least we have a starting place.”

“Don’t know what difference it makes,” Raph said. “Mikey’s radar will find her in a flash.”

Leo had a feeling that they were missing something; that they should have waited for Mr. Hidesato to return home before leaving on this hunt. There hadn’t been time to discuss the Yonaki babā with Mr. Hidesato while Angel was still visiting.

Raph was rushing them headlong towards what sounded like an easy capture, but Leo wasn’t nearly as certain of that as his brothers seemed to be. They hadn’t experienced the sensations of loss that Leo had gotten from his premonition.

The college building took up an entire block in the Bronx and was across from an elevated train line. On the east side of the college in the facing block was the student housing complex. During the day it was a busy area, at night only less so. Tonight however, the street, was nearly deserted. Even students who would have normally chanced breaking the curfew weren’t in a rebellious mood.

After leaving the sewers, the turtles climbed to the roof of the dormitory building. Standing on the edge of the roof, Don pointed out a series of windows on each floor. “These provide entry into the hallways,” he said.

“Floor number five, here we come,” Raph said as he dropped over the side.

“Raph, wait a . . . .” Leo began, but his brother was moving too fast.

“You snooze, you lose Leo,” Mikey said, quickly following Raph.

“Are you okay?” Don asked.

“I feel like we’re missing something important,” Leo said.

“Like it shouldn’t be this easy?” Don said.

“Like we’re underestimating this creature,” Leo said as he followed his brothers over the side.
Raph and Mikey were already in the hallway by the time Leo and Don caught up to them. Raph glanced back and whispered, “He ain’t getting anything yet.”

“Would you guys wait a minute? I’ve got to do something about the lights,” Don said, trying to keep his voice down.

Don found the electrical junction box and quickly picked its lock.

“How long will this take?” Leo asked.

“Give me a minute,” Don said as he looked over the switches. “I want to turn off only the hall lighting. If the power goes out in the dorm rooms, the students are going to freak out.”

“Doubly better for their lights to stay on,” Leo said. “It will make it harder for them to see anything through a peep hole if the only light is coming from behind them.”

Mikey and Raph had paused but as the overhead fluorescents began to go out, they started walking again without waiting for their brothers.

Taking the lead, Mikey proceeded down the hallway, waiting for his warder symbols to give him some indication as to which direction he should go. Once all of the lights were out, Leo went after his brothers, moving silently so as not to attract attention.

Don closed the junction box and then put on his headset so that he could listen to various radio frequencies in case someone called for assistance. He then brought up the end of the procession.

“I think I’m getting something,” Mikey suddenly hissed. His warder symbols flashed in the darkness and he began running, quickly disappearing around a corner.

Raph started to sprint after him. As he neared the corner where Mikey had turned, Raph heard Don say, “Security’s coming up in the elevator.”

“Raph!” Leo called in an undertone, getting his brother’s attention. “Elevator!”

With a nod of understanding, Raph darted to the elevator and used his sai to pry the doors open. The car was still below them and Raph pressed the emergency cutoff switch located just inside the elevator shaft. A bell began to ring and the elevator stopped.

“Where’s Mikey?” Leo asked as he caught up to Raph.

“Shit!” Raph said, looking in the direction Mikey had gone. “I think he took the stairs.”

Somewhere in the back of Michelangelo’s mind he knew he should wait for his brothers. For one thing, Raph had the trap coin and for another, the hallway lights on this floor were still on.

Just as he had that thought, the overhead fluorescents began to wink out one by one, as though keeping step with him. The symbols on his arm grew brighter and began to sting, a painful reminder that the yokai was near.

He was proceeding more slowly now to give his brothers time to catch up. Though Mikey couldn’t see the Yonaki babā, his warder magic continued to urge him forward.

As Mikey rounded the next turn, the Hag suddenly appeared in the center of the hall. She was only about half his height, with large eyes reddened from constant weeping, a wide mouth filled
with tiny sharp teeth, and an oversized gown whose sleeves were much too long for her. The Yonaki babā seemed to be searching for something as she slowly drifted along the hallway looking from one door to the next.

Mikey’s first thought was to delay the yokai until his brothers arrived. “Um, hey Hag thingy,” he said, hoping to draw her attention away from the students’ rooms. “You don’t know me, but I’m here to put you out of your misery. I mean, I’m not trying to be harsh or anything. Seriously, I don’t even know why you’re crying but it can’t be all that bad.”

The relief Mikey felt when she stopped moving to turn and look at him was short lived. With no warning, she dropped to her knees and began to weep.

An overwhelming feeling of sadness hit Mikey, the sound of her crying echoing inside his head. He couldn’t remember what he’d been doing or even why he was chasing such a wretched old woman.

Mikey blinked and shook his head. “Here to do a job,” he murmured. “Yep, Mikey is here to take care of . . . take . . . something. What does it matter?”

The question ended in a muffled wail. His legs gave way and Mikey plopped down on the floor, his head hanging and shoulders slumped.

“Mikey!”

Raph came around the bend in the hall first, followed by Leo and Don. What they saw was Mikey practically curled in on himself, and the Yonaki babā crawling towards him, her large eyes glued to his face.

“Get away from him bitch!” Raph shouted, barreling towards the yokai, coin in hand.

The Hag’s head jerked up at the sound of his voice and then she vanished.

“Where is she?” Don asked. “Where did she go?”

Raph ran to the end of the hall, looking in every direction without seeing the creature. Leo stopped next to Mikey and squatted down to look at his brother, placing a hand on his arm.

“Mikey?” Leo asked, frowning at the dazed look on his younger brother’s face.

“I can’t see her,” Raph announced, coming back to where his siblings waited. “Mikey, ya’ gotta activate your power again and make her visible.”

Mikey didn’t move, his eyes downcast and brow furrowed. Leaning over, Raph gripped Mikey’s shoulders and shook him. “Hey, snap out of it!”

Looking up at him, Mikey asked in a dull voice, “What’s the point?”

Just as suddenly as the lights had gone out, they started to come back on again. There were sounds from behind the doors, clear indications that the dorm residents had been alerted by the noise.

“We have to go,” Don said.

“Dammit,” Raph swore, realizing that Don was right.

“Come on, Mikey,” Leo said, tugging at his brother’s arm.
“No point,” Mikey repeated, making no effort to get up.

“We don’t have time for this,” Raph said. He quickly grabbed Mikey by his biceps and jerked him to his feet. Once Mikey was standing, Raph ducked under his arms, gripped his legs, and lifted him bodily in a fireman’s carry.

The turtles started running for the stairs. Leo heard a door handle turn and he spun in mid-stride, drawing his sword in one smooth motion. With a precise downward sweep he sliced the handle from the door. From the inside of the room there was a thud and a string of curses as the other part of the handle hit the floor.

They made it onto the roof and then down the fire escape without incident. Mikey was too out of it to pilot his shell sled, so Raph dropped him onto the spare seat in Leo’s larger sled and they sped back to Mr. Hidesato’s house.

When the brothers came up from the basement, Mr. Hidesato rushed from the office to meet them. His manner surprised them; Mr. Hidesato had never before moved so quickly in their presence.

Mr. Hidesato’s eyes swept over Mikey, who was on his feet but still being supported by Raph.

“Why did you not wait for me to return?” Mr. Hidesato demanded. “The creature has escaped you, has it not?”

“Yeah it did,” Raph said gruffly, pushing past Mr. Hidesato and taking Mikey into the office.

Mr. Hidesato was practically on their heels. “Michelangelo should not have confronted the creature.”

Don and Leo entered the office as well. “What’s wrong with him?” Leo asked.

“He has been infected,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“What the hell do ya’ mean he’s infected?” Raph asked, whirling around to glare at the man.

Seemingly undaunted by the show of aggression, Mr. Hidesato said, “You should have waited for me. One cannot fall victim to the Yonaki babā’s weeping without getting infected by her sadness. It is contagious. You would have known and been prepared for this if you had not rushed off to hunt the creature on your own.”

Raph stalked towards him. “We rushed off ‘cause ya’ disappeared just like ya’ always do!” he shouted. “All we had to go by was two freakin’ lines in a journal. What good are these damn journals if they leave out the important stuff?”

“I have no control over what my ancestors did or did not record. This is why you are supposed to wait for my guidance,” Mr. Hidesato told him.

“A hell of a lot of good your guidance has done so far!” Raph yelled.

“Enough,” Leo said in a firm voice, striding over to interpose himself between the two. “This argument is counter-productive.” He looked at Mr. Hidesato. “How do we help Mikey?”

“You must capture the Yonaki babā,” Mr. Hidesato answered, urgency in his voice.
“No shit,” Raph growled.

Mr. Hidesato went on as though Raph hadn’t spoken. “It must be captured quickly. It must be captured by tomorrow night.”

It was easy to see that the man was agitated, which made his pronouncement that much more frightening.

“Why?” Don asked. He was sitting on the couch next to Mikey, whose head was hanging.

“Young brother’s depression will worsen,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The infection will grow until he is unable to resist the Hag’s call.”

Raph had started pacing, but he stopped to wave his arm at Mr. Hidesato. “Ain’t this damn mark supposed to protect us?”

“It only provides a level of protection. It is not all powerful,” Mr. Hidesato said. “There are certain yokai it will not protect against at all.”

“That’s something else that would’ve been good to know,” Raph griped.

“Will capturing the Yonaki babā cure Mikey?” Don asked.

“Yes,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Anyone infected at the time of its capture will immediately be cured.”

“What will happen if we’re unable to capture her tomorrow night?” Leo asked.

Mr. Hidesato glanced again at Michelangelo before returning his attention to Leonardo. “If she is not caught within twenty-four hours of first contact, then the infected individual will try to destroy themselves.”

“Ya’ mean commit suicide,” Raph said.

Three of the turtles were staring at Mr. Hidesato, whose only response was to nod.

“Oh hell no,” Raph said. “Ain’t gonna happen.”

Leo grabbed his arm, getting Raph’s attention. “We’ll stay with Mikey, we won’t leave him alone for even a second.”

Raph looked over at Mikey, who was curled in on himself and rocking back and forth.

Don put his arm around Mikey’s shoulder. “You know what’s happening to you, Mikey. The feelings you’re having aren’t real. You have to fight them.”

“Okay, okay, just have to focus, right?” Mikey asked, desperation showing in his eyes as he met Don’s. “Like Leo always tells me ‘focus Mikey’.”

“Good,” Don said. “That’s right, focus. You’re strong, you can fight this.”

Mikey laughed at little hysterically. “Leo has to say that to me because I’m not as good as the rest of you. As a ninja, I just suck. I’m a problem for all of you.”

Squatting in front of him, Leo set a hand on Mikey’s knee and said, “No you are not. You are very talented and very smart. We trust you with our lives because you are an amazing ninja and
brother. We have faith in you, Mikey. We love you. Don’t give up on us.”

“You’re the Battle Nexus champion, Mikey,” Raph said, sitting on the other side of his brother. “That title is legit. The Turtle Titan does not let some mind controlling bitch tell him what to do.”

There was a spark of fight in Mikey’s eyes as he straightened. “Silver Sentry believes in me too. I can do this.”

“Of course you can,” Leo said, catching Mikey’s hand in his. “Remember, the bad thoughts aren’t yours. The yokai put them there.”

“Bad thoughts aren’t mine,” Mikey murmured, as though it were a mantra. “They aren’t mine.”

“We should all try to get some sleep,” Leo said, though he cast a meaningful glance towards Raph and Don.

“Okay,” Mikey said.

After helping Mikey up from the couch, the brothers went upstairs together. Mr. Hidesato wore a frown as he watched them leave.

For the remainder of the night the turtles remained together in one room. Michelangelo slept fitfully, his rest interrupted by nightmares. He alternated between shivering, moaning, and sobbing and was unable to get comfortable.

Raph held him for most of the night. Whenever Mikey would snap awake after some horrific nightmare, Raph would shush him and murmur words of love and encouragement. Mikey confided in him that he could still hear the Hag weeping.

“She’s not here,” Raph whispered. “Those sounds are in your head. Ya’ gotta push them away. Try to think of something else.”

When morning dawned it was clear that none of them had rested well. Mikey sat at the kitchen table, but the food that was placed before him went uneaten. He looked haggard, pale, and much older than he actually was. His shoulders sagged, as though a great weight sat on them and he hadn’t the energy to shrug it off.

“You need to eat something, Mikey,” Leo said. “If you want something else, tell me and I’ll get it for you.”

“Not hungry,” Mikey murmured.

“At least drink your orange juice,” Leo said, placing the glass in Mikey’s hand.

Mikey sighed and lifted the glass. He managed to take a couple of sips before giving up.

“Maybe we should get Master Splinter over here,” Don said in a low voice when Leo joined him and Raph at the counter.

“To what end?” Leo asked. “All any of us, including Father, could do for Mikey right now is to watch him. His infection was caused by a yokai and only capturing the yokai will take it away.”
“Maybe Sensei could, I don’t know, mind meld with him or something,” Raph said. “Mikey said he can still hear that damn Hag crying inside his head.”

Leo turned to look at Mikey and then gasped. His younger brother was holding a serrated bread knife near his face and staring at his reflection in it.

In a flash Leo was across the kitchen, his hand coming down atop Mikey’s. “How about you give that knife to me, Mikey? Don needs it to slice some bread for your toast.”

Mikey relinquished the knife reluctantly. “Don’t want any toast.”

“These cereal then,” Raph said, setting a bowl down in front of his brother. “It’s your favorite.”

The cereal didn’t earn even a glance from Mikey, who was still looking at the knife that Leo was holding. As Leo put it behind his back so that it would be out of view, Don sat down next to Mikey.

“Talk to us, Mikey. Let us help you fight the bad thoughts. Tell us what’s going through your mind,” Don said.

“Nothing,” Mikey said. “Nothing at all. It’s all black. A black void filled with crying.”

“Then look at us,” Don said, placing his hand beneath Mikey’s chin in order to lift his head. “Keep looking at us. Put the images of us into that void and let us fill it with color and hope. Let our voices drown out the crying.”

Mikey’s eyes were full of sorrow. “It’s so hard. I feel worthless. I deserve this, it’s my fault the Hag got away. I should have waited for you guys.”

“That’s not on you, that’s my fault,” Raph said. “I was the one who rushed us into this. I was trying to prove something and pushed ya’ to go after that Hag when we didn’t know enough about her.”

“She’ll kill more students and that will be my fault,” Mikey wailed. “It’s my fault that the other kids died.”

“It can’t be your fault,” Leo said. “We didn’t even know about the creature when those deaths occurred.”

“Should have,” Mikey sobbed. “Should have known. I should have known.”

Don pulled Mikey against him, holding his brother as Mikey continued to cry. It took them a while, but they finally calmed Mikey enough to get him out of the kitchen and back into the office.

Settling Mikey comfortably on the couch, Don used his computer to pull up a book of lighthearted short stories and began to read to his brother. When his voice grew tired, Leo replaced him, and then Raph took a turn. At no time did they leave Mikey alone or stop talking to him.

Throughout the day they continued offering Mikey reinforcements, though he still grew more and more despondent. Remembering the episode with the knife, they did not leave him alone or unattended for even a minute. Mr. Hidesato pitched in as well, preparing foods that he knew Mikey liked and actually getting him to eat a little.

When night fell everyone was on edge. The pressure to capture the Hag and save Mikey’s
life had all of the turtles feeling nervous and anxious.

“I don’t see how we’re going to get inside the building again,” Leo said. “After last night, I’m sure they’ve doubled the security.”

“You will not have to go inside,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Once you are at the building, the Yonaki babā will come to you. She will be drawn by the sadness that she has implanted inside Michelangelo. The Hag will want to finish the job.”

“Wait,” Raph said, frowning. “Mikey ain’t a ‘job’. He shouldn’t have to go face her again.”

“I am not trying to upset you,” Mr. Hidesato said. “In order to save Michelangelo, the Yonaki babā must be drawn out and captured. She now knows that you are warders. Unless Michelangelo is there, she will not come out of hiding.”

“How do we keep from being infected?” Don asked. “When she was infecting Mikey, we all heard her crying.”

“First of all, do not meet her eyes,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Looking into them will open you to the effects of her weeping. Secondly, you must not allow the sounds she makes to access your emotional core. It has to wash over you, not into you.”

“Why don’t we just wear earmuffs?” Raph asked, giving the man a disgusted look. “What’s with the dramatic ‘emotional core’ bullshit? How is anyone supposed to understand that crap?”

“Even the deaf can hear the Yonaki babā’s crying,” Mr. Hidesato said. “That is why her weeping is so insidious. That is why the warder symbols did not protect Mikey from its effects.”

Leo knew that Raph was irritated, his brother was the type who preferred straight answers and an opponent he could hit. They just didn’t have time for Raph to vent his frustrations.

“We’ll go to the roof of the dorm building,” Leo said. “We can catch the Yonaki babā there without worrying about interference from the residents.”

“I can’t,” Mikey muttered. “I can’t face her again.”

“Yes you can,” Don told him. “You can lean on us and use our strength. We’ll keep you safe.”

“I will drive you to your destination,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Come, it is time. We can wait no longer.”

Mikey allowed his brothers to bundle him out to the car. During the ride to the college, he kept his hands over his face and moaned into them. Raph had to tug on Mikey to get him out of the car when Mr. Hidesato dropped them off.

Once they were in the alley alongside the dormitory building, Mikey pulled back from his brothers. “Go up without me.”

“We can’t do that,” Raph said. “Ya’ gotta be there.”

“Carry him,” Leo said, realizing they had no time to argue further with Mikey.

“Sorry little bro’,” Raph said before scooping Mikey up and tossing him over his shoulders. They used the fire escape to ascend to the top of the building, hoping that all of the students
were abiding by the curfew and remaining in their rooms. Raph did not set Mikey down again until they were standing on the roof.

When Raph caught Mikey looking back at the edge of the rooftop, he caught hold of his brother’s wrist. “Don’t even think about it.”

“Is she coming?” Don asked.

Raph glanced at Mikey’s warder symbols, but they weren’t shining. “Got no idea. I don’t think this early warning system works if Mikey ain’t all here.”

“She’s coming,” Mikey muttered. “I can hear her.”

“Get the coin ready,” Leo said. “I have a feeling we’ll have to move fast.”

“Got it,” Raph said, slipping the trap coin into his palm.

“No~o!” Mikey suddenly howled.

His cry drew his brothers’ attention for a second and when the spun around, they saw the Yonaki babā standing on the far side of the roof. Her gaze was fixed on Mikey, who immediately collapsed.

“Shut her out, Mike!” Raph yelled.

Mikey clapped his hands over his ear slits. “It doesn’t help!” he cried out, squirming in pain.

“I’ve got this bitch,” Raph to his brothers as he strode towards the yokai. “Watch Mikey.”

This time the Yonaki babā did not try to escape. Instead she opened her mouth and began to weep.

“Not gonna get me,” Raph said through gritted teeth, refusing to look into her eyes.

Her crying grew louder. Despite his resolve, Raph felt an unutterable sorrow pierce his heart, a feeling that he would turn to find that Mikey had gone over the roof and it would be his fault.

“Shut up!” Raph bellowed, looking directly at the Hag.

“Raph, no!” Leo shouted from somewhere behind him.

Leo’s voice sounded far off and Raph suddenly felt all alone. His legs stopped moving and his arms dropped to his sides. The trap coin slipped from his fingers and landed next to him, but Raph didn’t notice.

Next to him was one of the building’s air conditioning units and Raph reeled back against it, sliding down the metal side while muttering, “We can’t do this, we’re not gonna make it.”

A leap put Leo alongside his brother. He snatched the coin from the roof and whirled around to look for the Yonaki babā.

In the second it took for Leo to grab the coin, she had moved again. Now she was on the other side of Mikey and Don, her attention on Mikey’s prone form.

“No more, no more,” Mikey moaned. He rose to his knees and started to crawl towards the edge of the roof.
Don grabbed hold of Mikey’s carapace, struggling to stop his brother. While Don fought to keep Mikey from plummeting to his death, Leo approached the Hag. He kept repeating a mantra inside his head that he hoped would shut out the sound of her voice.

She was facing away from him and Leo managed to get within ten feet of her before the yokai whirled around to confront him. The suddenness of her move caused him to look into her eyes and he swiftly dropped his gaze, but the damage was done.

Her weeping pierced through his defensive mantra. Leo felt as though he’d just received a hard blow to his gut and sat down heavily. Eyes wide and unblinking, a feeling of total hopelessness filled his entire being.

“Leo!” Don screamed when he saw his oldest brother go down.

He was the only one left with the chance to capture the yokai, but if he released Mikey, his brother would go over the roof. Raph sat with an arm over his eyes, completely out of it, and Leo was staring up at the sky as though waiting for it to fall on him.

A surge of power rushed through Don’s system and his body began to glow. The energy swept over him until he was cocooned in it. Remembering how he’d protected April’s shop, Don willed that power to cover Mikey as well, and suddenly Mikey was floating in a sheltering bubble of magic.

Turning to the yokai, Don began walking towards her. His focus was on the coin, which lay in the palm of Leo’s hand. Using only his peripheral vision to keep track of the Yonaki babā, Don made for the coin first.

The cocoon of energy sheltered him somewhat from the sound of her weeping, but the closer he got to her, the louder it became. Don thought back to what Mr. Hidesato had told them, that the sounds had to wash over him.

Don was a thinker; a scientist and engineer. If there was one thing he could do well, it was to become lost in thoughts so deep that no amount of crying could penetrate them.

“Chapter one, our picture of the Universe,” Donatello intoned to himself. “A well-known scientist - some say it was Bertrand Russell - once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy.”

Don continued to move forward, his shield blocking the waves of physical torment that flowed from the Hag’s mouth. His mind remained focused on Stephen Hawking’s book, a tome that he had memorized long ago.

“At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said ‘What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise.’ The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, ‘What is the tortoise standing on.’ ‘You’re very clever, young man, very clever,’ said the old lady. ‘But it’s turtles all the way down!’”

Reaching Leonardo, Don stooped over to retrieve the trap coin. He was cognizant of the Yonaki babā’s whereabouts but he was not allowing her wails to breach his emotional walls.

Coin in hand, Don continued his recitation. “Most people would find the picture of our universe as an infinite tower of tortoises rather ridiculous, but why do we think we know better? What do we know about the universe, and how do we know it? Where did the universe come from,
Perhaps it was the lure of three possible victims within her grasp that kept the Yonaki babā from fleeing when it became obvious that she was not affecting Donatello. In a few more steps, he was right on top of her.

“Did the universe have a beginning, and if so, what happened before then? What is the nature of time? Will it ever come to an end?” Don said, quoting from the book. “Guess what Hag? This is your end!”

For the first time Don looked into her eyes, but only to find his target. He struck without hesitation, grabbing her hair to pull her head back and slapping the trap coin directly over one tear filled eye.

As soon as the coin touched her, the Yonaki babā’s weeping stopped. Don released her and stepped back an instant before she winked out of existence in a tiny flash of light.

Don scooped up the coin and ran back towards Raph, who was beginning to stand up.

“Wax tool!” Don called out to him.

Raph pulled the instrument from his belt and tossed it to his brother. In one movement, Don caught the wax tool and stuck the coin into its opening. Counting off the seconds as the wax sealed the coin, Don looked around at his brothers.

Leo and Raph were on their feet again, looking none the worse for wear. The bubble that had held Mikey was gone, and the turtle was sitting up, looking slightly disoriented but no longer suicidal.

Walking over to his youngest brother, Leo reached down to help Mikey get up. “Is it over?” Mikey asked. “I feel like I’ve been swimming around in a fog for hours. Did we catch the Hag?”

“We did,” Leo said. “Don did.”

“Cool,” Mikey said, inhaling deeply of the evening breeze. “Can we go home now? I’m starving!”

Raph caught Mikey around the neck and rubbed his bald dome. “Yeah, baby bro’, let’s go home. I’ll cook whatever ya’ want.”

“Not your cooking,” Mikey said, extricating himself from Raph’s grip. “I want to eat, not be poisoned.”

He danced away from Raph, who barreled after him. The return to normalcy brought happy smiles and feelings of relief to both Leo and Don.

End Yonaki babā
Night of the Jorōgumo

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
Word Count: 10,118
Rated: PG-13 2k3

Chapter Notes

~~This remarkable preview image was commissioned from and created for this fic by the multi-talented AlessandraDC.~~
Donatello ran on pure adrenaline all of the way back to the car, but once inside, he passed out.

One minute he was talking as he handed the coin and wax tool over to Mr. Hidesato, the next he was sound asleep. It fell on Leonardo to tell Mr. Hidesato about their capture of the Yonaki babā. The problem was that he really didn’t know how Don had accomplished the task.

All three of Don’s brothers were suffering from varying degrees of retrograde amnesia.
Leo remembered that he had gotten close to the yokai, but then everything was a blank until he saw Don rushing towards Raph and yelling for the wax tool. Raph remembered seeing Mikey collapse just after the Hag appeared, but then his memory went blank.

It was the worst for Mikey. He’d lost a part of two different nights and one entire day. From the moment he’d first spotted the Hag until she was safely trapped in the coin, Mikey could remember nothing.

When Leonardo realized this, he decided it was probably a blessing.

“How do ya’ feel, Mike?” Raph asked. “I don’t mean health wise, I mean in your head.”

“Confused,” Mikey said. “I was thinking that tonight was still the same night we first met up with the Hag. Now you guys are telling me I lost a whole day. That’s just weird.”

Raph had his arm around Don, holding his brother whose head rested on his chest. “Ya’ know what I don’t get? I thought the Yonaki babā went after sad people. How’d she get to Mikey? He’s the most grounded guy I know.”

“The Yonaki babā is attracted by the sadness of others, that is what brought her to the student dormitory,” Mr. Hidesato said. “She remains outside of a home until she has infected everyone, whether they are sad or not. She feeds off of others’ sadness and manufactures some if none is present.”

“All of that would have been good to know from the start,” Raph grumbled. He didn’t want to start an argument while Donatello slept in his arms, but he couldn’t resist sniping at Mr. Hidesato. “Of course ya’ had play Sir Galahad and leave even when ya’ knew a yokai had been spotted.”

“If Mr. Hidesato hadn’t offered, you wouldn’t have let Angel leave by herself either, Raph,” Leo said.

“It was not only good manners on my part,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Did you not stop to think that having your young friend come to the house might have made her a yokai target?”

For a moment no one said anything and then Raph began to curse in an undertone.

“Does that mean anyone who comes over could attract one of those creatures?” Mikey asked. “What about the people who do the yard work and clean the house? Aren’t they in danger too?”

“Not unless they should have direct physical contact with a Warder,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Your warder symbols resonate with magic which is at its strongest when you are within the walls of my Uncle’s . . . my home. Your home. Miss Bridge was touched by that energy when she came into contact with you. There is a device in the car which can drain that energy, so my offer of a ride had a dual purpose.”

“So if Master Splinter comes to the house, he’s gotta stay there or take a ride in the Rolls if he doesn’t want some creature to follow him back to the lair,” Mikey said.

“Peachy,” Raph muttered. “As if we weren’t already pariahs, now we gotta avoid our few friends or we’ll be putting them in danger.”

“Maybe we could drop in on Bishop sometime and all four of us give him a big hug,” Mikey said with a grin.
Raph smirked. “Who knows, maybe all of the yokai would descend on him and we could kill two birds with one stone.”

“I don’t think even the yokai would mess with Bishop,” Leo said dryly, earning a laugh from both his brothers.

It took a bit of effort to wake Donatello when the car pulled up in front of the house. He was still groggy, so between them Raph and Leo helped him inside.

“Why does it seem like one of us always has to be carried into the house after we go up against a creature?” Mikey asked, closing the front door behind them.

“It’s either that, or someone needs patching up,” Raph said.

Don was starting to sag, forcing Leo and Raph to tighten their grip. “We need to get him up to bed.”

“Cool, you guys do that,” Mikey said. “I’m going to the kitchen. I’ll come up when there’s no food left.”

He bounced away from his brothers who between them managed to get Don upstairs and into bed. After Leo stripped Don and then tucked the sleeping turtle in, he glanced up at Raph and said, “He’ll be okay after he rests. I’ll stay with him. You should go downstairs and keep an eye on Mikey. He seems fine, but I’d rather he wasn’t alone until we’re sure there are no lasting ill effects from his experience.”

“I was just thinking the same thing,” Raph said. “Not to mention it’d be better if he didn’t try to eat his way through our food supply.”

After Raph left, Leo removed his gear and lay down next to Don. He watched him for a while, noting that his brother was breathing easily and was clearly in REM sleep. Satisfied that nothing was wrong and that Don was merely suffering from sheer exhaustion, Leo closed his eyes and went to sleep too.

Raph found Mikey in the kitchen popping grapes into his mouth from a large bowl of them sitting on the counter. Crumbs on a plate were all that was left of a sandwich, and an empty bag of potato chips was laying on the floor.

Shaking his head, Raph scooped up the bag and deposited it into the waste bin. “I get that you’re hungry, but ya’ don’t have to be a slob.”

“I was going to pick it up,” Mikey said, talking with his mouth full.

“I take it back, I guess ya’ do have to be a slob,” Raph said. “It must be in your DNA.”

They heard the front door open and then close again, but Mr. Hidesato did not join them in the kitchen.

“Guess he’s going straight up to bed,” Mikey said as he poured himself a glass of milk.

Raph grabbed a glass from the cupboard and held it out for Mikey to fill. “Good. I can handle only so much of the guy in a twenty-four hour period.”

“He probably feels the same about you,” Mikey said, opening the refrigerator to put the carton of milk back.
When he didn’t close it right away, Raph said, “Breakfast is only a few hours away. Why don’t ya’ save some of that appetite for a hot meal? None of us got much sleep last night ‘cause we were keeping an eye on ya’ and . . . .”

He trailed off and Mikey slowly closed the refrigerator door while looking at him. “And what? Come on Raph, give. I know the Hag made me all depressed and I have amnesia because of it, but why didn’t anyone get any sleep?”

“It don’t even matter anymore, Mikey,” Raph said. “Could we just drop it?”

Mikey took a stance, his fists on his hips and a stubborn look on his face. “No we can’t. I thought the days of hiding stuff from Mike ‘cause he’s the youngest were over. That yokai made kids kill themselves so I’m gonna guess that I was doing something that made you guys think I’d do the same thing.”

When Leo had told Mr. Hidesato of the capture of the Yonaki babā, he hadn’t mentioned that Don had stayed back with Mikey to keep their brother from throwing himself off the roof. Only Don knew how he’d managed Mikey and the capture at the same time, but Don wasn’t going to tell that story until he woke up.

Because Leo hadn’t said anything about Mikey, Raph figured he thought it would be best for their younger brother not to know what had happened. Problem was, Mikey always did have an uncanny ability to ferret out the truth.

Still Raph thought he’d give prevarication one more try. “We didn’t sleep because you couldn’t sleep,” he said. “You know, one for all, all for one.”

“Bull,” Mikey said sharply. “You guys were worried I’d kill myself so you were keeping a suicide watch. Why should that bother me now? As far as I’m concerned, the Hag was nothing more than a great hypnotist. Just because a hypnotist can make someone act like a chicken doesn’t mean the person really wants to be a chicken.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” Raph said.

“‘Course I’m right,” Mikey said with a self-satisfied look. “From what Leo said, she got the two of you with her whammy too. Do you remember feeling sad or wanting to end it all?”

“No, but we weren’t infected for as long as ya’ were,” Raph said.

“Trust me, the only difference is I have a longer blank period in my head than you,” Mikey said. “I’m not even close to feeling depressed. Never have been, never will be. At least when I’m just normal me and not under some creature’s spell.”

Raph grinned. “That blank spot in your head has always been there, that’s nothing new.”

“If that was true, you wouldn’t have been so worried about me. Was Raphie scared he might lose his wonderful little brother? Did Raphie lose sleep because he knows he can’t live without me?” Mikey asked teasingly.

“Keep calling me Raphie and see what happens,” Raph growled.

Mikey leaned on the counter and struck a dramatic pose. “Would you have given a heartfelt eulogy if I had perished? I can see it now, the tears running in an uncontrollable torrent down your cheeks as you proclaim your undying love and then throw yourself into the nearest volcano.”
“Volc . . . ?” Raph began, choking on the word. “Come here ya’ nut ball. Let me give ya’ a heartfelt butt kicking.”

Laughing gleefully, Mikey raced past his brother, barely dodging Raph’s outstretched hand. The pair ran up the staircase, neither making much effort to be quiet.

When they reached the third floor, Raph caught the top edge of Mikey’s carapace and spun him around. Using his body weight, Raph shoved Mikey against the wall and stole his breath with a kiss.

After a moment, their mouths separated and Raph whispered, “Shh, Donny needs to sleep.”

Mikey tried to initiate another kiss, but Raph moved down to his neck and began biting on it.

Panting heavily, Mikey said in a suggestive tone, “We should probably sleep in a different room. You know, so that we don’t wake Donny.”

“Guess the soreness is all gone,” Raph murmured, nipping at Mikey’s collarbone.

“Ha!” Mikey exclaimed, grabbing Raph by his arm and pulling him towards the spare room. “It’s your turn to be sore.”

Sometime in the early morning, the pair woke up enough to rejoin their brothers in the shared bedroom. The genius was still sleeping soundly, but one of Leo’s eyes popped open when he heard the door creak. Seeing that it was Raph and Mikey, he closed his eye again and went back to sleep.

Leonardo was deeply asleep when he felt something grab his arm. His first thought was that Don was in trouble and that made him shoot out of bed.

Don was nowhere in sight and neither were Raph or Mikey. As Leo looked around, he realized that he was not in their bedroom at HQ. He was caught in prophetic dream.

He was still in a house though. It had at least two floors because he could see the staircase. The house was empty, but the woodworking on the banisters and above the doorways told of a home of some value.

Something brushed against Leo’s arm again and he batted at it, sidestepping at the same time. A cobweb floated down from the ceiling, fluttering in a breeze coming from an unidentified source.

Another cobweb came out of nowhere, this time latching onto his arm. Leo pulled against it, but it held on, gripping his skin tightly. Pulling one of his katana, Leo slashed through the webbing, only to find it replaced by another.

Slashing and spinning as fast as he could, Leo cut through cobwebs which shot out of the darkness at a speed he could barely manage. The more of the webbing that attached itself to him, the weaker he began to feel.

“Leo! Crap, wake him up!”

“I’m trying! Leo, come on bro’, you’re dreaming!”

Leo flailed against the hold his brothers had on his arms until it came to him that he was no longer asleep.

“Don,” Leo said as reality came flooding back.
“Still sleeping,” Raph said. “He’s really out of it not to have felt you swinging your arms around.”

“What were you dreaming?” Mikey asked.

Laying back against his pillow, Leo exhaled and then glanced over at Don to check for himself that his brother was okay. Don’s breathing was even and slow, his sleep uninterrupted by the clamor.

“Should we be worried about that?” Raph asked, nodding his head in Don’s direction.

“Nah,” Mikey said, touching Don’s chest and hearing a responding churr. “He’s fine. I want to know what you were dreaming, Leo. It was one of those kind of dreams, wasn’t it?”

“It was,” Leo acknowledged. “I was in a house, an upscale one. There were cobwebs everywhere and it was like they were alive. They kept shooting out of the darkness and attacking me.”

“Did ya’ see anything else? Did ya’ see one of the creatures or whatever it was that was shooting those webs?” Raph asked.

“No, all I saw was the webs,” Leo said. He paused, remembering something else. “The more webbing that attached itself to me, the more . . . drained I felt.”

“It ain’t much, but maybe that’s enough,” Raph said. “Can’t be many of those creatures who think they’re Spiderman.”

Don mumbled something in a grouchy tone and rolled over.

“I’m pretty sure he’s telling us to shut up,” Mikey said with a grin.

“We should all go back to sleep,” Leo said, curving his body around Don’s. “Save the creature hunt for tomorrow.”

The next morning, Leo rose early and went directly to the dojo to practice. A short time later Raph joined him and the pair sparred for a while before Mikey put in an appearance.

“Don’s still out of it,” Mikey told them.

Grabbing a towel from a stack in the corner, Raph dried himself off and said, “I’ll go up and sit with him. Kinda don’t want him to be alone until we know he’s just recovering from that display of force last night.”

“We need to go pick up Mikey’s shell sled,” Leo said. “Do you want us to bring you something to eat before we leave?”

“What do you mean? Where’s my sled?” Mikey asked.

“Ya’ really don’t remember a thing, do ya’? Ya’ weren’t in any shape to drive after the Hag attacked ya’, so ya’ rode back with Leo,” Raph said.

“Not remembering stuff is no fun,” Mikey said.

“Trust me, most of that day is one you don’t want to remember,” Leo said.

Not wanting to listen to Mikey complain again that they weren’t telling him things, Raph said,
“Bring me a tray of something before ya’ two take off.” He jogged up the stairs, stopping into the office to grab a few journals before heading up to sit with Donatello.

A couple of hours passed quietly. Raph ate his breakfast while reading, and then decided he might as well spend some time writing in his own journal, since he hadn’t yet jotted down a single word.

Remembering how aggravating it was to learn that other journal keepers had left out so much, Raph took the time to write down even the smallest detail of the things he recalled from each of his encounters.

He wasn’t sure if his brothers were recounting how their new powers played a part in the captures, but he included that information in his journal. Raph would bring it up the first chance he got, and if majority ruled to keep that part a secret, he could always use a thick black marker to cover what he’d already written.

When Raph heard Donatello begin to stir, he set down his pen and turned to look at his brother. Don was sitting up in bed, rubbing his eyes and still looking slightly groggy.

“How do ya’ feel?” Raph asked.

“Like a commuter train hit me,” Don said. “My whole body is sore.”

Raph snorted. “I don’t know exactly what ya’ did last night, but ya’ managed to kick that Hag’s ass.”

“Didn’t you see me use my powers?” Don asked with a frown. “I somehow formed a sort of force shield around myself and then placed a protective bubble around Mikey so he couldn’t hurt himself.”

“Damn,” Raph said. “If I saw ya’ do that, I can’t remember it. None of us can remember a friggin’ thing from the moment the Hag zapped us until ya’ captured her.”

“Retrograde amnesia?” Don guessed.

“If that’s what it’s called, that’s what we’ve got,” Raph said. “Mikey is back to his normal annoying self. He claims the Hag hypnotized us and that depression we claim he was feeling wasn’t his feelings, it was what she told him to feel. Or some shit like that. Ya’ know how Mike’s mind works.”

“He’s probably right,” Don said, getting out of bed and stretching. “I need coffee. Are you working on your journal?”

“Thought I’d catch up to the rest of ya’,” Raph said, closing his journal and tapping the cover. “I’m including how our powers played a part in each of the captures. Figured I’d check with ya’ guys later to see if that’s something I should scratch out.”

“I don’t know why we shouldn’t include that,” Don said with a frown. “Future warders should know they might be able to activate similar powers.”

“Future warders won’t have been trained by the Ninja Tribunal to be acolytes,” Raph said. “I’ll betcha anything our extra powers are because of that.”

“Maybe so, but I did say ‘similar’, not our exact powers,” Don pointed out. “Any extra boost they can get would be an advantage.”
“Not gonna argue that point,” Raph said.

“Where are Leo and Mikey?” Don asked.

Raph stood up from the desk chair and said, “They went to pick up Mikey’s shell sled. I haven’t heard peep from them for a couple hours. We can check if they’re back and get ya’ some coffee at the same time.”

They were partway to the door when Raph stopped Don and pulled him into a hug. “I ain’t happy that ya’ get so wiped out every time ya’ have to use your powers. It leaves ya’ way too defenseless.”

“I know you have my back, Raph,” Don murmured against his brother’s shoulder.

“Always will,” Raph replied, squeezing Don tightly before letting him go.

There was a note on the kitchen counter from Leo, telling them that after he and Mikey picked up the shell sled, they were going to stop at the lair to check in with Master Splinter. Next to the note was a covered plate of food, which was obviously meant for Donatello.

Raph sat at the table with Don as he ate, and filled his brother in on what Mr. Hidesato had told them about how Angel coming to the house had placed her in danger.

“Wait,” Don said, setting down his fork. “If the Rolls is equipped with something that can siphon off magical energy, why couldn’t that same thing be used to weaken the powers of a yokai?”

“Don’t know, that’s a question for Mr. H,” Raph said. “It’s a good one too. Seems like the magic makers would have thought of that. What happens to that energy once it’s sucked out of a person?”

“Let’s put those questions up to Mr. H as soon as we see him,” Don said, finishing his breakfast. “Was he around this morning when you guys got up?”

Raph shook his head and jerked his thumb towards the white board. Written on it were two words, ‘business meeting’.

“Guess ya’ gotta have a lot of those if ya’ want to be a millionaire,” Raph said.

“Or the head of a warder clan,” Don said, getting up to wash his dishes.

They walked to the office together and Don collected an armful of journals. “I’m going to start scanning another section of these,” he said. “Having information about the Hag in my system made identifying her a lot faster.”

Raph snapped his fingers. “Shell, I just remembered, Leo had one of his dreams last night.”

He told Don what Leo had experienced during his prophetic dream.

“There’s not much to help us figure out where this creature might be, but maybe identifying it will also tell us where to look for it,” Don said. “Why don’t you skim through journals while I check to see if I scanned anything about webs or spiders?”

“I can’t wait until you’ve scanned all of these books into your computer,” Raph said as he grabbed a journal. “Trying to read crappy handwriting in another language gives me a headache.”

When Leo and Mikey returned a while later, they found Raph sitting on the couch,
surrounded by journals. Don was at the desk, speed reading his way through another stack of books.

“How’s Master Splinter?” Raph asked without looking up.

“He’s fine,” Leo said. “You doing okay, Donny?”

“Good as new,” Don said. “Raph filled me in on everything I missed. We’re trying to find which spider is the one you dreamt about.”

“What do you mean, ‘which spider’?” Leo asked. He sat in a chair and picked up one of the journals.

“I found a notation on animal yokai in one of the journals that mentioned three of them under the heading of ‘spider’ types,” Don said. “The Ushi oni, the Tsuchigumo, and the Jorōgumo. Now we’re trying to find those three so we can narrow down which of them you were dreaming about.”

“Why don’t you look in the coffer and see which coins are there?” Mikey asked. “Wouldn’t that be faster?”

All three of his brothers stopped what they were doing to stare at him. “Why didn’t I think of that?” Don asked.

“Obviously your genius has limits and mine doesn’t,” Mikey said as he went to the war room to retrieve the coffer.

He brought it back and set it on the desk. Leo got up to peruse the inside of the strongbox, quickly scanning the symbols etched into the leather next to each of the coins.

“There’s a slot for both the Ushi oni and the Jorōgumo,” Leo said. “Nothing for the Tsuchigumo.”

“At least we’ve narrowed it down to two,” Raph said.

The sound of someone clearing their throat made all four of the turtles jump. Mr. Hidesato entered the room and said, “The Ushi oni does not produce webbing.” He looked at Leo. “What did you dream?”

Leo described his dream, making certain to explain not only how the webbing moved, but how he felt when it touched him. “Is it the Jorōgumo?”

“Yes,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Her name, written in Kanji, means ‘entangling bride’, but characters were added on to her name to cover up the original meaning of the name which is ‘whore spider’.”

“Whoa, that don’t sound good,” Raph said.

“It is not,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The Jorōgumo’s primary diet is young, virile men who are looking for love. When she spies a man that she desires, she seduces him and invites him into her home. He is never seen again.”

“How does the webbing come into play?” Mikey asked.

“The Jorōgumo spins silk threads strong enough to ensnare a grown man, from which it is impossible to escape,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “Their powerful venom slowly weakens a man day by day, allowing the spider to savor her victim’s long and painful death.”
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“If she’s that ravenous, she’s probably already taken a victim,” Don said. “It’s been two weeks since the yokai were released. Even accounting for a few days for her to become acclimated and to find a suitable empty house, she could very well have more than one victim.”

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“I’ll look of course,” Don said. “This is New York City. There are hundreds of missing person’s reports and hundreds of young people who are runaways.”

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“How can you say you guys are involved in a dangerous job and expect me not to worry about that?” Angel asked. “Expect me not to want to help?”
“You’re family and we love you,” Raph said, getting up to stand next to Leo. “But ya’ gotta listen to me, Angel. We know ya’ want to help, and ya’ did by giving us needed intel. There ain’t nothing else you’re equipped to handle and if ya’ tried, you’d get hurt bad.”

“But . . . .” Angel began.

“No buts girl,” Mikey said. “We know you’re as tough as they come and you’ve got a really big heart. We’re not leaving you out for any reason except that you gotta have a certain kind of training to do what we’re doing right now.”

“Are April and Casey helping?” Angel asked suspiciously.

“They haven’t the right training either,” Leo said, not wanting to tell an outright lie. “I’ll tell you what, Angel. When the time is right, we’ll explain everything to you. This will all make perfect sense then. Is that good enough?”


She hung up before anyone could reply. “Think she’s mad at us?” Raph asked.

“A little,” Leo said. “It can’t be helped. She’ll understand once all of the creatures are captured and we can tell her about this.”

“You should not have made her that promise,” Mr. Hidesato said, his tone sharp. “Outsiders are not to know of the warder clans. It is one of our rules.”

“Ya’ know what ya’ can do with those rules?” Raph asked. “Ya’ can take them and shove them . . . .”

“We’re not members of your warder clans,” Leo said, interrupting his brother. “We accepted these symbols in order to protect our city. We’ve never agreed to abide by any set of rules. The few friends that we do have are ones we trust with our lives. People like April, Casey, and Angel have been by our sides fighting evil for years. They know how to keep their mouths shut.”

Don walked out of the war room carrying a sheet of paper, stopping when his saw the tense tableau. “What’s going on?”

“A minor difference of opinion,” Leo said, staring hard at Mr. Hidesato. Turning to his brother, he asked, “Did you find something?”

“Four reports of missing men who fit the profile,” Don said, waving the paper. “They were all reported by friends to have last been seen in Midtown, and all four were out partying when they vanished without a trace. According to my Google search, there are seven bars in that area that are listed as the best Midtown has to offer. There are two on Eighth Avenue and one each on West 46th, West 47th, West 48th, West 49th, and West 54th.”

“She has found her hunting grounds,” Mr. Hidesato said. “There are two options available to you now. Locate the home that she has made into her nest and capture her there or . . . .”

“Get her to take one of us there,” Raph finished for him.

“That will not be easy,” Mr. Hidesato said. “When I tell you that the Jorōgumo is cunning, it is almost an understatement. If she knows that you are hunting her, she will find a way to turn that against you.”
"How do we capture her?" Don asked.

"Once she shows her true form, there is a place at the center of her back where the coin must be placed. You will know it when you see it. Move quickly because she too is fast. In the blink of any eye she can entangle you in her webbing or grasp you with her legs, which are incredibly strong," Mr. Hidesato said.

"You guys are forgetting one thing," Mikey said. "She’s picking her prey up at bars and nightclubs, places we can’t go."

"Perhaps Mr. Jones could be called upon to draw her attention," Mr. Hidesato suggested. "He has a virility that she would find tempting."

"How about we don’t be so quick to offer up Casey as bait?" Raph asked.

The belligerence in his tone was unmistakable. Donatello knew his brother was right, they had to limit how often they involved Casey in their hunts. The percentages were not in his favor, especially considering the extreme danger each yokai presented.

"Maybe we can find her base of operations or where she’ll strike next in another way," Don said. He looked at Leo. "At least if you’re willing to try to access a premonition."

"I can do that," Leo said. "It would probably work better if you guided me through it to make sure I’m staying on the right track."

"Like with the Ao nyōbō," Raph said. "Just try and keep him from possessing anybody this time, Donny."

Once Leo and Don were in the dojo, with the lights out and candles burning, they settled onto the floor mats facing each other. Leo got into his usual meditation position, relaxing his body until he was no longer aware of his extremities and was able to focus internally.

"Close your eyes," Don instructed. "We’re going to start with you visualizing the thing from your dream that was the most memorable and then work back from there. Okay?"

Leo nodded. For the next few minutes he concentrated on the sound of Don’s voice, letting his brother’s words wash through him to push all of his other senses aside.

Then Leo saw the webbing. It fluttered to the ground near his feet and crawled away from him as though it was alive.

"Tell me what you see," Don said in a soft yet compelling voice.

"Spider webs," Leo responded in a monotone. "They are moving across the floor."

"They don’t want you," Don said. "Look up from the floor and see the room. Describe it for me."

"I’m on the entry level of a house," Leo said. "The woodwork is detailed and expensive looking, but the house is empty of furnishings. There are cobwebs everywhere."

"I want you to start walking," Don instructed. "Find the front door and walk out of the house."

Locked inside his vision, Leo tried to turn towards where he sensed the door to be, but he
couldn’t move anything but his head. He looked down at his body, but what he saw was someone else’s. His feet were bare and were not touching the floor, his legs festooned with webbing, his torso and arms likewise trapped in the strong, sticky substance.

“Leo, are you at the door?” Don asked.

“Can’t move,” Leo said. “I’m caught in a web.”

“No,” Don said with a frown. “That is someone else. Move away from that person, go back with his mind to before he entered the house.”

“Too . . . tired,” Leo murmured. He tried to lift one of his arms, but the effort only made the web sway. “Can’t get loose.”

“Get out of his body, Leo,” Don said. “His body is caught, not yours. Let go of him. Move back in time, back to before he entered the house. See what he has seen.”

Leo’s body jerked, startling Don. He jerked again. “He won’t let me go,” Leo said. “He wants me to help him.” Suddenly his voice changed, became lower pitched. “Oh God, she’s coming. She’s coming! Help me!”

Don lunged forward, grasping Leo by his shoulders and shaking him. “Wake up! Wake up!”

In his mind, Leo could see a dark form scuttling across the wooden floor. As it neared him, the shape elongated until it became a woman’s figure. Her mouth opened impossibly wide and strings of webbing shot out of her dark maw.

From somewhere behind her there was a red orange flash like a laser blast. It hit the web in midair and set it aflame.

“Leo!” Don shouted, snapping his fingers in front of his brother’s face.

The shout tore Leo out of the other man’s body and dropped him back into his own. With a sharp gasp, Leo’s eyes snapped open.

“Are you all right?” Don asked, searching Leo’s eyes with a great deal of concern.

“I need more practice at this,” Leo said, taking deep breaths to settle his heart rate. “It’s hard to get out of another body once I’ve dropped into it.”

“You had no problem seeing what the realtor was seeing,” Don said.

“He hadn’t become a victim yet when I entered his body,” Leo said. “I could feel this man’s panic. He was clinging to me, begging me to help him. It’s like when a drowning man latches onto you in the water, his terror can pull you under too.”

“Is it worth trying again to see if you can possibly drop into his thoughts before he was captured?” Don asked.

Leo shook his head. “This man is alive, Don. His emotions in the present are so strong they latch onto me as soon I’m anywhere near him.”

“Did you see anything new?” Don asked.

“I’d rather not tell this twice,” Leo said, taking Don’s offered hand and standing up with him.
Together they blew out the candles and rejoined the others in the office. Between them they explained what had happened during the session, and Leo recounted how he’d seen the Jorōgumo produce her webbing. Then he told them about the fire blast that had shot the webbing out of midair and burned it.

“Do you suppose that was one of us?” Mikey asked.

“I could easily make a flame thrower,” Don said. “Maybe that’s what the premonition was telling us to do. Burn the webs.”

“No,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The Jorōgumo’s silk is not susceptible to fire. In fact, long ago when there were fire-breathing spiders, the Jorōgumo could control them and direct them to burn down the homes of anyone who grew suspicious of them. I do not know what the fire in your premonition represented, but no non-magical source could produce heat hot enough to destroy the webbing she spins.”

Raph had been pacing as they talked and he stopped to say, “All of ya’ are overlooking the big point here. The man in Leo’s premonition is still alive and he needs our help. There might be others too and we don’t know how long they have. If the Jorōgumo likes to watch ‘em die slowly, then we might have a chance to save all of the missing men.”

“How?” Don asked. “We still have no idea where her nest is located. All we do know is where she’s hunting and that’s a large area to cover.”

“My power can find her,” Mikey said.

“But only if you’re already near her location,” Don pointed out.

“We’ll have to separate and stake out the bars she’s most likely frequenting,” Leo said. “We can find vantage points to watch them from and look for women who arrive alone. If they leave with a man, then we’ll need for Mikey to be mobile enough to come to that location quickly so he can tell us whether we’ve found our yokai.”

“Turtle bloodhound at your service,” Mikey said.

“There’s seven of them bars and only four of us,” Raph said.

“Five,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I will join you in keeping watch.”

“Okay, five,” Raph said. “Still ain’t enough. So how about we do ask Casey to help, just not as bait? He and April can keep an eye on the last two bars. I’ll make sure he stays up on a rooftop somewhere so he doesn’t take a notion to screw things up by going into the bar. That’ll ensure he’s far enough away so that Jorōgumo don’t latch onto him.”

“Why don’t you phone Casey and April and make that happen?” Leo said. “Have them meet us here at . . . what time do bars open?”

Raph chuckled. “That’s an area where I’m the expert. They don’t start to get lively until around nine o’clock.”

“Have them meet us here at eight thirty,” Leo said. “We’ll divide up the establishments between us. Tell Casey to bring his motorcycle and for April to drive her van. Mikey can use Casey’s motorcycle to stay mobile.”

“When we do find these men, the ones who are still alive will need medical attention,” Don
“I could call from my shell cell, but I’d rather not have law enforcement backtrack it to all of the towers it’s pinged off of in the past. They employ some really good hackers.”

“I can go out and purchase several prepaid cell phones from street vendors,” Mr. Hidesato said. “If I spread the purchases out amongst several of them, then the phones will not have sequential numbers for the authorities to trace. Once you have used a phone, simply dispose of it.”

“Use cash,” Raph said. “Make sure they’re ain’t any cameras around taking pictures of your mug.”

“I will avoid stores and purchase exclusively from mobile vendors,” Mr. Hidesato assured him. “I will also hide my face beneath the brim of a hat. I am not a ninja, but I have had some training in the art of disguise.”

He left them then and Mikey said, “Breakfast was a thousand hours ago. Who wants lunch?”

The remainder of the day passed quietly enough. Raph reached April and Casey, who both agreed to the proposed plan. All four turtles spent time practicing their martial arts together outside in garden

With the aid of the fresh air, Leo was able to shake off the remaining lingering dark feelings leftover from his premonition. He hadn’t told his brothers how connecting to the trapped man had left him anxious and impatient, neither of those emotions good for a leader who was expected to keep a level head.

April used the key that Mr. Hidesato had allowed her to keep to enter the house with Casey at eight-thirty sharp. Raph had been waiting for them and took them into the office where the others were gathered.

“Is there supposed to be a truck parked in front of the house?” April asked, looking at Mr. Hidesato.

Raph frowned. “A truck?”

“Yes, it was delivered by a rental company this afternoon,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I felt that the Rolls would look far too out of place parked on the street near a bar and would draw attention.”

“There are two motorcycles in the back of the truck,” Casey said.

“Additional transportation,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The warders will need to move quickly if we find the Jorōgumo. One of you can drive the truck and drop me off at a bar. It will be safe for me to go inside, since I am not within the age range that would draw her attention.”

Casey opened his mouth but Raph spoke first. “No,” he told his friend. “We need ya’ to watch, not interact with the bitch. She might not give ya’ the chance to warn us and then we’d be right back in the same boat we’re in right now.”

“There are a lot of people going in and out of bars on a Saturday night,” April said. “How do we keep track of the women? Granted that women don’t normally go to bars by themselves, there will still be a few.”

“Not to mention a few pros mixing with the crowd,” Casey said.

“In that part of midtown, the pros ain’t gonna go very far,” Raph said. “They’ll take the guy into the nearest alley and get down to business. That won’t start to happen until around midnight,
when the guys are hammered enough to pay for the privilege.”

“You know way too much about this, Raphie,” Mikey said.

“We have all been trained to be observant,” Leo said, before Raph and Mikey could start to bicker. “April, I know Master Splinter has been teaching you. Casey, you’ve been picking bad guys out of crowds for years.”

“The Jorōgumo is a shapeshifter,” Mr. Hidesato said, “but she will not change how she looks once she enters an establishment. She chooses her disguise before she begins to encounter likely targets.”

“April, you and Casey take the bars on West 46th and West 47th,” Leo said. “They are very close to each other.”

“I’ll take Casey’s motorcycle since I’m used to riding it,” Raph said. “Since I know the Three Donkeys bar on West 54th, I’ll stake that one. There’ll be a bunch of guys hanging out there ‘cause that place shows sports on a few big screen TV’s.”

“Mikey, you take one of the rented bikes,” Leo said. “I’ll use the other.”

“I can drive the truck and drop Mr. Hidesato off at the bar on West 48th, then park between there and the one on West 49th, which is where I’ll stand watch,” Don said.

“That leaves the two bars on Eighth Avenue for Mike and me,” Leo said. He turned to his youngest brother. “You should hold the trap coin and wax tool. Just don’t try to catch her by yourself.”

“Dude, I have totally learned my lesson on that one,” Mikey said.

The group filed outside after ascertaining that the street was clear of passersby. Even during the day, the neighborhood around Mr. Hidesato’s house was quiet, at night it was normally deserted. Leo wondered again if this was one of the reasons the elder Mr. Hidesato had chosen this spot to live.

Midtown Manhattan was a bustling area, even at nine o’clock in the evening. For the turtles, it was an area they normally visited strictly from the rooftops. Finding a parking spot near enough to their destinations was difficult, especially for Mikey since he needed to have access to his motorcycle at a moment’s notice.

Cars lined the street along West 54th, but Raph found a place for his motorcycle in an areaway behind the building next to the one he was to observe. The two buildings on either side of the one housing the bar were taller than it, and the one across the street was a hi-rise, but Raph decided his best perch would be atop the bar itself.

From there he had a clear view of the front entrance and line of sight into the two narrow walkways on either side of the building, one of which could be used to access a side door.

Raph had been watching the bar for a half an hour before he saw his first lone female enter the building. A few minutes later another one approached, and the first came out of the bar to greet her. He scratched both off his list of candidates.

Each member of their team was wearing a communication device so that they could remain in constant contact with one another. Raph felt like he was on a military mission rather than a yokai
It was nearing midnight and none of them had seen anything that fit the Jorōgumo’s modus operandi. Casey had just commented that maybe she wasn’t hungry tonight when Raph saw something that had him cursing under his breath.

“Raph? What is it?” Leo asked.

“Nothing,” Raph answered quickly. “Leg cramp from sitting still.”

It was a lame response but one that cut off additional questions. Moving fast, Raph slid down a drainage pipe on the side of the building and dropped silently into the walkway. Holding to the shadows, he made it to the corner and peeked around to the front entry.

Standing on the sidewalk and looking all around her was Angel.

Resisting the urge to curse again, Raph cut off his microphone and hissed just loud enough to get the girl’s attention. Angel spun on her heel, glanced left and right to see if anyone else had heard the sound, and trotted over to where Raph waited.

“What the hell are ya’ doing here?” Raph demanded as soon as she ducked back into the walkway with him. “Were ya’ following me?”

“Yes,” Angel admitted. “Don’t be mad at me.”

“Don’t be . . . .” Raph started to splutter and then caught himself. “Of all the hair brained, crazy stunts ya’ could have pulled, this takes the cake. How’d ya’ get here, on your scooter?”

Angel shook her head. “I took a cab.”

“Ya’ need to hop right back into one and get out of here,” Raph said. “I ain’t fooling.”

“I’ll go when you go,” Angel insisted. “Besides, I’d have to go to the corner to hail one and there’s already a line.”

“Dammit, we told ya’ this was too dangerous for ya’ to be involved in,” Raph said. “I can’t watch ya’ and the . . . person I’m supposed to be keeping an eye out for at the same time. I’ll give ya’ a ride someplace where ya’ can catch a cab and you’d better get in it and go home.”

“I will,” Angel said meekly. “I’m sorry. I just wanted to help.”

“Some other time,” Raph said, catching her by her upper arm and leading her around to where he’d parked the motorcycle.

They had ridden for a block when Angel leaned forward and said, “I have friends who live in a house on East 54th. It’s about eight blocks from here. If you drop me there, you can get back to your stakeout a lot faster.”

“Are they gonna be up at this time of night?” Raph asked.

“They’re college students,” Angel said. “They’ll be up.”

Following her directions, Raph pulled up in front of a townhome which sat near the center of the block. He expected to see lights on, but the stoop was dark and so were the windows.

“I ain’t feeling too comfortable just dropping ya’ here,” Raph said as Angel hopped off the
bik. “Ya’ might not be able to get inside, it looks like they closed it up for the night.”

“I’m sure I’ll be fine,” Angel said. “I’ll ring the bell and knock. Someone will let me in.”

Rather than leaving, Raph decided to wait until he saw that Angel was safely inside. He watched her climb the stairs then press the bell and wait. When no one answered, she knocked.

Under the pressure of her knuckles, the door opened, but no one was there. Angel stepped back and descended a couple of stairs before turning to give Raph a worried look.

Cutting off the motor, Raph climbed off the motorcycle and walked up the stairs. The door was only open a crack, but there was no light shining from within the house and not a hint of sound.

“I spoke to them today,” Angel whispered. “They have to be here.”

“Stay behind me,” Raph said, drawing his weapons. “I’ll check it out.”

He waited until she acknowledged that she understood, and then he pushed the door open enough to slip into the house. The first thing he noted was that it smelled musty, like a house that had been shut up for a long time.

Before he had the chance to process what that meant, something hit him a hard blow on the back of the head and he blacked out.

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“Com check,” Leo said into his microphone, frowning when he received an acknowledgment from everyone except Raphael. “Raph, you need to check in.”

Still hearing nothing, Leo said, “Donny, I’m not getting a response from Raphael.”

“Hang on,” Don said. A second later he was back. “His shell cell is off. He had to have done that himself.”

Remembering the cursing from earlier, Leo realized it was just after that when Raph had gone radio silent. “Can you track him?” Leo asked tersely.

“Yes,” Don said. “He’s still on 54th, but it is East 54th, not west which is where he’s supposed to be.”

“She’s got him,” Leo said. “Send us the address Donny.”

“What about us?” Casey asked.

“You and April pick up Mr. Hidesato,” Leo said, racing for his motorcycle. “We’ll meet you back at HQ.”

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“Shit,” Raph muttered, slowly regaining consciousness. The back of his head hurt like a bitch and it took a minute for his vision to clear.

His eyes landed on his sai first. Both his weapons lay on the floor, one near the staircase, the other close to his feet. That’s when he discovered that he was upright and suspended between the doorframes of a room near the front entrance to the house.
Thick webbing clung to the woodwork and was looped around his body. Raph immediately began to struggle, pulling as hard as he could against the confining strands without snapping a single one.

From somewhere nearby, a low, lilting voice with a touch of a hiss said, “What a pretty creature you are.”

A chandelier came on, it’s low light doing little to push back the gloom. Cobwebs stretched from the fixture to the ceiling and more webbing decorated the staircase banisters. It hung from corners in intricate patterns, covered the front window so it was impossible to see through, and adorned the walls like artwork.

“Hey whore, ya’ need a new cleaning crew,” Raph called out, trying to locate the owner of the voice. “Ya’ ain’t getting your money’s worth out of this one.”

“So much energy, so much power,” the Jorōgumo said, sliding slowly into the light.

She was a tall woman with a shapely figure and nearly translucent skin. Jet black hair was piled in a tidy bun atop her head, her breasts covered in light colored wrappings, and a long red dress reached from her upper arms down to the floor.

“Should’ve known ya’ wasn’t Angel,” Raph said, mentally kicking himself. “She’s a wild one, but she ain’t dumb. I am though. No way could she have followed me on that scooter of hers.”

“She was in your thoughts,” the Jorōgumo said.

“I wasn’t even in the damn bar,” Raph said.

“Your life force far outshone that of the wretched humans,” the Jorōgumo replied. She laughed, glancing at the symbols on his arm. “So worthy to be a Warder, yet so poorly trained. I will be able to feed here for centuries with no one to stop me.”

Raph once more fought against his restraints, trying hard to access his warder magic. The Jorōgumo continued to laugh as she watched his futile efforts and then moved towards him. From her back long, black legs began to emerge, each joint covered in sharp spines.

“Get the hell away from me!” Raph shouted.

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Leo was the first to reach the house and immediately saw Casey’s motorcycle parked at the curb. Coming to a sliding stop, he drew his swords and raced up the steps.

Slamming into the door, Leo wrenched it off its hinges as he plunged into the house. He saw Raph at once; his brother was hanging in a doorway, trapped in a gigantic spider web.

In front of him was the Jorōgumo, the tips of her eight legs touching different parts of Raph’s body.

Without a word, Leo lunged at the yokai. The distance was not great and he made not a sound, but he’d given away his presence when he’d broken the door. She twisted her head to look at him, and then a thick stream of webbing shot out of her mouth.

Leo slashed the web in midair, but it continued to come at him, preventing him from moving forward. The Jorōgumo turned to fully face him, her legs outstretched, strands of the sticky
substance flowing like projectiles from her wide orifice.

The very second he did not move one of his katana quickly enough, it became enmeshed in her webbing. The cutting edge grew useless as more of the web padded the blade.

Webbing rained down on Leo’s shoulders and its weight began to slow him. He swore he heard the Jorōgumo laugh as his second sword was wrenched out of his hand by a sticky strand. Another hit Leo in the chest and shoved him against the wall, trapping him there.

Then two more figures burst into the room. The Jorōgumo hissed in recognition of the addition of another pair of warders, but seemed undaunted by their presence. With no hint of a retreat, she began to spray her deadly webbing at Donatello and Michelangelo.

Don was instantly suffused in the glow of his energy protection shield. The webbing hit it and slid off, as though the shield was covered in a substance it couldn’t stick to.

Unfortunately, the shield was a passive power, providing protection as most yokai avoided contact with it. The Jorōgumo had no such qualms. When Donatello lifted his staff and swung at her, she used four of her eight legs to defend herself. Catching his staff, she pulled as he held on, and then she swept his feet out from under him.

Even as she battled Donatello, the Jorōgumo continued to spit webbing at Michelangelo.

His nunchucks quickly became entangled in the stuff and then he felt strands curling around his legs. Seeing that Don has used his gifts to protect himself from the webbing, Mikey hoped he could make his do more than just burn his arm.

Almost as soon as he had that thought, the symbols on Mikey’s arm lit up. The burning sensation began to grow, the pain increasing to the point where he forgot to keep dodging the strands of webbing.

He could vaguely hear Leo trying to shout something at him, probably a warning when Mikey realized the web had begun to cover his torso. It wrapped itself around his arm and covered his warder symbols.

That didn’t smother the burning. As it intensified, Mikey couldn’t take it anymore.

“Ow! Stop already!” Mikey yelped, straightening his arm with a hard jerk.

There was a sudden brilliant reddish orange flash and the webbing on Mikey’s arm disintegrated into ash.

“No!” the Jorōgumo screeched, turning her full attention onto Mikey.

“Oh yes!” Mikey yelled triumphantly.

Bands of energy rolled along his arm, shooting from the tips of his fingers as he aimed them at the creature. Each time a blast hit her webbing, the strands burned away in a puff of blackish smoke.

Mikey’s power burned the remaining webbing off of his body and he began to move towards the Jorōgumo, shooting energy blasts directly at her mouth. They proved too powerful for her and despite her doubled efforts to ensnare him, Mikey got in close enough to fire a blast directly down her throat.

The Jorōgumo’s eyes went wide as her throat expanded. A hideous squeaking noise issued
from her mouth and she clutched at her throat. Sinking to her knees, her body jerked as though she were retching, and all eight of her spider’s legs scrabbled at the floor.

Mikey instantly saw the spot in the center of her back that Mr. Hidesato had spoken of. It was a long thin crevice situated right between the areas where her legs protruded from her skin.

Taking the trap coin from his belt, Mikey pounced, shoving the coin into the opening.

As soon as the coin entered her body, the Jorōgumo flopped onto her back and began flailing. Her body started to shrivel, the human form turning into the bulking shape of a massive spider.

Fangs snapped at the air, its black body twisting on the floor and the flapping legs sending it into a spin. One by one the legs disappeared. Then the body dried up and was sucked into the trap coin.

The moment the Jorōgumo vanished, so did all of her webbing. Don’s shield lowered and he sat up just as Leo pushed off from the wall.

Raph slumped to the floor with a hard thud and Leo rushed to his side. From the corner of his eye, Leo saw Mikey place the trap coin into the wax tool and seal the Jorōgumo inside.

“Hey,” Leo said as Raph lifted his head.

“Hey yourself,” Raph replied. “I thought she was Angel. I didn’t want to get her in trouble.”

“Tricky,” Leo said, helping Raph to his feet. “Are you okay?”

“Tired,” Raph admitted. “She’d started to feed on me when ya’ showed up.”

A groan from nearby caught their attention and they saw Don rush past them and round the next corner. Trailing after him, they saw him kneeling next to a young man with blond hair, tattered clothing, and no shoes.

“That’s him,” Leo said. “That’s the man I entered during my premonition.”

“He’s weak, but I think he’ll make it,” Don said. Looking beyond him, Don saw two other men lying on the ground in what was probably a dining room.

As he went to check on them, Mikey came partway down the stairs. He’d been up to the second floor to look for survivors.

“There are three other guys upstairs,” Mikey said. “One of them is gone, but two are still barely alive.”

“So are the two in here,” Don called out. He came back to join them. “We need to get help to them fast.”

He used the burner phone he’d received from Mr. Hidesato to call for emergency services as the turtles left the house. Raph was too weak to ride, so he climbed into the passenger seat of the truck while his brothers loaded Casey’s motorcycle into the bed.

Before he drove off, Don tossed the phone into a nearby garbage can. The sound of approaching sirens bid the warders a farewell as they drove away from the house.
End Jorōgumo
“I don’t get it,” Raph said. “How come Mikey could activate his powers and I couldn’t?”

“’Cause I’m just that good,” Mikey said, looking like the cat who ate the canary.

All seven members of the Jorōgumo hunting party sat in the kitchen of Mr. Hidesato’s
house. Mr. Hidesato had opened a couple of bottles of wine and each of them had a glass, though Leo had only swallowed a thimbleful before switching to tea.

“It was probably because her webbing bound your magic somehow,” Don said.

“That is very astute of you, Donatello,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I did warn you that the Jorōgumo does not fear warders. A warder trapped by her will become just as helpless as any other of her victims.”

“So instead of saying straight up ‘her webs will make ya’ weak as a kitten’, ya’ decided to be cryptic,” Raph said. His tone wasn’t confrontational, but as he took a sip of wine, his eyes were glued to Mr. Hidesato.

“I will strive to be more informative in the future,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Yeah, I can tell ya’ got a problem with this whole communication thing,” Raph said. “Is that why there ain’t anymore warders in your clan?”

It was a sharp dig. April’s eyes darted to Raph and then to Leo, but his focus was on Mr. Hidesato. Though the man appeared as unflappable as always, Leo did notice a slight tightening at the corners of his mouth.

“How are you feeling, Donny?” Mikey asked, not caring for the uncomfortable atmosphere that was trying to settle on the group. “You don’t look as wiped out as you were after taking out the Hag.”

“I’m not,” Don said. “I’m getting pretty good at manifesting my shield. It was the addition of the protective bubble that took it out of me Friday night.”

“What protective bubble?” Leo asked, his focus now on Donatello.

“Oh right, he hasn’t told ya’ guys about that,” Raph said.

“After you went down, Leo, I had to act fast to capture the Hag,” Don said. “I couldn’t leave Mikey though because . . . .”

He hesitated, glancing at Mikey who made a face. “What is the big deal? I was under a spell and wanted to throw myself off the roof. If I could remember it, I’d be so over it now.”

“So I put an energy bubble around him,” Don said. “In my head I had a flashback to when we first battled the Foot Mystics and how the Water Mystic trapped Raph in that water bubble.”

“Ya’ didn’t tell me that,” Raph said. “Smart thinking, Donny boy. I couldn’t go anywhere in that damn bubble.”

“Expending that much energy, especially externally, really drained me,” Don said. “What about you, Mikey? That was some show of power you put on tonight. Any aftereffects? Is there a downside to your magic?”

“The downside to my power happens when I’m using it,” Mikey said. “You guys have a choice about using yours, well maybe Leo not so much with the whole dreaming thing, but not me. My arm starts burning when I get near a creature, whether I want it to or not.”

“When we were battling the Yanari, the burning sensation was so intense you were yelling for it to stop,” Leo said, appearing thoughtful. “That’s when your eyes started to glow and the
creatures became visible. This time when you yelled for the burning to stop, it left your body as an energy burst to burn away the Jorōgumo’s webs.”

“Your point?” April asked when Leo paused.

“His point is that as usual, Mikey does his best fighting with his mouth,” Raph said with a grin.

Mikey stuck his tongue out at his brother. Leo gave them a tolerant look and said, “That wasn’t my point. I think where I’m going with this is that Mikey’s magic builds in his system like a Triceraton laser on overload. He externalizes that power when it gets to be too intense.”

“Not liking the whole ‘Mikey’s arm needs to nearly burn off before he can do anything about it’ message I’m getting here,” Mikey said.

“It shouldn’t have to go that far,” Don said. “All of us should be able to exert control over the powers that we’ve been given. When we tried to get a location on the Jorōgumo through Leo’s premonitions, he accidently possessed a victim and almost couldn’t get back out of him. We all have to get better at wielding our gifts because right now what they take from us is dangerous.”

“The saying that everything worthwhile has a cost shouldn’t mean to your well-being,” April said.

“In this case it might have to,” Leo said. “Speaking of the Foot Mystics, remember when Master Splinter’s hands were so badly burned during our fight with them? He said ‘the sword of Tengu is a potent mix of science and sorcery. Only a true master can wield it without the protective glove, but there is a price to be paid.’”

It was the fourth time that Tengu had been mentioned in Mr. Hidesato’s presence, and he had yet to ask about it. Leo made a mental note to address the subject with the man when they were alone.

“All I’m hearing from ya’ guys is that ya’ gotta pay to play,” Casey said. “I want to get into this game too. I was in on the damn kick off.”

“The game’s got rules, Casey,” Raph said. “This go round your fighting skills ain’t enough to get you on the team.”

“Every team’s got backup players and a support staff,” Casey retorted. “They don’t get left behind when the game’s in progress.”

April drained her glass and set it down. “If we’re going to talk in sports analogies, then it’s time for Casey and me to leave. The shop may open later than usual on Sundays, but I still have to get up this morning to open it.”

The rest of the group followed her example and finished their wine. As they were getting up, Don nudged Raph before glancing at Casey and then back again. Raph nodded his understanding and sidled up next to Casey, drawing his attention and walking towards the front door with him.

“April, hang on a second,” Don said before April could follow them.

“What’s up, Donny?” April asked.

“Do you think you could slip away sometime this afternoon and meet us back here? There’s something we’d like to discuss with you and Mr. Hidesato,” Don said. Looking at the man, he
added, “That is if you will be here, sir.”

Mr. Hidesato bowed slightly and said, “I will make myself available.”

April knew that the subject they were to discuss was the possibility of Mr. Hidesato training her. “By slip away I’m assuming you mean I shouldn’t let Casey tag along,” she said. “That’s not a problem. I’ll make up an excuse and have him watch the shop.”

“We know you don’t like keeping secrets from him,” Leo said.

“That’s all right, he’s kept plenty of them from me over the years,” April said. “I’ll tell him when the time is right.”

“Say one o’clock?” Don asked.

“Sounds good,” April said.

The brothers walked with April to the door while Mr. Hidesato remained behind to wash their glasses. If he had gathered that April already had an idea of what they were to discuss, he was either too polite to mention it, or lacked the curiosity.

After saying their goodbyes to the human couple, the brothers went upstairs to their shared bedroom. In a very short time they had removed their gear and collapsed onto their mattress nest.

“Umm, this feels good,” Mikey murmured, burrowing his face into a pillow. “I’m not gonna wake up ‘til noon.”

“That’s okay by me,” Leo said, sighing as his body relaxed. “We’ll practice after our meeting with April.”

“I figured Donny’s high sign was for something like that,” Raph said. “We gonna ask Mr. H to train her?”

“We are,” Leo said.

“Good,” Raph said. He curved his arm over Don’s shoulder when his brother laid his head on Raph’s chest. “Maybe he’ll do a better job of talking to April ‘cause he sure as hell don’t tell us much.”

“He did go with us to actively participate in this hunt,” Leo said.

“Yeah, that’s either ‘cause he finally trusts that we won’t get him killed, or he don’t think we can do the job by ourselves,” Raph said.

“I don’t think it was either one,” Mikey said, his voice muffled by the pillow. “He just wanted to sit in a bar and have a drink.”

“Thank you for encouraging him, Mikey,” Leo said.

“I wasn’t encouraging him,” Mikey said, “I was agreeing with him.”

Leo reached over and pinched Mikey’s rear end. “Ow!” Mikey exclaimed, rolling over and glaring at his older brother.

Chuckling, Raph reached out with his free hand and slid it under Mikey’s neck before pulling him against his side. “Keep me warm.”
“Raphie sandwich,” Mikey said.

“I’m trying to sleep,” Don muttered.

“We should all be doing that,” Leo said, wriggling in close to Mikey.

They were all soon asleep, with the sound of Raph’s snoring covering them like a comforting blanket. It was something Mikey used to complain about, but he now claimed that knowing exactly where Raphael was helped him to sleep better.

Wet sidewalk.

The sound of rain hitting an umbrella.

A clouded streetlamp illuminating a narrow band of an intersection.

High heels clacking against pavement.

A sense of frustration and cold.

A passing car heightens the attention. Anticipation floods the bloodstream.

The car passes without slowing down.

Muttered curses and a tired sigh.

Suddenly the hairs on the back of the neck stand up and a shiver caresses the spine.

Wait. **Hair?**

A sudden gust of wind hits the umbrella, yanking it loose. Trying to give chase, but a heel catches and there is a near fall.

More cursing. Rain starts to soak through clothing.

**Clothing?**

An icy hand touches the neck. Jump and turn.

Nothing is there. Search the shadows. Heart beating faster. Breath quickening.

A low laugh from the darkness.

Fear.

Run. **Run! Run!**

Leo’s eyes snapped open. The room should have been in total darkness, but there was a small light shining from just beyond the edge of the mattress. Sitting next to it was Donatello with a journal propped open on his lap.

“The symbols on your arm start to glow when you’re having a prophetic dream,” Don whispered.

Pushing himself upright, Leo asked, “What?”

“You just had a dream, didn’t you?” Don countered.
“I did,” Leo replied, keeping his voice down so as not to wake Raph and Mikey. “Did I disturb you?”

Don shook his head. “I set my internal clock for one hour. I wanted to watch you sleep.”

“And write it down?” Leo asked, nodding towards the journal.

“First rule of the scientific method is to observe and make notes,” Don said. “The second is to form a hypothesis. That brand is more than a symbol and the way it lit up during the branding process was more than heat searing our skin. It was the magic itself.”

“Accessing the magic lights up the symbols,” Leo said. “So it’s like our magic wand?”

“Like the proverbial magic wand, our symbols channel energy,” Don said. “It is both magic itself and the route through which our own power travels.”

“They combine and provide us with our individual gifts,” Leo said. “Interesting.”

“What did you dream?” Don asked.

Leo frowned. “It was a lot of disjointed sensations. I think I was in someone and I’m fairly certain it was a woman. She was walking along a street, carrying an umbrella, and watching for a car. I think someone was supposed to pick her up and she was frustrated because they hadn’t come.”

“You could feel her emotions?” Don asked.

“Yes,” Leo answered. “I could perceive things like rain on my skin, the cold, and the feeling of hair standing up on the back of my neck. It prickled. There was something in the shadows. A hand as cold as ice touched my neck and when I turned, nothing was there.”

Don was writing as Leo talked and nodded his encouragement. “How did the dream end?”

“I started to feel afraid. Then something laughed and I . . . she . . . ran,” Leo said.

“So the feelings and control were hers,” Don said. “You were basically an observer riding around inside her body.”

“That’s a good way to describe it,” Leo agreed. “I have no idea what happened to her after she began to run because I woke up.”

Mikey snorted and rolled over, his hand swinging whether intentionally or not, at Leo’s face.

Catching it, Leo pushed it down on his brother’s chest and exchanged grins with Donatello.

“He’s trying to tell you something,” Don whispered.

Leo lay down, tucking a pillow under his head before saying, “You going back to sleep?”

Tapping his pen against the journal he was holding, Don said, “I’ll make a few more notes first, while my thoughts are fresh.”

“Don’t get carried away,” Leo cautioned before closing his eyes. “I know how you can be.”

It was Michelangelo’s stomach that woke him up. Looking around the bedroom, he saw that he was alone, so after a good stretch he got out of bed. After putting on his gear, Mikey headed downstairs in search of his brothers.
According to the kitchen clock, Mikey hadn’t slept until noon, only until a little after nine. Don was sitting at the table with his laptop open in front of him. He alternated between looking at it and at the TV mounted on a swing arm inside a cabinet near the sink.

Something smelled good and Mikey flipped open the top of a box sitting on the counter. Inside were a dozen breakfast tacos, each labeled with different ingredients.

After selecting three and putting them on a plate, Mikey joined Don at the table. “I didn’t know there was a TV in here.”

“Mr. H was watching it this morning when I came in,” Don said. “He’d gotten up early to grab us some breakfast.”

The tacos were a little cool, but that didn’t interfere with the taste. “Where are Leo and Raph?” Mikey asked.

“Downstairs working out,” Don said as he typed away on his laptop.

There was a bright flash outside the windows followed by a boom of thunder so loud it made Mikey jump. “When did it start raining?” he asked, watching the rain pelt the window glass.

“Around four-thirty,” Don said. “Leo dreamed about it.”

“He dreamed that it was gonna rain? News flash, the weather report could have told us that,” Mikey said.

Don glanced up. “He dreamed about a woman walking in the rain. He also dreamed that something kept coming after her.”

“Oh, one of those dreams,” Mikey said. “What did the thing look like?”

“He never saw it,” Don said. “It was hiding in the shadows. All he took away from the dream is the way the woman felt when the thing kept toying with her.”

“Let me guess, she was scared,” Mikey said. “That’s helpful. Not.”

“You’ve had an attitude since last night,” Don said. “What’s going on?”

Mikey set his partially eaten taco down and said, “You know I love watching scary movies, not living in one. Do we ever get a break from this or what?”

“We’ll get a break when the creatures have all been re-captured,” Don said. “You knew that when we took on the job.”

Mikey sniffed disdainfully. “Somehow I thought it would be more fun. Like we track them down and catch them like Pokémon fun.”

“This isn’t a game, Mikey,” Don said. “We’ve caught fourteen of the escaped creatures. When has hunting any of them been fun?”

“Excuse me for not wanting to count the endless days of chasing deadly creatures,” Mikey said. “I need something to look forward to.”

“They aren’t endless days,” Don said, laying his hand on Mikey’s arm. “You’ve seen the empty coins in the coffer. Once we’ve filled them again, we can go back to the way things were.”
Mikey was quiet for a minute, and then asked, “Think we can keep the house?”

“You like it here, don’t you?” Don stared at his brother, seeing the wistful look in his eyes.

“I like living the way everyone else does,” Mikey said. “You know, above ground. Creature comforts. Maybe a little appreciation for saving the world - again. The other clans may not know exactly who we are, but they know we exist and that we’re doing good.”

“Hold onto that thought when you start feeling down about this assignment,” Don said. “Maybe we can hold onto the things Mr. H has offered us. If April can become a warder, then the whole difficulty of having someone on the High Council will be solved.”

Don could almost see Mikey’s spirits lift.

“Once we catch all the creatures, then we could have the house without having to constantly step into a horror movie. That’s something I can get behind,” Mikey said. “On that note, did Mr. H have any idea what Leo was dreaming about?”

“He said the key points in the dream were too vague and could fit any number of yokai,” Don said. “I had thought about asking Leo to try to access a premonition, but I feel like I barely got him out of the last one.”

There was another loud boom of thunder and the lights flickered. “Much as I’d like to catch another yokai, I’m not looking forward to going out in this weather,” Mikey said.

“The worst of it is supposed to pass over in the next couple of hours,” Don assured him. “Then it’s just light rain after that.”

“Is that why you’re watching TV? For the weather?” Mikey asked as he returned to his breakfast.

“That and to see if there are any news reports about unusual things happening,” Don said.

“Are there?” Mikey asked.

“Nope,” Don said. “At least nothing that’s been reported. You’d think in weather like this all sorts of yokai would come out.”

“Maybe they don’t like getting wet either,” Mikey said. “You’re not researching weather and news on the computer too, are you?”

“I was earlier,” Don admitted. “Actually what I’m doing now is trying to learn something about hypnosis. Not how to put someone into a trance or an altered state of consciousness, but how to direct them once they’ve achieved that state.”

“For Leo?” Mikey asked.

“Yes,” Don said. “His premonitions have been useful, but they have to be guided. The problem, well one of the problems, is that someone in a trancelike state has an increased suggestibility. I have to use words that help him to relay what he perceives without altering his awareness.”

“But he’s not really hypnotized,” Mikey said. “Leo’s using magic to see stuff.”

“The principle is the same,” Don said. “At least, I believe it is. What I think might happen to
Leo while he’s in an altered state, either seeing what is going to happen or becoming one with a victim, is that he becomes dissociated. He detaches from his self and assumes this new self to the point where his identity fragments.”

Mikey had been staring hard at Don as he tried to follow along with what his brother was saying. “Is that like when Master Splinter said his power causes a part of him to disconnect?”

“That was more about what he left behind in order to inhabit another body and then return to his,” Don said. “What I need is to find a way to easily bring him back to himself after he’s accessed a premonition. Yesterday he entered the body of one of the Jorōgumo’s victims, which was not our intent, and he couldn’t get out of it because of the man’s weakened state.”

“Could he get stuck inside someone?” Mikey asked, looking worried.

“I hope to find a way to prevent that,” Don said. “Until I feel like I’m on the right track, I can’t justify having Leo use his power to access a premonition.”

“Does Leo know that?” Mikey asked. “I mean, you’re basically saying you want to take him off the playing field.”

“Are sports analogies contagious?” Don asked with good humor. “Yes he knows. While you were asleep the three of us talked about it. Leo wasn’t thrilled but between Raph and me we got him to see reason.”

“Only after he made you promise to find out all you could as fast as you could on how to direct his premonitions,” Mikey guessed.

“Hence the reason I am sitting here,” Don said. “If you wanted to be helpful, you could scan some more journal pages for me. I’ve got the next set of them stacked next to the scanner.”

Before Mikey had a chance to respond, Leo and Raph entered the kitchen. They both grabbed bottles of water from the refrigerator and downed most of the liquid before speaking.

“We’re gonna hit the showers,” Raph said.

“Have you learned anything, Donny?” Leo asked.

“Quite a bit,” Don said. “I’m following an idea that might solve our problem.”

“Can we try it today? My dream didn’t give us enough to work from other than the fact that whichever yokai this is, it’s our next target,” Leo said.

“I don’t feel comfortable with that,” Don said. “I understand your sense of urgency, but we also have to protect ourselves.”

“Come on bro’,” Raph said, clapping Leo on the shoulder. “If ya’ ask nicely, I’ll give your shell a good scrubbing.”

Leo seemed reluctant to walk away from the discussion, but Raph got him moving. When Mikey turned back around to look at Don, he saw that the genius was grimacing.

“We need to get better at hunting for signs of yokai activity,” Don said. “Otherwise I predict that Leo will try something reckless, like putting himself into a trance when he’s alone.”

“Then how about we move this operation into the war room?” Mikey suggested. Stuffing the
reminders of his breakfast into his mouth, Mikey got up to wash his plate. “You can keep
researching and watch a lot of news stations all at once. While I’m scanning I can also see what
people are talking about on social media.”

“Using your own log in, not mine,” Don said, rising as well. “Our online voices are nowhere
near the same.”

When Raph and Leo came back downstairs, they found their brothers hard at work in the war
room.

“Don texted April to let her know she’s eating lunch with us,” Mikey said. “I’m cooking.”

“Was there anything in the news about the men we saved last night?” Leo asked.

“Just a small mention on the morning broadcast,” Don answered. “There should be more
about it in fifteen minutes when the afternoon news comes on. The online news editions only
referenced a break in the case of the missing men.”

Leo pulled out a chair and sat down in front of the bank of televisions. Raph took a seat at
one of the worktables and tuned a radio in to a talk station, turning the sound down as he waited for
the top of the hour news.

When the television news came on, they opened with a report of the discovery of the missing
men. The identity of the deceased man was being withheld pending notification of his next of kin.
Of the remaining five men, one was critical and the other four in serious but stable condition.

“They’re gonna make it,” Mikey stated, as though it were a fact.

“Do you think those other warders, the ones Mr. H talks about, would have bothered to
notify anyone about the victims?” Don asked. “From the way he spoke of them, they’re all about
capturing yokai and everything else be . . . .”

When he hesitated, Raph said, “Everything else be damned. Ya’ need to learn to curse,
Donny. I swear, ya’ can speak who knows how many languages, but ya’ won’t say one curse
word."

“You swear is exactly right,” Don said with grin. “You do enough of it for all of us.
Besides, how do you know I’m not cursing when I’m speaking those other languages?”

Raph chuckled. “Well then I’ll be damned. That’s what I love about ya’, you’re full of
surprises.”

“Guys,” Leo said, the urgent sound in his voice cutting off their banter.

The news had been talking about gang activity and a carjacking, but the current topic had
caught Leo’s attention.

“ . . . and burglary has dropped, but the trend in prostitution had been rising in the three
month reporting period. However, over the last two weeks there has been a sharp decline in those
rates,” Newscaster one said.

Newscaster two picked up the story. “Police credit that decline to increased patrols in the
Hunts Point neighborhood in the South Bronx. However, sources say that it has less to do with
police presence than with the fact that something is scaring the prostitutes so badly that they refuse
to walk the streets at night.”
“Last night, a prostitute killed the man she works for and another seriously injured a customer,” Newscaster one said. “We turn to our Bronx reporter James Kirkwood for more.”

The image on the screen cut to a man standing outside the 41st Police Precinct. “According to information from a source inside the station, both women had been badly frightened by something before the attacks. The woman who killed her pimp had refused to return to the streets and when he tried to force her outside, she stabbed him to death.

“The other woman was accosted by a customer while she was fleeing from this unknown assailant,” Kirkwood continued. “When the customer attempted to hold onto her, the woman used her stun gun on him. He fell and hit his head against the curbing.

“There have been no sightings of whoever it is that is frightening these women. Police are not ready to give credence to their stories until they have investigated further. Back to you, Linda.”

“That fits,” Leo said as he turned the sound down. “Walking the street in the early morning, high heels, the anxious feeling when a car passes.”

“A hooker on the lookout for a customer,” Raph said. “Even the cold ya’ felt could easily be ‘cause the woman wasn’t wearing much clothes.”

Don was typing something into his computer, his fingers a blur on the keyboard. “What are you looking for, Donny?” Mikey asked as he came over to stand behind his brother.

“The 41st Precinct intake records and police incident reports,” Don said. “Got it! Wow, there has been a real spike in the number of injuries amongst the prostitutes in that area. A good sized number of them have been defying their pimps and refusing to step outside at night.”

“The pimp beats them up when they don’t do what he says,” Raph said, disgust in his voice. “They’re scared of him and scared of whatever’s out there messing with them. It’s a no win situation.”

“But whatever creature it is, it’s not doing anything to the street gals except scaring them,” Mikey said. “I’m not missing something, am I?”

“Scaring them badly enough so they will do bodily harm to anyone who tries to force them back out on the streets,” Don said.

Mr. Hidesato appeared just then. “Were you watching the news broadcast?” he asked.

“We were discussing it just now,” Don said. “Leo feels that this thing with the prostitutes is what he dreamt about last night.”

“Is there a yokai who is more about causing fear than anything else?” Leo asked. “One who plays tricks like making sounds from the darkness and touching the backs of people’s necks?”

“Yes,” Mr. Hidesato said after thinking about it for a moment. “Yes, I believe I know which of the yokai this might be. It is called Ushirogami and its primary diet is fear.”

“So it scares people as a way to eat?” Mikey asked. “Gross. That’s as bad as the Hag feeding off sadness.”

“That is where the similarity ends,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The Yonaki babā manufactures sadness through her magic, while the Ushirogami is a prankster. It targets cowardly people, particularly women.”
“I wouldn’t say hookers are all that cowardly,” Raph said.

“I’d say they are more afraid than not,” Don said. “Look at the lifestyle. They manufacture this hard exterior in order to survive, but every minute they’re working they have to worry about making money for their pimp, not getting picked up by some lunatic or by the police. That’s a lot of stress and fear.”

“Tell us more,” Mikey said.

“The Ushirogami looks like a ghost,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It has long black hair and one large eyeball located on the top of its head. It has no feet, but instead has a long, twisting body which gives it the ability to leap high into the air. One of its favorite tactics is to leap out and appear right behind a person.”

“It didn’t do that in your dream though, right Leo?” Mikey asked.

“No,” Leo said. “Maybe it would have if the dream had lasted longer.”

“They also like to tug on the hairs at the back of the neck, place their icy hands or breathe their hot breath on the back of the neck, and then vanish just as the person turns around,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Sometimes they will sneak up behind a woman and untie her hair so that it falls in an unkempt manner, or they will run their hands through the woman’s hair and cause it to become tangled. They will also sometimes call up strong gusts of wind to disarrange clothing or blow umbrellas away.”

“That’s what it did to the woman in my dream,” Leo said. “She was incredibly afraid.”

“No one likes things that come out of the dark to mess with you,” Mikey said.

“Maybe ya’ should sit this one out, Mikey,” Raph said. “Can’t have ya’ screaming down the neighborhood in the middle of the night.”

“If you can go after giant spiders, I can handle a ghost,” Mikey retorted. “The underground monsters were scarier than this.”

“How do we capture it?” Leo asked.

“It is all about timing,” Mr. Hidesato said. “When it leaps out of hiding you must place the coin beneath the trailing end of its long body. You need not be exact. As long as the coin is within thirty centimeters of the bottommost point, the Ushirogami will be pulled into it.”

“How much is that in inches?” Mikey asked.

“About one foot or twelve inches,” Don said.

“And just how the hell are we supposed to find the thing?” Raph asked. “We ain’t women and we got no idea if any of them are gonna be walking around in this weather.”

“Or any weather while this is happening,” Don said.

He appeared lost in thought for a moment and Mikey snapped his fingers in front of his brother’s face. “Share,” Mikey said.

“April is coming by later,” Don said slowly.

“Don’t have to be a mind reader to know what you’re thinking,” Raph said. “Ya’ want her to
act as bait.”

“She wouldn’t be in danger from the yokai, since it doesn’t actually do anything to people,” Don said.

“There’s only one problem with your idea, Donny,” Raph said. “April ain’t exactly the cowardly type. She’d smack the thing if it jumped out at her.”

“She’d just have to think of stuff that scares her,” Mikey said. “Everybody has something that scares them.”

“Except for Fearless over there,” Raph said, jerking a thumb in Leo’s direction.

“Something happening to a family member scares me,” Leo said. “It’s probably the same for April. She could stay focused on that, on all of the things that have happened in the past that gave her a fright.”

“Like Stockman chasing her all over the Roosevelt Island Sky Tram,” Mikey said. “I’ll bet if she imagines him following her down the sidewalk she’ll be scared.”

“How will you remain close enough to her to capture the Ushirogami if Miss O’Neil draws it out?” Mr. Hidesato said. “This yokai will move quickly if it learns that you are near.”

“We’re ninja,” Raph said. “It won’t see us coming.”

“Yeah, it’s only got one eyeball,” Mikey said.

“Who’s gonna tell her she has to dress like this yokai’s favorite type of victim? It sure as shell ain’t gonna be me,” Raph said.

Mikey glanced down at the bottom edge of Don’s computer screen and noticed the time. “I gotta go make lunch,” he said, scurrying quickly from the room.

“Coward,” Raph said to his retreating shell.

“I doubt she’ll need to dress differently,” Leo said. “It’s probably more about locale and behavior.”

“So I guess everyone buys into April being bait,” Raph said. “Can I just put it out there that these damn creatures ain’t acting exactly the same as they did a couple hundred years ago? Casey’s already had a couple of close calls, now we’re asking April to step up to the firing line.”

“Maybe I could make some sort of talisman that would offer her extra protection,” Don said. “Perhaps a piece of jewelry that she could wear. It wouldn’t be as strong as the symbols themselves, but might be enough to make a yokai think twice about attacking her.”

“Wouldn’t that defeat the purpose of having her act as bait?” Leo asked.

Don shook his head. “I don’t think so. I can’t give you empirical evidence to support this theory, but when I warded the shop, it was more like I was transferring some of my protection shield to the symbols I etched into the wood.”

“Like some kind of invisible fence?” Raph asked.

“Something like that,” Don said.
“When would this shield activate?” Mr. Hidesato asked. “The Ushirogami’s scare tactics very much involve the touching of its victims.”

“This is just a theory,” Don said. “I have no idea if I can create a working talisman or even how it will behave.”

“What you’re saying is that April is gonna be part of an experiment,” Raph said. “Still sounds too dangerous to me.”

“It isn’t the most dangerous thing we’ve ever asked her to do,” Don said. “Remember when she went into the TCRI building for us?”

“How about we leave it up to April?” Leo asked. “We’ll give her the facts and the plan. She can tell us if she’s willing to lure the Ushirogami out.”

Raph crossed his arms. “How much ya’ wanna bet she says yes?”

April arrived promptly at one o’clock. After leaving her umbrella and raincoat on the rack near the front door, she greeted the turtles and Mr. Hidesato. Michelangelo announced that lunch was ready, so the group filed directly into the dining room.

“Did you have any problem getting away from the shop?” Leo asked once they were all seated.

“None,” April said. “I sent Casey on a delivery run and left my part-time salesperson in charge of the shop.”

“Do you think you could manage to do that again tonight?” Don asked.

April eyed him suspiciously. “Why?”

Between them, the turtles and Mr. Hidesato outlined their discovery of the location of the Ushirogami and what it had been doing. Then Donatello told her of their plan.

“I’ll do it,” April said immediately, “on one condition. That we don’t leave Casey out of it.”

“Ya’ sure?” Raph asked.

“Yes. I know he can behave like an overprotective oaf, but the only secrets I want to keep from him are the tiny ones that don’t matter. We’re in a relationship and the only way it will work is if there’s trust between us,” April said.

“He can’t be with you while you’re walking the streets,” Don said. “The Ushirogami only attacks lone women.”

“Casey can sit in the van,” April said. “You guys are super focused on catching this creature, but you’re forgetting that it’s not the only dangerous thing out there, especially in that area of the Bronx. If any person starts to hassle me, I’ll need Casey there to chase them off. That way none of you has to come out into the open.”

“Very smart,” Mr. Hidesato said appreciatively.

“That she is,” Don agreed.

They were finishing up with lunch and since Leo didn’t know how long April could be gone from the shop, he broached the subject that was the main reason they’d asked her to come over.
“Mr. Hidesato, we wanted to have you and April together so we could run a proposal past the
two of you,” Leo said. “We talked a little to April about this and she’s willing.”

“You wish to have me train her so that she can become a Warder,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Yes,” Leo said with surprise. “Had you already thought about this?”

“It only came to me that this was what you wished to discuss when you asked if I would be
available to meet with Miss O’Neil this afternoon,” Mr. Hidesato said. He looked at April. “You
have trained under the same Master as the turtles, have you not?”

“I have,” April said. “Master Splinter has been training me for several years now.”

“The training is rigorous and you would also be required to perfect your Japanese. You must
learn to read it as well as to speak the language,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Have you spoken with Mr.
Jones about this?”

“We’ve talked about it a few times,” April said. “He knows it’s what I want to do.”

“He must not come here and interfere while you are in training,” Mr. Hidesato warned. “I
respect his protective instincts and warrior nature, but he could never be a Warder. There is more to
it than mere physical training. A higher level of spirituality must be achieved so that one can interact
with the world’s magic.”

“Casey will be fine with that,” April assured him. “He’s never gotten involved during my
time training with Master Splinter. If I can manage to acquire the warder symbols, he’ll be glad that
I’ve gotten that extra protection. In the meantime, wearing a talisman will suffice. It would be nice if
you could fashion something like that for Casey as well.”

She was speaking to Don as she said that and he nodded. “I can do that, but will he wear it?
He doesn’t strike me as the type to wear jewelry.”

“Don’t call it that and he’ll wear it,” April said with a smile. “Tell him it’s a protection
amulet.”

Leo was watching Mr. Hidesato carefully as he said, “We would also like for April to attend
your next Warder High Council meeting as our representative.”

“That is not possible,” Mr. Hidesato said quickly. “One must be a Warder in order to attend.
The other members will look to see if she has acquired the symbols.”

“That’s where I come in,” Mikey said. “I’m a master with an ink brush. I can paint the
symbols on her arm and make it look like they’ve been branded there. It’s just a matter of color
matching and shading.”

“If you’re serious about wanting the other clans to stay away, it would help your cause to be
able to present a face to your claim of having found warders to do this job,” Leo said. “April will
easily allay any doubts they might be harboring. We can prep her on the captures she hasn’t been a
party to so that if they ask questions, she’ll be primed with the correct responses.”

“This is a solution that perhaps resolves a difficulty for both of us,” Mr. Hidesato said
thoughtfully. “Miss O’Neil could be an added buttress to fortify my assurances that additional aid is
not required and she can satisfy your suspicions on whether or not I have been hiding things from
you.”
“Ya’ ain’t got a problem with that, do ya’?” Raph asked.

“None whatsoever,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Of course this is predicated entirely upon whether Michelangelo is as adept with his inks as he claims to be.”

“He does his best work under pressure,” Don said.

“I should get back to the shop,” April said. “I’ll have to sit down with Casey and tell him everything we’ve talked about. What time should I be back here?”

“Around ten thirty,” Leo said. “We’ll give the streets time to settle down for the night.”

“That will give me time to work on the amulets,” Don said. “I need to go to the lair to do that. I want to make the amulets out of metal and all of my welding equipment is there.”

“Make them from silver,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Everything you need is here.”

“Why silver?” Don asked.

“Silver has mystical properties,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It can do many things, from channeling magic, to stopping evil and warding off monsters, to making magic mirrors, or turning water into a healing potion. It is considered to be of incorruptible pureness, or simply put, made of good. It is why the Wado Kaichin – the trap coins – are made of silver.”

“I’ve never worked with silver before,” Don said. “I’ll have to research the proper method on the internet.”

“That will not be necessary,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is a skill I learned many years ago. I will teach it to you.”

Mikey and Raph walked April out while Leo cleaned up the luncheon things. Don followed Mr. Hidesato into the war room, watching as the man opened a small safe and removed a box.

“This is silver clay,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is quite easy to work with. We will cut thin sheets of cardboard into the warder symbols and press them into the clay. Come, the other materials we need are in the basement.”

From shelves in the furnace room, Mr. Hidesato gathered several items and brought them into Don’s work space. Together they cut out two sets of symbols from cardboard and then set them to the side.

Setting out a sheet of Teflon, Mr. Hidesato lay a four millimeter long piece of silver clay onto it, and then set one and a half millimeter thick plastic spacers on either side.

“These spacers will ensure that we roll out the clay to an even thickness,” Mr. Hidesato said.

He used a section of plastic pipe as a rolling pin and showed Donatello how to roll out the clay. Once it was the proper thickness, he took one of the cardboard cutouts and set it on the clay, pressing it down firmly.

Next he took a craft knife and trimmed the excess clay from around the edges of the symbol. After he had done that, he cut away the clay from the inside of the symbols, leaving a small segment of clay as a connector.

Mr. Hidesato then took a small piece of wire bent into a circular shape and embedded it into
the back of the clay. “After the clay is fired, it will shrink slightly around this wire and hold it tightly. This is where we will attach a chain. This piece must be allowed to dry before firing, so we will set it aside and you will prepare the second one.”

Following Mr. Hidesato’s instructions, Don crafted the other amulet. Years of building fragile equipment had given Don a delicate touch and he had little difficulty with the piece. They then gently removed the cardboard from the back of the shaped clay.

After the clay had dried, Mr. Hidesato instructed Don on how to use a sanding sponge to sand the edges of the clay so they wouldn’t be rough.

“We could adjust the heat in the furnace so that it would act as a kiln, but it is easier and faster to use a small gas torch,” Mr. Hidesato said, showing Don the one he’d brought from the furnace room. “Please place that copper sheet onto the table to protect the surface and then put the ceramic fire block on top of it. The lights should be off for this part of the process.”

Don set the two items on the table and then turned out the lights. The light from the dojo filtered into the room so that it wasn’t in total darkness, but it was apparently dark enough because Mr. Hidesato nodded his satisfaction. He then set one of the amulets on the ceramic block and used the automatic ignition on the torch to produce a flame.

“Watch carefully,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I am not holding the flame directly to the silver because I do not want it to melt. My purpose is to remove the organic binder that is in the clay, which will then leave only silver.”

A small flame flared up from the clay piece. “That is an indication that the binder is burning away,” Mr. Hidesato explained. The amulet began to glow pink as Mr. Hidesato waved the torch back and forth over it. “We want to keep it glowing for about two minutes. If you do not fire it long enough it will not be completely converted into the metal form of the silver.”

After the allotted time, Mr. Hidesato shut off the torch. On the edge of the table was the small ceramic bowl of cold water that Mr. Hidesato had brought downstairs with him and he used tweezers to transfer the amulet from the block into the water.

“As you can see, it cools very quickly,” Mr. Hidesato said, reaching into the bowl with his fingers and extracting the silver amulet. “It is now your turn.”

Donatello was careful to emulate Mr. Hidesato’s actions and soon they had two silver amulets bearing the warder symbols.

Nodding his satisfaction, Mr. Hidesato said, “I have no chains upon which to hang these, but perhaps Miss O’Neil might be able to bring something suitable with her.”

“I’ll give her a call,” Don said. “It’s probably better to let her choose the length.”

When he and Mr. Hidesato returned to the ground floor, none of the other turtles were around. Don placed the amulets on the desk in the office and Mr. Hidesato returned the box containing the silver clay to the safe.

Remembering that Leonardo had said something the night before about an afternoon practice session, Don glanced outside but saw that it was still raining. Since they weren’t in the dojo, he peered into the front room and saw that his brothers were all meditating.

Moving quietly, Don took a seat on the carpet. He did not immediately close his eyes though because he was studying Leo for any sign that his brother was having a premonition. After several
minutes it appeared that he was enjoying a serene contemplation, so Don relaxed as well.

As they often did when meditating together, all four brothers came back to themselves at the same time. A feeling of peace and calm had descended on them, and the turtles reached out to each other, clasping hands.

The very second they completed the circle, their warder symbols began to glow.

No one moved. A force such as nothing they’d ever experienced seemed to energize every part of their bodies, winding its way through their very psyche. The power of it bonded them to one another, connecting them on a level that was almost molecular.

So caught up in their rapture, the brothers did not sense it when Mr. Hidesato peeked into the room. They did not hear him when he entered a moment later to toss the silver amulets into the center of their circle.

Four beams of light shot from their symbols to strike the amulets. The flash it produced snapped the brothers back to awareness and the glow that had enveloped them dissipated.

The two amulets were still shining.

“Fascinating,” Mr. Hidesato said in a hushed voice.

Donatello leaned forward and gingerly picked up the amulets as their radiance began to fade. “Did we just collectively infuse these with our magic?”

“I think so,” Raph said. “Don’t know how and I’m not sure I want to, as long as it works.”

The brothers rose to their feet and Leo blew out the candles they had been using. Mikey helped him return them to the mantel above the fireplace and Don switched on the reading lamp.

“How did you know what was happening to us?” Leo asked Mr. Hidesato as they followed him from the room.

“I felt it,” Mr. Hidesato said, touching the sleeve of his jacket above the spot where the symbol on his arm was located. “I have never felt such power from the magic. Whatever the four of you have accessed has resonated through the very essence of what makes us warders. I am sure the High Council will have questions.”

“Their answers will have to wait,” Leo said. “We have a creature to capture.”

“I can use the justification of a hunt to avoid their queries until tomorrow,” Mr. Hidesato said. “If I attempt to wait longer, they will send an envoy to ask the questions in person.”

“We sure as hell don’t want that,” Raph muttered. “One of you guys is enough.”

Don excused himself so that he could phone April about bringing chains for the amulets. Since Mr. Hidesato said that he would order a food delivery for their dinner, the brothers decided to spend the remainder of their free time in the media room.

April and Casey arrived promptly, both looking eager. The rain had slowed to a light mist and April had brought her umbrella with her, but she’d traded her raincoat for a faux fur jacket. She was also wearing a tight black skirt and high heeled shoes.

“Ya’ okay in that getup, April?” Raph asked.
“I am as long as I don’t have to do any running,” April said. “These spikes are a lot higher and thinner than I’m used to.”

“But they make your legs look a mile long, babe,” Casey said appreciatively. “Maybe ya’ could keep them on later when we get back home.”

“Down boy,” April said, blushing lightly. “Here Donny, I brought a chain for my amulet, but Casey insisted on having a long cord on his.”

“Last thing I need is for someone to think I’m wearing a necklace,” Casey said. “Especially some Purple Dragon punk.”

Donatello attached the amulets and then handed them to Casey and April. Casey slipped the cord over his head and pushed the symbols under his shirt.

April studied the symbols for a moment. “This is really pretty and so delicate,” she said. “Are they ‘powered up’?”

“We think so,” Don said. “The only way to know for certain is if there’s a need for them.”

Clasping the chain around her neck, April tucked the symbols down between her blouse and jacket. “I’m ready to go if you guys are,” she said.

Leo accepted the trap coin and wax tool from Mr. Hidesato and then followed the others out to April’s van. As it pulled away from the curb, Leo noticed that Mr. Hidesato still stood in the open doorway, watching as they drove off.

Hunts Point in the Bronx was listed in the top five most dangerous neighborhoods in New York. It was notorious for its prostitution industry and its lucrative drug trade. At the first dark alley he came across just off of Spofford Avenue, Casey pulled over so that the turtles could exit the van.

Pulling onto Coster Street, Casey drove until he found a spot where he could not only park and be unnoticed, but where he could keep an eye on April.

After listening to Casey tell her for the hundredth time to be careful, April stepped out of the van. Opening her umbrella, she took a deep breath and crossed the street.

Though she didn’t know the area, April had a feeling that despite the rain, this particular street was normally a busy one at this time of night. The attacks that had frightened the prostitutes into staying away had a trickledown effect. Fewer cars drove by, the drug trade had moved to another neighborhood, and lights were out in businesses that usually stayed open late.

April walked past a couple of street girls who huddled together in the brightly lit doorway of a drugstore. A car pulled to a stop alongside them, the driver’s side window lowering enough for someone to speak through. One of the girls responded and after a moment of negotiation, jumped into the car. The remaining girl stayed where she was, hugging herself tightly and making no move to step into the darkness.

Walking for another block, April realized she was amped up but not frightened. If she wanted to be a target for the Ushirogami, she was going to have think of something that would scare her.

“Girl, this is so not your thing.”

The deep, husky voice coming so unexpectedly from a nearby alcove made April jump. Cigarette smoke wafted out first, followed by a woman who was well over six feet tall. She was
wearing fish net stockings, a very blonde wig, and carrying a garishly colored umbrella.

Tossing the cigarette onto the wet sidewalk, the streetwalker gave April the once over and said, “You’re obviously not a prostitute baby, not even a newbie. What’s your gag, you one of those undercover cops?”

The one thing April did not want to be taken for was a police officer. Thinking quickly, she said, “No, I’m a reporter. I was hoping to lure whoever has been frightening people out into the open.”

“They do seem to prefer the more delicate ladies,” the streetwalker said. “I’ve never been bothered.”

April noted the prominent Adams apple and knew why she’d emphasized ‘ladies’. “You haven’t seen anything?”

“Not a thing,” the streetwalker said. “For twenty bucks I’ll tell you how to attract their attention though. I know his type.”

When April hesitated, Leo’s voice sounded in her earpiece. “I know the person you’re talking to,” he said. “If you have the money, pay her.”

Surprised to hear that Leonardo was familiar with a streetwalker, April reached into her pocket and took out a bill. “Here,” she said, handing over the cash.

The streetwalker tucked it into her brazier and said, “First off, hike up that skirt, honey. You’ve got to show off some of the goods, even on cold, rainy nights.”

Obligingly, April rolled her skirt up at the waist, lifting the hem until it barely covered her rear end. “How’s that?”

“Good enough,” the streetwalker said. “Now your walk, baby. You stride, just like a woman on a mission. Slow your roll, put some swing in that thing. Like this.”

She proceeded to walk down the sidewalk, accentuating the movement of her hips as she set one high heeled foot down in front of the other. Turning to walk back towards April, the streetwalker looked very much like a model strutting along a catwalk.

“Now you,” the streetwalker said.

April emulated her as best she could, trying hard not to walk too quickly. As she came back towards the streetwalker, April was greeted with a nod of approval.

“That will do. The last thing is attitude. You have to look available. Keep your head on a swivel ‘cause you’re supposed to be looking for customers,” the streetwalker said.

“Attitude,” April repeated. “Got it.”

“Not too much,” the streetwalker advised. “If it comes off as bravado, you’re gonna have a long, lonely night. I hope you brought some backup. This idea of yours isn’t too smart if you’re all alone.”

“There are a couple of guys keeping an eye on me,” April said. “They’re very good at remaining unseen.”
“I met someone like that once,” the streetwalker said. “He’s the only real man I’ve ever known. His name is Leonardo.”

There was a hint of a smile on her lips, which broadened at the startled look on April’s face.

“What’s your name?” April asked.


Waving a perfectly manicured hand, Tawny sauntered away, singing in a rich tenor voice something about true love and Leonardo.

Making a mental note to query Leonardo about Tawny the first chance she got, April continued on her mission. This time she took on the persona of a streetwalker, following the instructions that Tawny had provided.

The street was eerily quiet. Even the light mist hitting April’s umbrella made no noise. April walked slowly, turning her head periodically to look along the street as though waiting for a customer to appear.

Before they’d left the house, the group had agreed that April would walk a two block section of the neighborhood. It was the area where the previous encounters with prostitutes had taken place and limiting the distance made it easier for the guys to keep track of her.

Crossing the street, April made the return trip on the opposite side of the road. To put herself in the right frame of mind, April thought about the Kuchisake onna and how it had nearly slit Casey’s throat. She also thought about how the Itsumade had cut open Leonardo’s leg.

They hadn’t expected the yokai to be as dangerous as they were. Correction, they hadn’t anticipated how a modern city so full of people could change the creatures.

Now April was starting to feel afraid. This thing she was attempting to attract was supposed to be fairly benign, but what if it had been transformed?

Thoroughly on edge, April had to keep reminding herself not to walk too fast. The more she told herself that, the harder it was not to start running.

A sudden blast of air ripped the umbrella out of April’s hands and sent it flying along the street. April started to give chase, but realized she’d never catch up to it.

April had given a startled cry when the umbrella flew off and had expected that Leo would ask if everything was all right. Instead there was silence. Was their communication down? Could the guys even see her? Did they know where she was?

Icy cold fingertips danced across the back of April’s neck and she gasped. Spinning around, she saw nothing, not even a hint of movement.

“It’s here, it’s here,” April whispered into her com unit, but received no response.

Heart pounding, April turned and began walking again. She hadn’t gone three feet when she experienced what felt like heated breath blowing against the backs of her knees.

In the cold rain, that was worse than the icy fingers. April nearly jumped out of her shoes. When she turned, there was again nothing to be seen.
“Dammit guys,” April whispered urgently. “Get your butts over here.”

The yokai probably expected that April would be running away by now. Instead, April took a deep breath and continued walking, though she did turn up the collar of her jacket.

In the next second there were fingers in her hair, twisting and pulling at it. Swinging a hand up, April whirled around.

“Stop th . . .!” April stopped in mid-shout. Hovering near her, at eye level, was the Ushirogami.

April stiffened as she stared into its single eyeball. Then it vanished.

A slight sound made April turn quickly. That’s when the Ushirogami leaped directly at her face.

April screamed and jumped back. Her heels turned, causing her to fall, and the yokai plunged after her.

With no conscious thought, April snatched at the warder symbols hanging from her neck. As soon as her hand closed over the amulet, the Ushirogami froze.

Suddenly there was movement all around her. Three sets of muscular green legs surrounded her while the fourth leapt for the Ushirogami.

Leonardo slapped the trap coin onto the pavement beneath the trailing end of the yokai’s body. The Ushirogami uttered no sound as its body began to twirl like a cyclone before being sucked into the coin.

“Ya’ okay, April?” Raph asked, reaching down to help April stand.

“Marvelous,” April said with a touch of sarcasm. She wiped her hands on her skirt and left a grimy trail on the fabric. “I guess this outfit is ruined. What took you guys so long?”

The van pulled up alongside them and Casey hopped out. “Ya’ okay, babe?”

“We had to wait for the Ushirogami to become visible,” Leo said, displaying the trap coin. “Otherwise we couldn’t find its trailing end.”

“April?” Casey asked, looking worried.

“I’m fine, Casey,” April said. “Just take me home.”

End Ushirogami

Chapter End Notes

* Tawny first appeared in Encounters: Leo and the Streetwalker

This internal view of the first floor sitting room in the Hidesato House was created by the very talented Sherenelle.
Night of the Tenome

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
Word Count: 10,757
Rated: PG-13 2k3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Usually there was conversation after a successful capture; sometimes lively, sometimes subdued.

Tonight the mood was solemn. April peered out of the van’s passenger side window as Casey drove. Because she was so silent, so were the turtles. Their thoughts were not quiet though. Each in their own way wondered if they had finally asked too much of her.

Casey periodically glanced at his girlfriend, trying to gauge how she was feeling. Eventually he couldn’t take it anymore. “April?”

When she didn’t answer right away, Leo spoke. “You got a bad fright, April. I’m so sorry to have put . . .”
April had seen Leonardo embarrassed before, but she didn’t remember ever seeing him blush.

That brought a smile to her face, which immediately lifted the tension. Mikey snickered and Raph punched Leo’s shoulder.

“Yeah, Fearless, who’s Tawny to ya’?” Raph asked. “Ya’ got a girlfriend on the side?”

“No I don’t have a girlfriend,” Leo said, looking even more discomfited. “Tawny is someone I met a couple of years ago. She helped me with that child kidnapper case. That’s all.”

“You must have made quite the impression,” Don said. “What exactly did you do to get her to help?”

“Love ‘em and leave ‘em Leo,” Mikey teased. “We see how you are bro’.”

“You can all stop now,” Leo said, giving his brothers a dirty look.

“We could go back and ask her ourselves,” Don said.

April nodded. “I’m sure that Tawny would make an interesting story of it.”

Thinking back on his first encounter with Tawny, Leo couldn’t help but chuckle. “Not unless you paid her.”

“I want to know how she connected me to you,” April said. “She seemed to know exactly who my backup was.”

“Tawny is both smart and intuitive,” Leo said. “She’s . . . unique.”

“Aww, I think ya’ have a little crush on her,” Raph said, eyes twinkling.

“I just might,” Leo said good-humoredly. Then he sobered. “Are you sure you’re okay, April?”

“I’m fine, Leo. I would like to know why you guys didn’t answer me,” April said. “I thought the com units were down.”

“I’m sorry about that too,” Leo said. “It was my call. The Ushirogami feeds off of fear, and if you weren’t truly afraid, it would have left you alone.”

“The longer you were there feeding it, the better chance we had of it becoming visible,” Don said. “If we had told you that part of the plan in advance . . . .”

“I wouldn’t have displayed the proper emotion and it wouldn’t have come out into the open,” April said, finishing the explanation for him. “After all this time working with you guys, I should have known you wouldn’t leave me hanging. There’s more to being the bait than I would have imagined.”

“Welcome to my world,” Mikey said.

They all began talking then, the atmosphere livelier now than it had been. After several
minutes Donatello stopped contributing to the conversation, his expression concentrated. He was the only one not to remove their headphones; apparently something he was hearing had captured his attention.

Leo noticed and leaned over to ask, “What are you listening to?”

“Police band,” Don said. “I usually do after a capture, just to be certain there’s no mention of us. I think I may have picked up on another yokai sighting.”

That quieted the group. “What are ya’ hearing?” Raph asked.

“The report of a body found on the grounds of Green-Wood Cemetery,” Don answered. “They just used the code for radio silence, but not before one of the officers mentioned this being the third one.”

He reached for his duffel bag and extracted his laptop. Opening it, Don quickly typed in a series of commands so that he could hack into the police database.

“There’s an open investigation on the first pair of deaths,” Don said, scanning the reports. “The bodies belonged to homeless individuals. And I’m using the term ‘body’ loosely. Apparently someone had removed all of the bones from the remains. Every last one of the two hundred and six bones that comprise the adult human skeletal structure.”

“Ya’ mean something not someone, don’t ya’?” Raph asked.

“I’m only reading what the medical examiner’s report had to say,” Don said. “They think it’s a serial killer, though they haven’t figured out how he’s extracting the bones. The skin hasn’t been cut.”

“It’s gotta be one of ours,” Mikey said. “Oh, and by the way, that’s gross. What’s the plan, Leo?”

“Do you have a location, Donny? Green-Wood Cemetery is a big place,” Leo said.

“Four Hundred and seventy-eight acres to be exact,” Don said. “The first of the bodies was found amongst the gravestones near 5th and Maple Avenues. The second was under some trees near 36th Street and Spruce Avenue. Tonight’s callout was to an area off of Lake Avenue.”

“Do those locations have anything in common?” Leo asked.

“Maple, Spruce, and Lake Avenues are all inside the cemetery property,” Don said.

“So the cemetery is the common denominator,” April said. “I’m not very familiar with that cemetery, but aren’t those streets located near one corner of the property?”

Don pulled up a map of the cemetery. “Your memory is correct, April. They’re all within the area bordered on two sides by 5th Avenue and 36th Street.”

“We should take a gander at that area,” Raph said. “See what’s so special about it.”

“Take the van,” Casey said. “Me and April can hop out at our place, since it’s on the way.”

“We’ll leave it parked in the alley when we’re done,” Leo said. “We can make our way back to headquarters on foot.”

“Maybe we should go with you,” April said, looking worried. “You might need backup.”
Leo shook his head. “This is just a recon mission. We can’t engage a yokai even if we locate one. We don’t know what we’re hunting and we don’t have the proper trap coin with us.”

“Hopefully by the time we get there, the police will have gone,” Don said. “If not, we’ll have to wait them out and who knows how long that will take. You have a shop to open in the morning, April.”

“Okay,” April said. “I guess I have had enough for one night.”

After Casey pulled up next to the ‘2nd time Around’, he and April got out of the van. Casey tossed the keys to Don and then the couple went inside for the night.

When the turtles reached the cemetery, Don drove slowly on 5th Avenue where it ran alongside the property. They couldn’t see the actual police activity, but on their second pass they did observe two police vehicles leaving the park through one of the emergency exits.

Don found a place to park the van and the four brothers entered the cemetery grounds.

Avoiding the area where the latest remains had been found, the turtles crossed over to where the first body was discovered. There had been pictures taken by the crime scene unit which helped Donatello locate the exact spot where the body had lain.

There was one large mausoleum nearby and the turtles stood next to it so they would be hidden from sight.

“Ain’t much to go off,” Raph said. “Quiet here at night, probably attracts a few homeless folks looking for a safe place to sleep.”

“The cemetery draws a lot of visitors, but the main entrance closes at seven. The other three entrances close at four,” Don said. “By the time it gets dark the place is pretty well deserted. It would certainly be a draw for someone looking for a spot to sleep where they won’t be hassled.”

“Except by yokai,” Mikey said. “I was wondering when we were gonna end up in a graveyard.”

“Let’s make our way over to the second location,” Leo said.

When they reached the next area, Raph said, “I didn’t realize the railyard was so close. No wonder there are vagrants camping out over here.”

“I thought at first it had something to do with the Sylvan Water glacial pond since that’s near here too,” Don said. “But now I believe Raph might be onto something. If these bodies are part of a yokai kill, then said yokai will hunt where it’s more likely to find victims.”

“Maybe it’s dragging them out of the railyard and into the cemetery,” Mikey said. “You know, ’cause it needs a quiet place to feed.”

“It would probably be helpful to check the latest location of a body dump, but the police will still be working the site,” Leo said.

“If we walk out past Oak Avenue towards Chapel we might be able to catch a glimpse of the location,” Don said. “There are plenty of trees to provide cover.”

His idea was accepted and the ninjas moved silently across the grounds, keeping a watchful eye out for police patrols. It was while they were walking through a heavily wooded area that Mikey
stepped on something that squelched.

Hopping back, Mikey looked down and saw a human hand.

“Ahh!”

Don darted over to him and clapped a hand to his brother’s mouth. “Shh!”

Pushing him away, Mikey pointed down. “Oh yuck! Gross, gross, gross!”

“Please shut the hell up,” Raph barked, nudging Mikey out of the way. “Holy crap. What the fuck is that?”

Digging a flashlight out of his bag, Don squatted down to examine what looked like human remains.

“Another body, Don?” Leo asked.

“It is,” Don answered. The body was large and dressed in ragged clothing. Prodding it gently with the end of his flashlight, he said, “It doesn’t seem to have any bones.”

He handed the flashlight to Leo and began to unbutton the victim’s shirt.

“Should you be touching it?” Mikey said. “You know, without ten gloves and maybe one of those infectious disease outfits?”

“If I thought this was caused by an infectious disease then I would,” Don said without pausing. He threw the shirt open, noting that it was a male. The skin was sunken almost flat in some locations and bulging a little in others. “The organs are still intact. Whatever attacked him just wanted his bones.”

“Take some pictures and then leave him for the authorities,” Leo said. “I saw a call box on our way in here, I can phone in a tip from there.”

Don took several pictures as instructed and then the turtles made their way out of the cemetery. Before picking up the van, Leo stopped at the call box and informed the operator of the body they’d discovered.

When they dropped off the van at April’s shop, Raph said, “The lair’s closer than HQ. Maybe we should spend the night there.”

“I’d rather not,” Leo said. “As much as I’d like to see Father, we still have the Ushirogami with us. Even though it’s trapped in the coin, I’m not comfortable taking it into the lair.”

“Ya’ got a point,” Raph said. “I guess we’re going for a run.”

Upon arriving at the house they were surprised to find that Mr. Hidesato wasn’t there waiting for them.

“Do you think he went to bed?” Mikey asked as Leo tucked the trap coin into the coffer and then put the wax tool away.

“Guess he wasn’t worried about our having trouble capturing the Ushirogami,” Don said.

“Ya’ be sure and let me know if ya’ ever figure out what he does worry about,” Raph said. “I’m wet and cold. What say we all take a quick, hot shower and hit the sack?”
His suggestion was unanimously accepted. The shower stall in the guest bath was large enough to accommodate two of them, so Don and Raph shared it while Leo and Mikey had bathrooms to themselves.

As they were putting their gear away preparatory to climbing into bed, Raph glanced over at Don and tilted his head in Mikey’s direction. Leo’s back was turned to them so he didn’t see the signal that was passed from Don to Mikey.

Leo had just straightened up when all three of his brothers jumped him and shoved him onto the nest of mattresses. Don and Mikey held onto his arms while Raph straddled him, keeping him pinned down.

“And what is all this about?” Leo asked, not bothering to struggle.

Raph grinned. “Ya’ skated past April’s questions about Tawny but we ain’t letting ya’ off the hook so easy.”

“Seriously guys?” Leo asked incredulously. “We all run into humans from time to time who inadvertently learn about us. Tawny was just another of those people.”

“Sounded like she was a little more than that,” Don said.

“Yeah, Leo. Have you been cheating on us?” Mikey asked, trying and failing to sound offended. “You must have made an impression if she’s waiting for you to call.”

“Your brothers not enough for ya’ bro’?” Raph asked. “Ya’ been out getting a little somethin’, somethin’ on the side?”

Leo knew that they were teasing him and sighed in mock exasperation. “You have finally learned my secret. I should have known I couldn’t keep Tawny under wraps for very long. She’s just too much woman.”

Leaning down, Raph nipped at Leo’s collarbone. “Guess the three of us will have to figure out a way to make ya’ forget her.”

They spent the next hour doing exactly that before all four of them fell into an exhausted sleep.

When the dream came, Leonardo immediately recognized it for what it was. His consciousness hovered above the cemetery they had just visited and though nothing was happening, there was a sense that he was waiting for the action to unfold.

Below him there was a flash of movement. As he watched, a man burst through a line of hedges, running as fast as he could. On his face was an expression of pure terror.

The hedges moved again. Leonardo’s attention turned back in that direction, hoping to see what it was the man was fleeing from.

Something flew out of the bushes. It was fast, a mere blur.

Suddenly Leo was looking into the center of a giant eye. A blink and its eyelid swallowed him.

Leo lurched into a seated position as he fought his way out of the dream. He wasn’t aware that he was flailing until strong hands closed on his arms. At their touch, his eyes opened.
To either side of him were Raph and Don, each gripping his arms. Mikey was sitting up as well, staring at him in alarm.

“Are you awake, Leo?” Don asked with concern.

Nodding, Leo said, “I’m okay.”

His brothers released him but none of them settled back down. They all appeared expectant, knowing by now the symptoms related to a prophetic dream.

“Tell it while it’s fresh,” Raph urged.

“I was back at the cemetery,” Leo said. “I was floating above the grounds. I knew it was a dream and that I was waiting for something to happen. A man burst through the bushes and began running. He was dressed in ragged clothes and looked frightened out of his mind.

“When I looked behind him something, whatever was after him, came out of the bushes too. Instead of going for the man, it came straight at me. It was so fast I never saw the whole being, all I did see was a gigantic eye. Then its eyelid closed over me.”

“Ya’ got trapped inside a giant eye?” Raph asked.

“No wonder you woke up swinging,” Mikey said. “I would have too.”

“Your dream verifies that the cemetery deaths are yokai related,” Don said. “Now we know that not only does it remove the bones of its victims, but that an eye or eyes play a part. Those clues should help to narrow down our search.”

“Come on, Leo. Lay down and go back to sleep,” Raph said, lying back on the bed and pulling Leo with him.

Don and Mikey got comfortable again and in the quiet of the room, Leo’s eyes started to drift shut.

Then Mikey chuckled. “Hey, maybe this time you’ll dream about Tawny.”

“Shut up,” Leo retorted. There was a smile on his face as he fell back asleep.

The rain had let up by daybreak, but the skies were still overcast. As Leo went about making his tea, he realized how much he’d come to enjoy seeing sunshine streaming in through the kitchen windows.

He was staring at them when Don came in. Rather than going straight for the coffee pot, Don crossed to the window nearest the table and looked outside.

“Gloomy,” Don pronounced. He turned towards Leo and asked, “Are we getting spoiled by waking to a sunny outdoor view?”

“Considering the only time we’ve ever enjoyed that is when we’ve vacationed at Casey’s farm or underwent training with the Tribunal? Yeah, probably,” Leo said. “The only thing that’s certain is change.”

“Dragging Mikey back underground after this is all over is going to be difficult,” Don said as he set about preparing coffee.

“Tell me something I don’t know,” Leo said, taking his cup of tea to the table.
“Okay,” Don said, joining Leo at the table. “Mr. Hidesato wasn’t home last night.”

Leo paused with his cup partway to his mouth. “He wasn’t? How do you know?”

“I got up after you had your dream,” Don said. “I wanted to check on what the police discovered about the body we found. I’d left my duffel bag in the bathroom and when I went out to get it, I heard the front door. I went partway downstairs to check and saw him coming up. He didn’t see me. He looked preoccupied and worried, so I didn’t say anything.”

“So he went out after we left here,” Leo said. “I wonder how long after and who he went to see.”

“And why he was out until so early in the morning,” Don said. “Can I just say that I don’t think Raph’s wrong in being so suspicious?”

“I’ve never said his suspicions weren’t justified,” Leo said, drinking tea. “I’ve just asked that he not be so overtly antagonistic.”

“I don’t know, Leo, maybe he should,” Don said, getting up to pour himself a cup of coffee. He waited until he was seated again to elaborate. “Remember, Mr. Hidesato wasn’t forthcoming about the High Council until we pushed him. He’s keeping things from us. I think that Raph staying on his back is the only way we’re going to find those things out.”

“Raph does have a certain gift for forcing someone to lose their composure,” Leo said with the hint of a smile.

“You’d think that Mr. H would comprehend the concept of teamwork,” Don said. “His clan had to work together in order to capture all these yokai in the first place. Surely they didn’t all compartmentalize crucial information and keep things from each other. As a clan, they wouldn’t have surviv . . . .” He stopped when he realized what he had been about to say.

“They didn’t,” Leo said, looking worried.

“What’s with the long faces?” Raph asked as he entered the kitchen.

Leo barely shook his head, but it was enough to let Don know a change of subject was in order. Having Raph lose his temper so early would not be an auspicious start to the day.

“I was telling Leo that I’d checked on police progress last night after we’d reported the fourth body,” Don said.

“Good morning my most awesome brothers,” Mikey chimed as he bounced into the kitchen. His gaze fell on the window and his manner changed. “Don’t tell me we’re going to be hunting in the rain again.”

“Twenty percent chance,” Don replied.

Raph brought a bowl of cereal over and sat down with his brothers. “Did the cops learn anything new?”

“Other than to verify it was another homeless man, no. There was an email from the precinct’s head of detectives instructing his men to stake out the area closest to the railyard,” Don said.

“So they’re guessing like we did,” Raph said. “Great. That means we’re gonna be dodging
police while we’re trying to catch this creature.”

“It also means the police are going to become potential victims,” Leo said. “We need to figure out what we’re up against and develop a plan for catching it that leaves the police out of the equation.”

“Good times,” Mikey said.

“Be nice if we got a start from our resident expert. Somebody want to go up and bang on Mr. H’s door?” Raph asked.

“That will not be necessary,” Mr. Hidesato said.

He walked into the kitchen and looked at the brothers all gathered around the table. From his appearance it was not readily apparent that he’d been out all night.

“My apologies for not being available when you returned,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I had to go out in order to deal with the High Council. When you are finished with your breakfast, I would be grateful if you could join me in the office.”

Rather than waiting for acknowledgements, he turned and left the room.

The turtles sat in silence for a moment, and then Don said, “Well whatever the news, good or bad, at least he’s not keeping it to himself.”

“Glad to know somebody’s feeling optimistic this morning,” Raph said.

Knowing that Mr. Hidesato was waiting for them made the brothers hurry through their breakfast. In a very short while they were in the office and seated so that they could see Mr. Hidesato at the desk.

Tenting his fingers, Mr. Hidesato said, “The members of the High Council felt the power surge from the circle you formed yesterday.”

He stopped speaking, looking around at the turtles as though waiting for their reactions.

“Felt it how?” Don asked.

“The same way that I felt it,” Mr. Hidesato said. “There was a collective pulse that flowed throughout the elemental foundation of our magic, one that was strong enough to cause concern. I was certain that such was the case, so after you left on your mission, I went to confer with the Council.”

“You initiated the communication?” Leo asked. “Why?”

“Because I knew there would be questions,” Mr. Hidesato said. “That pulse was centered here, in New York City. I had assured the Council that my warders were highly trained individuals. They had accepted my word at face value, though they had obviously not been aware that there were any warders other than my Uncle living in this city.”

“So what you’re telling us is that ya’ had to calm them down again,” Raph said.

“Yes.” Mr. Hidesato shifted in his seat, placing his palms flat on the desk. “A force strong enough to be felt through the collective is extremely rare. It occurs only when a magical implement has been forged.
“To infuse the implement with old, powerful magic requires a team of mystics to meditate together for several days. Only when their minds connect on the logoic plane, or as it is commonly known, the plane of total oneness, are they able to focus a highly concentrated beam of magic into our tools.”

“Is this also how the trap coins are created?” Leo asked.

“Yes,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “It is an arduous, time consuming process. It is exactly the feat the four of you accomplished yesterday. The High Council demanded to know how this was possible.”

“What did you tell them?” Mikey asked. “You had to give them some kind of explanation, right?”

“I told them that you were all siblings and that you had been trained in both the martial and spiritual arts since birth,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I told them that you had all served under not only two but three Masters and that in pursuit of voidness you have lived lives of isolation.”

“That ain’t far from the truth,” Raph muttered.

“Wouldn’t that explanation have led to questions about how you found us in the first place?” Leo asked with some concern.

“That is where your wise suggestion that Miss O’Neil train as a warder became useful,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I followed upon your idea and represented that she already is a warder, one who had trained with my Uncle. I told them that her first Master had been one of yours, thus her connection to you, which in turn placed you in my path.”

“You’re pretty good at saying what people need to hear, aren’t ya’?” Raph asked.

“I am a member of the diplomatic corps,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“So what is the upshot of your meeting with the Council?” Leo asked.

“They have accepted, with some reservations, the fact there are novice warders with such powerful abilities,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Wait, ya’ didn’t tell them all about the stuff we can do, did ya’?” Raph asked, his brow furrowing.

Mr. Hidesato shook his head. “Of course not. They are troubled enough knowing that together you can harness magic normally consigned to trained mystics. I was admonished to take extra care that you did not use your combined power to create magical implements. Such objects must be approved by the Council.”

“Guess ya’ didn’t tell them about the amulets,” Raph said. “Stretching the truth and withholding information. Ya’ really are a diplomat.”

“The amulets were meant to be protective objects, not to wield magical powers of their own,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“They didn’t get the message,” Mikey said.

Mr. Hidesato frowned. “What do you mean?”
“Last night the Ushirogami went after April,” Don explained. “She grabbed the amulet before the creature got to her and the yokai froze.”

“Tell me all that happened,” Mr. Hidesato said.

Don began at the point where they had dropped off April, describing how deserted the streets were and skimming over the encounter with Tawny. He told Mr. Hidesato how they had managed to build up April’s fear so that she would become a target of the yokai.

After explaining how April had grown frightened enough for the Ushirogami to appear, Don described in detail what had happened after April had fallen.

“Why do you think the amulet became activated only after Miss O’Neil touched it?” Mr. Hidesato asked. “The purpose for its creation was to protect her from yokai attack, both known and unknown.”

“Maybe it does that too,” Leo said.

“I’ll bet the amulet is passive most of the time. When the wearer is in harm’s way and thinks to use it as a defensive measure, then their emotions power it up,” Mikey said.


“Yeah, but it came out of you,” Raph said. “That’s always a shock.”

“Very funny,” Mikey retorted, sticking his tongue out at his brother.

“The Council must not learn of this,” Mr. Hidesato said, his aspect extremely serious. “The unsanctioned creation of a magical implement would have severe repercussions.”

“Like what? They gonna insist on showing up here in force?” Raph asked.

“That is certainly one possibility,” Mr. Hidesato said. “They might also insist upon questioning you in person.”

“We know that we can’t let that happen,” Don said. “Even if they could be talked into meeting only with April, there’s no way she could pull off the warder guise in person. It’s going to be hard enough during a video conference.”

“The Council has no way of knowing when a magical implement has been used, do they?” Leo asked.

“No,” Mr. Hidesato said. “That low grade energy output does not create a ripple through our magical foundation.”

“Then for now we needn’t worry they’ll find out what we did,” Leo said. “Our focus has to remain on capturing as many creatures as we can as quickly as possible. We think we’ve got a bead on another one, Mr. Hidesato.”

He explained what they had learned the night before and what he had seen during his prophetic dream. Mr. Hidesato listened with great interest, nodding as Leo’s recitation drew to a close.

“It can only be a Tenome,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is a particularly insidious yokai, one driven
by revenge and resentment. The symbols for the Tenome translate to ‘eyes on hand’. The eye you saw in your dream, Leonardo, was one of the eyes that are on the palms of the Tenome’s hands. Those eyes are not particularly strong and it does not have eyes on its face.”

“How the heck does it find its victims then?” Raph asked.

“The Tenome has a powerful sense of smell, which helps them to follow their victims in the dark,” Mr. Hidesato said. “They hunt in open fields or graveyards, searching for humans upon whom they can feed. Their diet is human bones, fresh from the body.”

“That explains the boneless bodies,” Mikey said.

“It explains the homeless men too,” Raph said. “It ain’t like they get the chance to bathe every day.”

“How did the Tenome come into being?” Don asked.

“While its true nature is not known, it is said that Tenome are the ghosts of blind men, most likely tōdōza, members of the blind person’s guild. The explanation is that a blind man was attacked at night, robbed and then left to die. As the man lay dying, he cried out with his last breath, ‘If only I could have had one glance at their faces! If I only had eyes that worked – even if only on the palms of my hands!’” Mr. Hidesato said. “His resent filled death caused him to be reborn as a yokai with eyes on the palms of his hands, just as he wished.”

“How is it able to extract the bones from a body?” Leo asked. “The medical examiner could find no wounds on any of its victims.”

“The Tenome’s power is in its hands,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Once a victim is within its grasp, they are paralyzed. Its fingers sink into the skin, releasing a powerful toxin that begins to liquefy all of the bones in the person’s body. In this liquefied state, the bone is sucked up through the pores of the skin. It is not a pleasant way to die.”

“I can’t think of too many ways that are,” Mikey said.

“In battle,” Raph said firmly. “Taking as many of them with me as I can.”

“Old age,” Mikey retorted. “In my sleep.”

“Enough you two,” Leo said. “How do we capture the Tenome, Mr. Hidesato?”

“The trap coin must be placed just at the bridge of its nose,” Mr. Hidesato said. “That would put it in a position that would normally be between its eyes. In essence, you are taking the energy from the eyes on its palms and returning it to its original state as a blind old man.”

“That would mean coming very close to its hands,” Don said.

“Close? That would mean being in its damn grasp,” Raph said.

“Not if we can figure out a way to incapacitate it first,” Leo said. “It has a strong sense of smell but its eyesight isn’t great. What else do we need to know?”

“It can run very quickly,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Once it has a scent, it cannot be deterred.”

“Sounds like we need some stinky bait,” Raph said, looking pointedly at Mikey.

“It’s somebody else’s turn to be the bait,” Mikey protested. “Raph smells worse than all of us
“Sorry, Mikey,” Leo said. “It’s time to put to practical use what you learned from Hisomi-Shisho. You are the fastest of us.”

“When he focuses and doesn’t run his mouth,” Don said.

“Does screaming count? ‘Cause if I’m getting chased by something that sucks bones, I don’t think I can be totally silent,” Mikey said.

“Whatever works for ya’ bro’, just so long as ya’ stay out of its clutches,” Raph said.

Mikey gave him a dirty look. “Thanks for that advice.”

“We still have to figure out how to get by the police patrols,” Don said. “I think they’ll notice if four mutant turtles start running around a graveyard where a group of men have died.”

“Their presence is problematic in more ways than one,” Leo said. “If the Tenome targets an officer, we might not be able to draw it away. The police have to be removed from the equation.”

“A distraction perhaps?” Mr. Hidesato said. “Something to pull the police into the railyard?”

“Are you certain the Tenome isn’t hunting there?” Leo asked.

“He is in the cemetery,” Mr. Hidesato said with assurance. “It is the place with which he is most familiar and where he has already found prey. The railyard is full of movement and light, not at all a hospitable environment.”

“I don’t think a phone call to a tip line is gonna pull the cops out of the graveyard,” Raph said.

“Nor do I,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I think perhaps a group of homeless men could be induced through monetary means to run about the railyard crying for help. That should create enough confusion to keep officers away from the cemetery for some little time.”

“Only if the police could be led to believe the chaos was caused by the killer they’re after,” Don said.

“An emergency call to that effect purporting to be from a railyard worker,” Mr. Hidesato suggested. “That can easily be accomplished during the confusion from a phone on location.”

“Are ya’ volunteering to take that on?” Raph asked. “That’s a lot of participation from ya’.”

“Needs must,” Mr. Hidesato replied, ignoring the jibe.

“Where are you gonna get enough homeless men to do the job?” Mikey asked.

“There’s a homeless encampment in the wooded area between the railyard and the neighborhood on the other side of 36th,” Raph said. “It’s supposed to be a noise buffer zone. Cops probably already warned them to stay out of the cemetery, but I doubt they actually posted any officers to keep a watch on the encampment.”

“They’ll be suspicious of strangers,” Leo warned.

“Then I will have to become one of them,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It will not be the first time I have had to disguise myself as a man who is down on his luck.”
“We’ll also need to find something for Mikey to wear,” Leo said. “The items in your closet won’t work for him, we need something a bit more malodorous.”

Don grinned as he glanced at his youngest brother. “In other words, you have to smell like a juicy treat for the Tenome.”

“I really hate you guys right now,” Mikey said.

“I’ll head out after dark and borrow some stuff for Mikey to wear,” Raph offered. “I know just the guy to get it from. He hasn’t bathed in twenty years.”

“You are no longer on my Christmas list,” Mikey told him.

“I’m sure I’ll survive,” Raph said.

“There is something that I have been meaning to ask you,” Mr. Hidesato said. “You move freely around the city, albeit after dark, but how do you avoid being caught on camera?”

“That’s a Donatello question,” Leo said, looking at his brother with ill-concealed pride.

“It’s pretty simple actually,” Don said. “The cameras just don’t ‘see’ us. I wrote a computer program that makes us invisible to the cameras. That part was easy. The time consuming part was installing that on the various systems that control the twenty thousand city cameras, many of them privately owned.”

“He also added a feature on our shell cells that blocks cameras from taking our picture,” Leo said. “I won’t pretend to understand how it works, but the only thing the camera will see are white splotches and not us.”

“How did you learn to do all of these things, Donatello?” Mr. Hidesato asked.

Don shrugged, appearing self-conscious. “Master Splinter taught us to read and I found out that I enjoyed learning everything that I could.”

“Everything that he could about everything,” Raph added.

“Trying to get his face out of a book was almost impossible when we were growing up,” Mikey said.

“Now it’s trying to get his face out of a computer screen that’s hard,” Leo said, smiling.

“I am very fortunate to have found four extremely talented individuals to aid me in the recovery of the escaped creatures,” Mr. Hidesato said as he stood up. “If I have not thanked you before for everything you have done, allow me to say it now. I feel this overwhelming task could not be completed without all of your hard work.”

It was the first time he had vocalized his appreciation to the turtles as a group and it took them somewhat by surprise.

“We’re glad that we could help,” Don said, ever the mediator. “If we had found out about these creatures on our own, we would have tried to stop them. Without your guidance, we wouldn’t have been successful.”

“Somehow I have the feeling you would have found a way,” Mr. Hidesato said. He sighed. “It was a long night and I must rest. I have opened an account with a grocer who delivers; the
information is here on this notepad. Please feel free to order anything you need or that you believe your father might need."

With a polite bow, Mr. Hidesato exited the room. The turtles were silent for several minutes, each contemplating all of the things they had discussed.

"Is it just me, or does this whole thing feel like it’s getting weirder by the day?" Raph asked.

"Certainly more surreal," Don said. "I almost miss the days when all we did was battle the Shredder."

"That wasn’t any less weird, just a different kind of weird," Mikey said.

"We should go and see Master Splinter," Leo said. "We can take him some supplies and restock the kitchen here later."

"I second that motion," Raph said, standing up. "This shit about magical abilities and hiding stuff has my head swimming. I could use a little of Sensei’s wisdom."

Don grabbed the grocer’s information from the notepad and dashed upstairs to get his duffel bag. His brothers went to the kitchen to pack some food and Leo left a message on the white board letting Mr. Hidesato know where they were going.

They took the shell sleds home, arriving to find Master Splinter pacing the lair, an anxious look on his face.

"My sons!" Master Splinter cried out upon seeing them. "I very nearly went in search of you."

"Why? Is something wrong?" Leo asked quickly.

"That is for you to tell me," Master Splinter said. "Yesterday as I meditated, I sensed an incredible surge of power within one of the spiritual planes. Only magic can produce such a strong ripple and magic is at play in this mission you have undertaken. I grew worried."

"That surge you felt came from us," Don said.

"Come and sit at the kitchen table while we put away the food we brought," Leo suggested. "We can explain all that’s happened."

Leo and Don sat at the table with their father while Raph stored the food items and Mikey began preparing lunch. Between the four brothers they explained all that had occurred since Leo and Mikey had visited two days earlier.

"Such enormous power," Master Splinter murmured once the tale was told. "I have always known that together, the four of you were quite special. These abilities you are acquiring gives one pause to think."

"We’re sorry you were worried, Father. You could have called us on your shell cell to set your mind at ease," Leo said.

"I have been trying not to hover," Master Splinter said. "On television they refer to those who do as ‘helicopter parents’. You are all quite old enough to be considered adults." He sighed. "Letting go is harder than I imagined it would be."
“In all fairness, you have more reason to worry than most parents,” Don said.

“Yeah, Sensei,” Mikey said, nodding in agreement. “Raph gets in a lot of trouble.”

Raph reached out and smacked his younger brother on the back of his head. “Goof ball.” He turned his attention back to his father. “What do ya’ think about all this, Master Splinter? I mean, one minute Mr. H is guarding secrets like his life depends on it and the next he’s dishing out compliments like there ain’t no bottom in the bowl.”

“I cannot give you a definitive read on someone I have never met, Raphael,” Master Splinter said. “From what you have told me, he may very well feel as though his life does depend on his ability to keep things to himself. Look at our own lives as a comparison. The secrecy of our existence has been all that has kept us alive. I do not know that secret societies are necessarily a good thing, but the reasoning for preventing the world from knowing that yokai exist is a valid one.”

“If the world knew that there was such a thing as warders, then they would also know why these hunters came into being,” Don said. “Even if only a small percentage of people believed that what they purport to do isn’t fake, that would be altogether too many. Again, it’s what I said about Tulpa. If you believe in it, you bring it to life.”

Master Splinter leaned forward in his chair. “My primary concern at the moment has less to do with the power you have begun to access than with the unwanted attention that power may bring to you. Mr. Hidesato’s commitments align with yours, so his knowledge of your existence does not form a threat. I am actually pleased at knowing that he is able to keep things to himself.”

“That’s one of the reasons we asked April to work towards becoming a warder,” Leo said. “We need to put a human face on our activities.”

“Miss O’Neil is skillful in many ways, but even she may not be able to hold the other warder clans at bay if your powers continue to draw attention,” Master Splinter said. “However, I do not wish for you to avoid using your newfound gifts if doing so will save lives, including your own.”

“It’s a regular catch-22,” Raph said. “Ya’ know how much I hate stuff like this. Give me a straight forward fight any day. This is too much like politics.”

“Then I would suggest you do not worry about any possible repercussions from employing your abilities to their fullest,” Master Splinter said. “Be circumspect when possible, but do not second guess yourselves when danger is present.”

“I suppose as long as we’re getting the job done, the Council has no room to complain,” Don said.

Raph began distributing place settings preparatory to their meal. “Unless we ain’t doing the job fast enough. Sounds like they’re already bitching about that.” He glanced up at his father. “Pardon my French.”

Master Splinter lifted a finger, drawing his son’s attention. “Mr. Hidesato is your liaison with the High Council. It is his job to hold them at bay. Focus on your own task and do not rush lest you become careless. In a city of this size, one capture at a time is all that can reasonably be expected.”

“Even if we could go after two or more at once, we only have the one wax tool,” Leo said.

“Maybe Mr. H should tell the Council to send us a couple more of those,” Raph said. “It’d be better than trying to ship over a bunch of guys who don’t know nothing about this city.”
“I’ll suggest that to him,” Leo said.

Mikey plunked down a large serving bowl filled with spaghetti and meat sauce. “Forget the yokai talk, it’s time to eat.”

Though they didn’t fully accede to Mikey’s wishes, the family did enjoy the food. Master Splinter had each of his sons in turn describe their individual gifts, what it was that had activated them, and how it had felt when their power was at its fullest.

After they had eaten and cleaned up, the brothers followed Master Splinter to the dojo. They sat in a semi-circle around their Sensei as he spoke of the importance of strengthening their spiritual center. It was one of the lessons that went along with their martial arts training and seemed apropos to the situation they currently found themselves in.

Following that the group worked through physical exercises together. Once dismissed, the brothers set about doing their regular cleaning chores and then sat with their father to watch some television.

It was quality family bonding and helped to ease some of the guilt the turtles felt at leaving Master Splinter alone so much of the time. Still they felt bad when the hour grew late and they had to leave.

“There is plenty of room in Mr. Hidesato’s house, Sensei,” Leo said. “We would love to have you stay there with us.”

He had extended the offer before, but again Master Splinter shook his head to negate the idea. “Two old men under one roof, both set in their ways, is not a good mix. That is especially so when each would be attempting to direct your actions. Such a thing would be the formula for an inevitable clash of wills. Better I remain here.”

“Try not to worry too much about us, okay Father?” Raph asked.

Master Splinter smiled. “I am a parent, Raphael. Worrying comes a naturally as breathing. If you want to set my mind at ease, phone home often.”

“We will Master Splinter,” Don promised.

“If you need anything, you can call us too,” Mikey said. “As the crow flies or the shell sled slides, we’re not that far away.”

“Thank you, Michelangelo,” Master Splinter said.

It was well past sunset when the turtles left the lair. On their way back to headquarters, Raphael took them on a detour so that he could acquire the clothing Mikey would wear in his guise as bait.

To say that the items smelled was an understatement, even to mutants who had grown up in the sewers. Mr. Hidesato was in the kitchen when they arrived, and he found a large plastic bag for the clothes so that they wouldn’t stink up the house.

While they were at the lair, Donatello had placed a grocery order and it had been delivered. Mr. Hidesato was in the middle of preparing dinner when the brothers returned, and Mikey pitched in to help him.

“Ya’ notice how much Mikey seems to enjoy this whole domestic stuff?” Raph asked,
walking into the office with Don.

“He enjoys the cooking,” Don said. “The cleaning, not so much.”

Raph grinned. “Don’t ya’ ever tell him this, but the way he cooks, I’d be happy to do all the cleaning.”

“We’re always best at the things we enjoy,” Don said.

“Mikey certainly enjoys eating,” Raph replied with a laugh. He dropped a kiss on Don’s shoulder. “Ya’ want to know what I enjoy?”

“Letch,” Don said. “I already know the answer to that.”

Though the food was quite good, dinner was a quiet affair. The anticipation of the hunt, especially for a yokai as dangerous as the Tenome, had a distinct effect on the atmosphere.

Donatello had learned that the time of death for each of the victims had been narrowed down to between eleven and one in the morning. That knowledge helped the group determine when they would leave for the cemetery.

The brothers waited at the back gate as Mr. Hidesato changed into his disguise and then drove around to pick them up. When he arrived, he was behind the wheel of a nondescript white panel van.

“This will draw much less attention than the Rolls,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Ya’ think?” Raph asked rhetorically.

Leo tossed the bag of clothes into the back before taking a seat. “Even wrapped in plastic those things stink.”

“Yep,” Raph agreed. “Bad enough so the Tenome can follow Mikey in the dark.”

“While everything else runs the other way,” Don quipped.

“You guys are gonna owe me when this is over,” Mikey said.

When they reached the railyard, Mr. Hidesato parked the van near a warehouse just beyond the homeless encampment. He had first driven past the area twice so that they could all check for a police presence.

Piling out of the van, they huddled together for last minute instructions.

“We’ll have no problem getting into the cemetery without being seen,” Leo told Mr. Hidesato. “After we’re in position, we’ll remain stationary until we receive your call. That’s how we’ll know you’ve successfully pulled the police stakeout away.”

“There is a fog rolling in,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It will diminish visibility for you, but will not affect the Tenome. Please be careful. No yokai should be underestimated, but this one in particular is quite dangerous. A single touch can be deadly.”

“Peachy,” Raph muttered as Mr. Hidesato handed the trap coin and wax tool over to Leo.

The turtles watched as Mr. Hidesato started across the railyard, moving towards the trees where the homeless encampment was situated. For an older man, he was both swift and careful,
avoiding well-lit areas. Soon he was out of sight.

“Time to move,” Leo said.

“Here.” Raph shoved the bag of clothes into Mikey’s hands. “This is your load to carry.”

Mikey held the bag by its edge, keeping it away from his body. “I know ninjas have to master the art of disguise, but for the record, can I just say this stinks? In more ways than one.”

To reach the cemetery the turtles had to cross the railyard. They used what cover there was to avoid being spotted by security guards and night shift operators. Getting across 36th Street was more time consuming, since they had to wait for a moment that was free of traffic, but they soon made it to the cemetery grounds.

Raph picked the lock on the door to the mausoleum they had hidden near the night before and the brothers went inside. Don stationed himself at the entrance so that he could monitor police activity.

“Go ahead and pull on those clothes, Mikey,” Leo instructed. “You should be ready to go as soon as the police do.”

Mikey made a face at him and dumped the clothing out of the bag. Their pungent aroma rose up to almost immediately become pervasive inside the small space.

“This stuff smells awful!” Mikey complained.

“If ya’ run fast enough, the smell won’t catch up to ya’,” Raph told him.

“That’s very helpful,” Mikey said, lifting a jacket from the pile. He managed to push his arms into the sleeves but when he flexed, some of the seams tore. “I can barely move in this.”

“Tie it around your waist,” Leo said. “Forget the pants. The jacket’s scent is strong enough to do the job.”

“If Mr. Hidesato is right and the Tenome is fast, your movements really don’t need to be restricted in any way,” Don said.

Mikey dutifully tied the jacket around his waist. “So what’s the plan? It’s gotta be more than me running through the cemetery. How do we get the trap coin on its face when we have to avoid its hands?”

As Don handed out their headsets, Leo said, “While you’re luring the Tenome out, Mikey, the rest of us will post up in the trees. You’ll need to run a varying pattern route that leads the creature past us. The first one to get a good shot at it will leap on its back and drive it to the ground. Keep your comm units open. We don’t know how strong it is or how long we can keep it down.”

“So if you’re the one who pounces, ya’ can slap the coin on its face,” Raph said. “If it’s Don or me, we’ll yell as we jump so ya’ can get your ass over to us.”

“When one of us has it pinned, everyone else needs to move quickly to help keep it that way,” Leo said. “At least until we can deploy the trap coin. And I’m sure I don’t need to remind you guys to stay away from its hands.”

Raph rolled his eyes but refrained from making the snide comeback that was on the tip of his tongue. He knew Leo’s leader mode well enough to understand that his brother was verbally ticking
off a checklist and wasn’t eluding to their competency with his reminder.

After choosing a wooded area near where the bodies had been found, all four of the brothers ascended into the trees. It wasn’t long before they saw activity on the paths as two uniformed officers on motorcycles sped past their hiding places. A few minutes later Mr. Hidesato called to say the police were streaming out of the graveyard.

“Go time, Mikey,” Leo called out.

Jumping down from his hiding spot, Mikey strode off at a fast walk, the jacket flapping as he moved. Turtles in general have a keen sense of smell, and the ninja variety were no different. Even from his perch, Leonardo caught a whiff of Mikey’s jacket and knew the Tenome couldn’t miss it.

Another thing he could tell, just from the way Mikey was moving, was that his brother was tense. Even though the banter in the van had sounded light-hearted, it was actually just a cover for the tension all of them were feeling. The fog that had begun to descend didn’t help.

Leonardo mentally kicked himself for failing to ask if Mr. Hidesato knew how silently the Tenome could move. He had made the assumption that they would see the creature before it saw them, thus giving Mikey time to run and the rest of them time to get set. It was a tactical error.

“Mikey,” Leo whispered into his comm unit, “watch the symbols on your arm. The fog is getting thick and you might not see the Tenome coming.”

“I’m having a hard enough time keeping up with grave markers,” Mikey responded. “I’ve gotta keep to the same pattern bro’, otherwise I’m gonna trip over something.”

“Use your other senses too,” Leo said.

“Maybe you should have been the one doing this,” Mikey said. “You’re better at the whole blindfolded thing anyway. It’s not too late to trade pl . . . .”

The end of his sentence was cut off by a loud scream. It wasn’t Mikey’s.

“Ahhhh! Help! Help!”

A man plunged through the bushes to the right of the tree Leo was in. He was close enough for Leo to see that the man was dressed in ragged clothing and sported a scruffy beard. That Leo could also see the whites of his eyes was a good indication that they were wide with terror.

“No, no!” the man shouted. And then he tripped.

There was a flash of bare skin below Leo’s hiding place and he caught his first glimpse of the Tenome. It bore down on the fallen man, who began scooting back, one arm lifted to shield himself.

Leo sprang from his perch, landing on the ground just as the Tenome’s hand closed around his victim’s wrist.

The man’s high pitched wail of pain cut the air like a knife. Leo took one step towards him and then his entire body froze.

Somehow Leo was still moving though. His physical form remained immobile, but his spirit shot towards the grim tableau like a flash of lightening.

Leonardo’s psyche entered the man’s body through his mouth.
He could feel the man’s agony immediately. The pain was so intense that Leo pushed back, expanding his warder power outwards and encompassing the man’s body in a rush of pure energy.

A magical burst hit the Tenome with such force it shoved him off of his victim.

In the blink of an eye, Leo’s essence rushed back into his own body. He saw Mikey zip past the Tenome, his mouth open as he yelled something at the creature. Head still buzzing, Leo couldn’t hear the words, but Mikey’s action lured the Tenome away.

The man writhed on the ground, clutching at his arm. Leo realized that whatever poison the Tenome had injected into him was still traveling through the man’s system.

Without another thought, Leo drew one of his swords as he dashed towards the man. As soon as he saw the giant turtle coming at him, the man clutched at the grass with his uninjured hand and tried to pull himself away.

There was no time for second guesses. The affected appendage had already become flat up to the elbow as his bones dissolved. With a precise swing of his katana, Leonardo lopped off the man’s arm above that point.

The homeless man’s scream ended with a gurgle as he passed out. Sheathing his weapon, Leo dropped to his knees next to the man. Swiftly removing his mask, Leo tied it tightly around the man’s upper arm to form a tourniquet.

Grabbing the jacket sleeve that had been shorn off when he’d used his katana, Leo shook out the dead limb. It plopped out on the ground with a sickening sound akin to raw chicken hitting a cutting board. Leo randomly thought that it would be a while before he ate meat again.

He’d just started to wrap the stump of the man’s arm when Mr. Hidesato appeared, running through the fog.

“Go and help your brothers,” Mr. Hidesato urged, quickly kneeling next to Leo and taking the cloth from his hands.

Leo didn’t hesitate to turn over the first aid duties. Jumping to his feet, he began running towards him through the fog.

“Go and help your brothers,” Mr. Hidesato urged, quickly kneeling next to Leo and taking the cloth from his hands.

Leo didn’t hesitate to turn over the first aid duties. Jumping to his feet, he began running towards the sound of Mikey’s voice.

Michelangelo had burst upon the scene in time to see the glow of energy suffuse the homeless man’s body and then shoot out of him to drive the Tenome off. Then the power had lifted out of the man to fly back towards his oldest brother, who stood there completely immobile and helpless.

Whatever was happening to Leo, Mikey knew he had to keep the creature away from him. Dashing to within reaching distance of the creature, Mikey shouted, “Dinner’s served! Come and get it!”

Whether it was the shout or the cloying scent of his jacket that caught the Tenome’s attention, Mikey didn’t much care. The creature started for him and it was damn fast.

“Raph!” Mikey shouted into his comm unit. “Leo left his body and the creature is after me!”

Mikey knew he could probably access his power to blast the Tenome, but he didn’t know if he could do so fast enough. Even running full tilt, he was barely staying ahead of the thing. If Mikey focused in order to activate his chi, he could easily outrun the creature, but that would defeat the purpose of his being the bait.
So Mikey ran, hoping that Leo would snap out of it and that his other two brothers would come up with a new plan.

Raph heard Mikey’s warning and then saw his brother fly by with the Tenome giving chase. He knew right then he wouldn’t be able to time it so that he could jump down on the creature. The thing was too fast and the visibility was diminishing with every passing second as the fog grew thicker.

“Donny, get down here,” Raph said as he leaped out of the tree.

A second later Donatello appeared out of the fog. “Mikey’s sticking to the same route. I’ve got an idea!”

He was running before Raph had a chance to ask any questions. Following him, Raph concentrated on listening for Mikey’s progress and wondering what the shell had happened to Leo.

“Here!” Don called, darting behind a gravestone and gesturing to the one next to it. “Get behind that one!”

Raph followed his direction and then crouched down as Donatello was doing. He could hear Mikey running towards them. “Now what?”

Don pulled his bō and stretched it out on the grass towards his brother. “Grab the other end and focus your energy on the staff!”

Raph caught hold of his end of the staff just as Don began to glow. Grinding his back teeth together, Raph concentrated, feeling the adrenaline begin to surge through his system to activate his power.

Twin flashes of energy flowed across the wooden staff just as Mikey ran past his brother’s hiding places. In one smooth, simultaneous motion, Raph and Don stood up, the bō extended between them.

The Tenome slammed into the staff and the radiating energy threw it backwards. It hit the ground face up but before it could rise, Don whipped the bō around and mashed one end into the creature’s right palm, gouging into the eye.

“Oh no ya’ don’t!” Raph barked as the Tenome started to lift its other hand towards Don. Stamping down on that arm, Raph yanked a sai from his belt and stabbed through the eye on the creature’s left hand to pin it to the ground.

Even with its hands immobilized, the Tenome struggled to free itself. The flesh on the palm of its hand began to tear as it tried to pull away from the sai and Raph was forced to put his entire weight on the creature’s arm.

Mikey ran over to them and flung himself across the Tenome’s legs to stop it from pushing its body across the grass.

“Ya’ gotta get the coin, Mikey!” Raph shouted.

“If I move, it’s gonna get loose!” Mikey yelled back.

Racing towards his brothers, Leo grabbed the trap coin from his belt. A gigantic bound brought him down next to the creature and he quickly slapped the coin down on the bridge of its nose.
“Get away from it now!” Leo ordered, leaping backwards.

Mikey rolled off of the creature as Raph back flipped away. Don lifted his staff and spun around, moving far from the Tenome.

The creature’s entire body began to vibrate and then both hands were jerked off the ground, the left one ripping as it was forcibly yanked off the sai. Both palms were drawn up to the Tenome’s face to smack down atop the spot where its eyes should have been.

As soon as the eyes were hidden, the Tenome’s body began to shrivel as though its bones were being drawn out of its skin. When its entire form had flattened against the ground, it was pulled into the trap coin.

Leo tossed the wax tool to Mikey, intent on getting back to the man whose arm he’d been forced to amputate. He’d only gone a few steps when Mr. Hidesato emerged from the fog.

“Have you captured it?” Mr. Hidesato asked.

“Yes,” Leo answered shortly. “The man?”

“I carried him to the railyard and drew the attention of the police,” Mr. Hidesato said. “When they rushed to his aid I managed to evade them. We should leave before they notice the van or cordon off the area.”

“One Tenome waxed and sealed,” Mikey said, holding up the trap coin before passing it over to Mr. Hidesato.

“Let’s book,” Raph said, pulling his sai out of the dirt. “I’ve had enough of this fog.”

Mikey stripped off the jacket he was wearing and tossed it far away from him. “I’ve had enough of this stink. You guys are totally scrubbing my shell when we get back to HQ.”

Placing a hand over his nostrils, Don said, “That’ll have to be after we hose you off outside.”

“Maybe we should tie him down to the roof rack for the ride back,” Raph said.

“How about I rub my hands on your face instead?” Mikey asked, moving threateningly towards his brother.

“Oh shell no,” Raph yelped, taking off at a dead run.

Don started to smile at his brother’s antics, but then he saw the expression on Leo’s face.

Whatever had just happened to him, it had disturbed Leo deeply. The first chance he got, Don meant to encourage his brother to talk to him about it. Whether Leo wanted to or not.

End Tenome

Chapter End Notes
Night of the Reiki

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The TMNT are not mine. No money being made.
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Chapter Notes

Preview art commissioned from the amazingly talented AlessandraDC
Just as he’d suspected, Donatello found his oldest brother in the basement. Leonardo was sitting in seiza on the floor, his sword cleaning kit arranged neatly next to him so it was within easy reach.
Don crossed the room and kneeled across from his brother, mimicking Leo’s formal seated position. He watched as Leo cleaned his katana, each movement both reverent and ritualistic.

For Leo, this activity was as much about clearing his mind as it was about cleaning his swords. The longer it took, the more cluttered Leo’s thoughts were.

It had taken only one quick glance for Don to see the blood on the cloth that lay to one side of Leo, tossed where it was beyond the range of his peripheral vision.

“Mike and Raph?” Leo asked without looking up.

“In the big tub together,” Don said. “Raph said the only way the stink is coming off of Mikey is if he helps scrub it off. Mikey said ‘please leave me some skin’.”

Leo chuckled. “Next time we need someone to be bait, let’s make sure it’s not Mike. He’s earned a reprieve.”

“So have you,” Don said. He waited a couple of seconds and when Leo didn’t reply, he went on. “What happened to you tonight? Mikey told us about the part he saw, but there was more to it than you leaving your body to protect a homeless man.”

It was a statement, since the question had already been asked. Leo contemplated the events of the night as he put his thoughts into order.

Then without skipping any detail, he gave a succinct account of what he’d had to do to save the homeless man’s life. When he reached the point where he’d cut off the infected portion of the man’s arm, Don glanced at the bloody cloth, before quickly returning his gaze to Leo’s face.

By the time he finished speaking, Leo deemed his sword clean enough and reattached the saya. The rod from a twenty-two caliber rifle cleaning kit that Leo used to wipe out the inside of his sheaths was nearby, the slightly pinkish color on the mop an indication that they had already been thoroughly cleansed.

Leo slid his katana into its sheath and then looked up at Don. He seemed tired.

“You need to sleep,” Don told him.

With a deep sigh, Leo said, “Don’t we all?”

Still he made no move to get up. “Are you afraid to dream again?” Don asked.

With a grimace, Leo answered honestly. “Yes.”

Don reached for his hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. Before they had become intimate, before they had all connected physically, Leonardo would not have been so forthcoming with his feelings. Maintaining a barrier was much harder to do with someone who frequently saw you at your most vulnerable. It was just one of many advantages their intimacy had provided them.

“You saved that man’s life,” Don said.

“I crippled him,” Leo said.

“No,” Don said sharply. Leo eyes widened in surprise and Don said again, this time softly, “No. You are not allowed to see it that way. I won’t let you. For once, Leo, you are going to accept the victory, imperfect as it is. That’s life. If you hadn’t been there, he would have died. If
you hadn’t acted, he would have died. That’s the truth in a nutshell. Dwelling on any other aspect is a fruitless exercise that could only be explained by some innate need of yours to torture yourself.”

“Am I being selfish then?” Leo asked, with a little upturn at the corners of his mouth.

“Let’s call it an indulgence and move on,” Don said, a touch of humor in his voice. “Preferably up to bed.”

He emphasized his point by standing up and pulling Leo along with him.

“You’ll give me a few minutes to put my things away?” Leo asked, this time offering a real smile.

“I’ll help you,” Don said. “I’ll help with the dreams too. You might have to endure them, but you don’t have to feel alone, even in your sleep. Just cling to the sensation of my touch, to the knowledge that all of us are surrounding you with our love. That’s your greatest weapon against the darkness.”

“That’s our greatest weapon against everything,” Leo emphasized, pulling Don into his arms and enjoying a kiss before starting to do anything else.

While Leo put the cleaning supplies back into the storage box, Don took the soiled cleaning cloth and mop to the furnace and tossed them inside. With the box back on a shelf in Don’s new work space, they went upstairs and to their shared bedroom.

Raph and Mikey were already in bed, but neither were asleep. Raph glanced at his brother’s faces and then lifted the blanket invitingly. Leo and Don removed their gear and weapons before crawling into bed. After a little shifting around, the group managed to cocoon Leo at their center and they all went to sleep.

The dream, when it came, took shape against a sunny backdrop. Leo found himself standing on some railway tracks, out in the open and surrounded by emergency services personnel. Behind him were three railcars still on the tracks and one sitting crossways on them. Down an incline were three other cars lying on their sides.

As he watched, a body was taken from one of the cars. Three others lay beneath tarps. The scene switched suddenly and this time Leo was farther ahead on the same rail line. Now it was dark and the cars that had derailed were lying across two tracks within a rock cut. On either side of him was the tall hill into which the cut had been made.

To his relief, Leo saw no indications that anyone had died. He’d barely processed that fact when once again, the dream shifted.

Leonardo was now riding inside a train car. It was nighttime and the passenger car was full. As the car took a curve, Leo looked out of the window and saw the rock cut looming up ahead.

They were just moving into the cut when the train car began to shake violently. There was the sound of metallic rattling and then the back end of the railcar kicked into the air, throwing passengers out of their seats.

Leo awoke with a jolt, the sounds of screaming still ringing in his ears.

Though he tended to sleep heavily when he did sleep, the movement woke Donatello, who had curled himself against his older brother’s side.
“Dream?” Don whispered.

“Yes,” Leo said, taking a deep breath and releasing it slowly. “I was on a train.” He glanced over at Raph and Mikey, who were still sleeping soundly. “I don’t want to wake them.”

“It will keep until morning,” Don said as he began rubbing gentle circles over Leo’s chest. “Can you go back to sleep?”

“It’s always been one dream a night,” Leo said.

“Nothing to anticipate,” Don said, filling in the inference. “Easier to relax now.”

Leo’s eyes were already closing. “Love you.”

“I love you too,” Don said, continuing to caress Leo’s chest until his brother was asleep again.

When morning rolled around, three brothers woke to find that as usual, the eldest was already out of bed. He hadn’t left the room though, as they discovered upon rising.

Leo was at the desk by the window, the curtain open just enough to provide light for him to write by. His pen was skimming across the pages of his journal and he didn’t pause in his writing until Raph leaned over his shoulder.

“Damn, what time did ya’ get up?” Raph asked, seeing that a number of pages had already been filled.

“A couple of hours ago,” Leo said. “I decided I needed to get caught up in this journal before so much had happened that the task became daunting.”

“Are ya’ writing just about the captures, or are ya’ including everything?” Raph asked, giving Leo a shrewd look.

Mikey and Don headed off to opposite bathrooms and Leo leaned back in his chair, throwing one arm over the top rail.

“Everything,” Leo answered as Raph propped a hip against the desk. “As much detail about my dreams as I can remember, when they occurred, and all manifestations of my warder magic in any other form.”

“Like jumping out of your body and into that man last night?” Raph frowned. “Did ya’ tell Don exactly what happened?”

“You know I did,” Leo said. “That’s why you made sure he came downstairs alone.”

Raph punched his shoulder lightly. “Do I know ya’ or what?”

Leo grinned. “You know me and I know you. When Don and Mikey get back here, I’ll tell all of you about it and about the latest dream. It was an odd one.”

“Pfft,” Raph responded, clearly feeling that Leo had just stated the obvious. “Ain’t they all?”

It was a rhetorical question so Leo didn’t answer. Right then Mikey came bouncing into the room and threw his arms around Leo’s shoulders.

“Bestest big brother of mine,” Mikey said enthusiastically, “you’re gonna let me read your
journal, right?”

Raph snorted. “If he doesn’t, you’ll swipe it and read it anyway.”

“There’s not really anything in here I haven’t already told you guys about,” Leo answered. “So yes, you can read it, but you have to wait until I’m not actually writing in it.”

Donatello walked into the room, his mask in one hand as he stretched. He started tying it into place and said, “Are we going to spar today? I’m feeling stiff.”

Rushing over to him, Mikey placed the back of his hand against Don’s forehead. “Are you sick? Donatello asking to practice? Don’t you have something, I don’t know, geeky to work on instead?”

Grabbing his thumb, Don twisted it down and behind Mikey’s shell, making his younger brother yelp. “Yes I do,” he said. “I always do. That doesn’t mean I keep busy with projects as a way to shirk practice.”

“Uncle!” Mikey chirped, laughing when Don released him. “I know. You just lose track of time.”

“It’s nice outside,” Leo said. “We’ll practice in the garden.”

“After Leo tells us about last night,” Raph said firmly.

Leo dutifully ran through his experience at the graveyard. It was still painful to remember, but seeing the sympathy and understanding in his brother’s faces helped. When he was finished, Leo segued into the dream he’d had, careful not to skimp on details because he knew that even the smallest one could be useful.

“Were those three different events or were you seeing the same one from different angles?” Don asked.

“I don’t know,” Leo said, frowning. “That’s the annoying thing about these prophetic dreams, I’m always left trying to interpret what I’ve been shown.”

“Sounds like a news reel to me,” Mikey said. He was in the middle of the room doing push-ups. He paused to look at his brothers. “You know, like in the old days when just before the movie they’d play one of those news reels that showed important events.”

“Everything sounds like a movie or comic book to ya’,” Raph said.

Don snapped his fingers. “You know, Mikey might be onto something. The first two scenes you witnessed could have been after separate events while the third might be the one you’re supposed to prevent.”

“Come to think of it, the vegetation was brown and there were no leaves on the trees during the first scene, like it happened in winter,” Leo said, his eyes distant as he recalled his dream. “In the second one everything was green. What little I saw of the scenery during the third one looked like it does now, with the leaves just changing color.”

“If you were being shown past events, then I should be able to find mentions of them on the internet,” Don said as he rubbed his chin. “Especially since in one of them people died.”

“That’d tell us where the shit went down,” Raph said. “Ya’ said it was all on the same rail
Leo shook his head. "I didn’t see any signs, I just knew. During the second and third scenarios I could tell that the rock cut was the same."

Mikey jumped up from the floor. "Maybe we could talk about this some more while we’re having breakfast? I'm starving!"

"Sure," Raph said, walking over and flinging an arm around Mikey’s neck. "Since you’re volunteering to cook, what are ya’ making for us?"

"Eggs over easy?" Mikey asked, though his tone was less than confident.

"That means scrambled eggs," Raph said, pulling Mikey out the door.

There was a note in the kitchen informing them that Mr. Hidesato had gone to his office. In it he told them he might be late in returning and left the phone number where he could be reached.

"Guess that means he’s not carrying his shell cell," Mikey said, opening the refrigerator and getting out a carton of eggs.

"I’m thinking he’s allergic to it," Raph said.

Don started brewing coffee and then filled the tea pot. As he set it on the stove, Leo came in with the newspaper. He sat at the kitchen table next to Raph and passed the sports section over to him, then set the business section aside for Don and the travel section on the table for Mikey.

"Shit, I missed last night’s game," Raph said, skimming the front of the sports page. He looked up. "I've been missing a lot of them lately. Hell, I'm losing track of the days of the week 'cause I haven’t been catching games with Casey."

"There’s a game Thursday night," Don said as he sat down. He blew on his coffee, took a sip, and then set the cup on the table. "We could watch it here and have Casey over."

"That only works if we’re gonna be here," Raph said with a scowl. "Turtle luck’s gonna have us hunting some creature in a muddy swamp or something."

Folding his paper, Leo put it down and said, "Go ahead and plan to watch that game, Raph. Invite Casey. If we don’t maintain some normalcy in our lives, this job we’ve taken on will eat us alive."

"That means I can set up a gaming system in the media room," Mikey said as he put condiments on the table.

"You were going to do that anyway," Don said.

Raph chuckled. "No, Donny, you’re gonna do it. Ain’t ya’ figured out Mikey’s code yet?"

The teapot began to sing and Leo got up, laughing as he crossed the kitchen. This was the kind of family time he enjoyed, where they could sit together talking, teasing, and laughing. The only thing missing was Master Splinter. Leo wished he could find a way to convince their father to join them, but he had a feeling that Master Splinter’s reluctance was based on something other than just his being more comfortable in the lair.

After they had breakfasted, the turtles went into the garden and spent several hours practicing
their martial arts and sparring. Working out in the open air and sunshine had a positive effect on all four of them, dispelling the gloom from the previous evening.

Once they were back inside, Leo set to work cleaning the kitchen, telling his brothers he’d pop a family sized frozen meal into the oven for their lunch. It was one of the few things they trusted him to do in the kitchen.

Don took Raph and Mikey into the office with him. He intended to research train accidents and wanted his brothers to start scanning and cataloging journals again. Still stinging over not being able to find the journal he was sure Mr. Hidesato had taken, Raph jumped into the task with enthusiasm.

Mikey worked alongside him for a while and then vanished. It was only after he’d finished scanning the journals on the table next to him that Raph noticed that Mikey hadn’t brought him any new ones.

Stepping out of the war room, Raph saw Mikey seated at the desk working on his journal.

“What the hell are ya’ doing?” Raph demanded, walking over to his brother. “We’re supposed to be scanning journals into Don’s computer program.”

“An idea hit me and I couldn’t wait,” Mikey said, holding up his open journal for Raph to see. On the facing pages Mikey had drawn a comic strip.

Taking the journal out of Mikey’s hands, Raph gave the comic the once over and then nodded. “Not bad. What made ya’ think to chronicle our yokai hunting adventures like this?”

“We’re telling a story, aren’t we?” Mikey asked, accepting the journal back from his brother. “I got to looking at all those words in the old journals, all the different handwriting styles and Japanese characters and thought ‘hey, a picture’s worth a thousand words’. Not just pictures of the creatures, but you know, pictures of how to track and trap them.”

“Where’s Leo?” Don asked, darting out of the war room with an excited look on his face. “I know where his dream took place.”

“Kitchen,” Raph said and then watched Don zip past him and out of the room.

“I guess if we want to know what’s going on, we’d better follow him,” Mikey said.

They caught up to him in the dining room, where Leo was laying out the table preparatory to lunch.

“Your dream was relaying past events,” Don said as his other two brothers arrived. “Both of the accidents happened in two thousand thirteen and both occurred near the Spuyten Duyvil station in the Bronx.”

Leo finished setting out forks and straightened up. “Is there a rock cut near there?”

Don nodded. “It’s about ten miles from Grand Central. The first accident was to a freight train and happened in July. No one was hurt. The second was to a passenger train and happened in December. Four people were killed and sixty-one injured.”

“Wait,” Raph said, frowning. “This stuff happened years ago. Why is Leo dreaming about it now?”
“Yeah,” Mikey echoed. “The creatures weren’t running around loose back then.”

A timer beeped and Leo said, “Hold that thought. Lunch is ready.”

While he took the meal out of the oven, his brothers brought drinks to the table. Along with the casserole he’d heated, Leo had made a large garden salad.

The food was passed around and they began to eat, each lost in thought. Finally Don looked up and said, “Maybe it’s not that the yokai had anything to do with these accidents, but that something about these accidents drew a yokai to that site.”

“Accidents happen in the city every day,” Raph said. “Many times a day.”

“But people don’t always die in them,” Mikey said. “I mean, not all the time and not four at a time. In comics there’s sometimes lingering spirits, especially ones that die a violent death. Croaking during a train accident is a pretty violent way to die, don’t you think?”

“If I follow your train of thought,” Leo said, “no pun intended, the residual echo of a tragic event drew one of our yokai to this site.”

“Gotta be.” Mikey shrugged. “I mean, I’m not saying there’s actually like, ghosts on the rails. I’m saying that places can pick up vibes from tragedy. Maybe there’s a creature that’s drawn to stuff like that.”

“There are probably a lot of them,” Don said dryly.

“We ain’t gonna figure it out by sitting around here talking it to death,” Raph said. “Leo’s dream gave us a location, so we should go check it out.”

Those lines run twenty-four hours a day,” Don said.

“Your point being?” Raph asked.

“Didn’t really have one,” Don told him. “I was just mentioning a fact.”

“We could hitch a ride on top of a train to get out there and back,” Mikey suggested.

“I’d rather that we rely on our own methods of transportation,” Leo said. He turned to Donatello. “Didn’t you say you were going to build new shell cycles for all of us?”

“I did and I have,” Don said. “I put the finishing touches on them a few days before April called to ask us to come over here.”

“Seems like a good time for a test run,” Raph said.

“We’ll swing by the lair later to pick them up,” Leo said.

“Maybe make dinner here and take it with us?” Mikey asked. “Master Splinter would like that.”

“He’d probably worry less if he saw us more,” Raph said, remembering how they’d found their father pacing the day before.

“Good,” Mikey said, rubbing his hands together. “That gives me some free time to watch TV.”
“Wrong,” Don said. “There are still journals to be scanned and a partition to build in the tunnel. Pick one.”

“I’ll scan,” Mikey said quickly. “I should stay clean so that I can make dinner later.”

“Ya’ can do lunch cleanup too,” Raph said, pushing away from the table. Waving a hand at Don and Leo, he added, “Come on. Don’t see why we can’t get this job done in a couple of hours.”

Mikey was starting to pack their dinner into a picnic basket when his brothers came up from the basement a few hours later. They had finished partitioning off a section of the tunnel and had moved the excess storage items into the new room so that the dojo was no longer cluttered.

After getting cleaned up, Leo left a note for Mr. Hidesato informing him of their plans. He only wrote that they were on a scouting expedition so that the man would not be worried.

Leaving the note stuck to the refrigerator door, Leo joined his brothers and they rode their shell sleds to the lair.

Master Splinter was seated in his chair watching a news broadcast when his sons entered. They all greeted him and then separated; Mikey to get things ready for dinner, Don and Raph to check over the shell cycles. Leo joined his father, sitting on the couch and catching up on the latest city happenings until there was a commercial break.

“Tell me what is lurking at the back of your mind, my son,” Master Splinter said as he lowered the volume on the television. “Something is bothering you.”

“It is not so much that any one thing is bothering me as it is that I have concerns,” Leo replied. “A number of them. I know that what we are doing is saving lives and that we are better suited to this job than any law enforcement agency would be, but at what cost to us?”

“Your newly acquired gifts?” Master Splinter asked.

“Not just that, but they do worry me,” Leo said. “I feel as though they are not meant to be retained for any length of time. I have no proof that they could be potentially harmful, but that kind of power . . . could it burn us out? When Donny uses his, he’s drained for hours. Mikey’s gift is a powerful weapon, but it hurts him almost as much as whatever he’s aiming it at. Raph gains incredible strength but along with that comes a false sense of invincibility, not to mention how overhyped he is afterwards.”

When he paused, his father looked at him wisely. “And you, Leonardo?”

“To be successful, we need my prophetic dreams,” Leo said. “I’ve been able to leave my body to possess others, but it costs me and leaves my physical form vulnerable.”

“Have you and your brothers discussed this?” Master Splinter asked.

“A little.” Leo sighed. “Not enough. I don’t want them to worry over how disoriented I feel after using my gifts. Or . . . .”

He stopped and glanced back as though to make certain his brothers were not within earshot.

“Go on, Leonardo,” Master Splinter said. “The choice as to whether or not you should tell your brothers is your own, but I do believe you need to tell someone.”

Leo’s brow was furrowed, as though he was thinking deeply about something. “I feel like
sometimes I’m losing my sense of self,” he finally said. “I should be controlling these powers rather than the other way around.”

“Your brothers all seem to have dominion over their gifts,” Master Splinter said. “They choose when to access their power. You have no control over when your dreams occur.”

“Or even if they will,” Leo said. “I worry too that we’ll start to become immune to the suffering these creatures are causing, or that we’re causing in our pursuit of them.”

“The way the other warder clans have become? It is why Mr. Hidesato does not want them involved in these captures, is it not?” Master Splinter asked.

“It’s what he’s told us,” Leo answered. “We can all tell he is keeping things from us, but we’ve no way of knowing if they pertain to what we are doing or not. It infuriates Raphael.”

“Your brother does not care for subterfuge in any of its forms,” Master Splinter said. “Trickery and deception are an anathema to him, though they are the ninja way.”

Leo had to smile. “Raph does have a preference for the straight forward approach. The smile faded. “What would you advise me, Father?”

Master Splinter studied him for a moment and then asked, “Do you feel as though someone has suffered at your hands?”

The pained expression that crossed Leo’s face was almost enough of an answer in itself. Leo responded anyway, telling his father how he had saved the homeless man’s life but had left him without an arm.

“It is good to know that you have shared this with your brothers,” Master Splinter said once Leo had finished speaking. “That you question your actions proves that you have not become callous. We should spend time reviewing our choices because that is what keeps us grounded.

“If you do what you think is right or what will save lives, if you do your best in a bad situation, then that is all you can ask of yourself. Should you feel you could have done better, then learn from your experience rather than dwelling on what you cannot change. Guilt in small portions is a reminder that flaws are inherent to our existence. Self-reproach in large doses is crippling and in some measure egoistical.”

“That’s pretty much what Don told me last night,” Leo said, the humor returning to his tone.

“Donatello is wise beyond his years. He makes me quite proud,” Master Splinter said with a smile. “You all make me proud. My advice to you, Leonardo, is to keep your brothers close. Support them and allow them to support you. None of you will suffer from loss of self if you lean on one another and remain vigilant.”

“Food’s ready!” Mikey sang out. “Come and get it before the grease sets!”

Leo chuckled as he and his father stood up. “Depend on Mikey to keep us focused on the things he considers important.”

Mikey was beaming at his family when they arrived at the table. “I heard that on an old western,” he said.

“I hope that doesn’t mean these pork chops are swimming in grease,” Raph said as he took his seat.
“Perish the thought,” Mikey scolded. “The only thing they’re swimming in is flavor.”

Once dinner and the cleanup was finished, the brothers left the lair on their shell cycles, accompanied by their father’s admonition that they be careful. By using a route that would keep them off of high traffic roads they reached their destination in a little over thirty minutes.

At a signal from Donatello, the brothers pulled off on a side road marked as accessible to railway maintenance crews only.

“We’ll have to survey the scene from atop the hill overlooking the tracks,” Don said, pointing at the hill. “There isn’t a road alongside the track itself. If we want to look around inside the cut, we’ll have to be off our shell cycles.”

“Let’s get a bird’s eye view of the scene first,” Leo said. “As you said earlier, trains will be going by all night. If we don’t find any clues up there, we’ll chance searching at ground level.”

Raph jumped off his bike and picked the lock on the gate, opening it so that they could all drive through. Mikey closed it behind them, draping the chain and padlock in a way that made it appear as though the gate was still locked.

A paved road led to a maintenance shed, but the brothers went off road in the opposite direction, maneuvering their shell cycles through stands of trees until they were at the peak of the hill. They parked their bikes and dismounted to walk to the edge where it overlooked the rail line as it ran between the cut.

The rail line below appeared undisturbed. Though there was no lighting inside the narrow cut that divided the hill, lights from the nearby Harlem River Ship Canal kept the area from lying in complete darkness.

“Does it look familiar?” Don asked, looking at Leo. “Was this the place in your dream?”

Leo nodded, his eyes fixed on the rails. “This is the spot.”

Returning to his bike, Don unstrapped his duffel from the back and dropped it on the ground. Underneath it sat a cylindrical object, and when he picked it up, his brothers recognized it as his flying tech pack.

Sliding it onto his shell, Don buckled it tightly and pressed a button to extend the wings. “I made some modifications and this seemed a good opportunity to test them out. I can make a pass over the rail line for a mile in either direction to look for anything that’s out of place.”

“That’s a good . . . .” Leo began to say.

Before he could finish there was a rumble from the hill opposite them. Small rocks and pebbles escaped the metal mesh that was meant to keep debris off the tracks.

It stopped almost as quickly as it started, leaving the brothers to stare at one another.

“Think that was a one-time thing?” Raph asked.

Almost as if to answer him, the other hill began to shake, the rumble rising to a crashing crescendo as uprooted trees fell into the cut along with a few fair sized boulders.

“Shit!” Raph exclaimed. “That ain’t good.”
“You don’t think there are any trains nearby, do you?” Mikey asked.

Somewhere in the distance a train’s horn sounded. Wide eyed, the brothers looked at each other.

“That answer your question?” Raph asked rhetorically.

“We need to stop that train,” Leo said.

Don was already digging around in his duffel bag. “Mikey, take these emergency flares and ride out to where you see the train coming. Start dropping them on the track to give the engineer time to brake.”

“Got it,” Mikey said, grabbing the flares from Don and jumping onto his bike. Dirt flew from under his back wheels as he sped down the hill.

“The rest of us?” Raph asked.

“Get down there and see if we can’t clear the tracks,” Leo said.

Another rumble sounded, sending a cascade of debris onto the tracks.

“If that was natural, we would have felt it over here,” Don said.

“Yokai?” Raph asked.

Running to the edge of the hills, Don said, “I’ll do a fly over and see what’s on the other side. Maybe I can scare it off.”

“Be careful, Donny,” Leo warned. “If it is a creature, don’t engage it. We aren’t prepared.”

Giving him a thumbs up in acknowledgment, Don took off.

“Fastest way down is over the side,” Raph said.

Together he and Leo used the heavy gauge wire mesh to climb down the side of the hill. Don flew by overhead as he made a second pass over the opposite hill.

“I get the feeling he ain’t seeing anything,” Raph said.

“Maybe he and Mike should have traded places, since Mike’s the one who can make the invisible, visible,” Leo replied.

Raph snorted. “These things are bad enough when ya’ can see them.”

When they were within ten yards of the tracks both of them jumped the remaining distance to the ground. They once more heard the train’s horn, this time sounding closer, and then it blew again as though signaling a warning.

“Mike must have gotten their attention,” Leo said. “We don’t have much time.”

The pair grabbed opposite ends of a tree and between them managed to slide it off the rails and to the side of the tracks. Another tree was lying across some boulders and though they were able to remove that tree as well as one of the boulders, another of them was too heavy to move.

They could feel the vibrations of the train on the tracks. Leo and Raph looked at each other,
knowing there wasn’t anything else they could do.

“He’d better be able to stop them,” Raph said.

A whistle sounded from above them and they glanced up to see Donatello fly past, his body glowing with warder magic. He waved them towards the hill and rocketed towards the train, flares in hand.

“That’s our cue to get off the tracks,” Leo said.

Racing to the cliff face, they both leaped high, catching the wire mesh and starting to climb. The pair were halfway up when they heard the screeching of train wheels. Turning their heads, they saw a freight train coming their way, sparks flying from beneath its braking wheels.

It seemed to be coming in much too fast. Leo and Raph both held their breath, waiting to see if the train would stop before it collided with the debris on the tracks. The sound of the wheels grabbing at the tracks was loud in the cut, echoing off the hill around them and setting their teeth on edge. Then just short of the entrance to the cut, the train slowed and stopped.

Both Leo and Raph sighed in relief and returned to climbing. At the top they were greeted by Mikey.

“Wow, that was touch and go,” Mikey said when his brothers were back on terra firma. “I wasn’t sure they were going to pay attention to those flares. Donny started dropping them right in front of the engine.”

“Speaking of Donny, what the hell is he doing?” Raph asked.

They looked towards the opposite ridge and saw their brother flying low over the ground. He had his shell cell out and was pointing it down at an area he seemed to be searching. He was no longer glowing, so whatever danger he had sensed must have passed.

There was shouting from the direction of the train and the turtles saw the engineer and conductor running along the tracks, both carrying flashlights. One of the men was holding a radio into which he was speaking, no doubt telling rail line officials to cease all use of the blocked tracks.

The disturbance from the other side of the hill had completely stopped. Don continued to search though, his curiosity clearly piqued by something.

“Dammit Donny, get your ass back over here,” Raph muttered under his breath.

“The maintenance people are going to start showing up soon,” Mikey said.

“Thanks for stating the obvious,” Raph growled as he began waving his arms to get Don’s attention. “Leo, throw a rock or something at him.”

It wasn’t necessary as Don had seen him and was flying back to where his brothers waited. He landed and Leo helped him remove the tech pack.

“Did you see something?” Mikey asked.

At the same time, Raph said, “We’re about to have company and you’re over there sightseeing.”

“I was recording an anomaly,” Don said, quickly strapping the tech pack and his duffel bag
onto his shell cycle. “Want to talk about it here or leave before the rail line officials start to arrive?”

“I’d say leaving would be a good plan,” Leo said. “We’ll discuss this back at the house.”

They were nearing the gate when they began to hear the approaching sirens. Mikey had left it standing open after his mad dash to warn the train, so once they’d all driven through, he hopped off his bike to close it and snap on the padlock.

Back at HQ, the brothers walked their bikes around to the side of the house and left them parked there, where the tall hedges would hide them from sight. Entering through the kitchen, they headed for the office, discovering that Mr. Hidesato was waiting for them.

“I found your note,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Were you able to learn anything during your excursion?”

“We learned that whatever we’re up against is strong enough to shake a hillside,” Leo said.

“And it doesn’t like trains,” Mikey added.

“It almost wrecked one tonight,” Raph said. “If we hadn’t been there to warn a freight train about the danger, it would have run full on into a pile of trees and boulders.”

“The trains will start running again as soon as they clear the debris,” Don said. “They’ll have done that and repaired any damage before night falls again. We need to identify the yokai before then, or this is going to happen once more.”

“Show us what you were recording, Donny,” Leo said.

“Let me hook this up to a monitor,” Don said, holding up his shell cell before making his way into the war room.

The others followed him and formed a semi-circle around his chair as he sat down. After hooking up his shell cell to one of the computers, Don played back the recording he’d made.

At first all they saw was a typical hilltop covered in small brush, vegetation, and rocks. It was obvious from disturbed areas that trees had been uprooted, but some of the missing trees came from spots too far from the cut to have fallen onto the tracks naturally.

Then the camera skimmed over a depression in the ground that looked suspiciously manmade. This was the spot that Don had been studying and on camera they saw where he’d turned and gone back for a closer look.

The second pass showed them exactly what Don had seen. It was the clear imprint of a very large four-fingered hand. The ground inside the imprint glowed an eerie bluish color.

Pressed in so tightly together, Mr. Hidesato’s sharp intake of breath was clearly audible.

“Ya’ know what it is, don’t ya’?” Raph asked.

All four of the turtles turned to look at the man. “It is a Reiki,” Mr. Hidesato said. And then, almost as if to himself, he added, “Of course I knew one had escaped, but I did not expect to . . . .”

His words trailed off and he walked out of the room. After glancing at one another, the brothers swiftly followed.

Mr. Hidesato was at the bookshelves. He took down a large book from one of the top shelves
and brought it back to the desk with him.

“The Reiki was captured by my clan long before my time,” Mr. Hidesato said as he turned pages in the book. “The artistic ancestor I mentioned once before drew a scene from the capture.”

Setting the open book down on the desk, Mr. Hidesato stepped back so that his warders could look at the drawing. It showed a creature that was the size of a giant. Its body was human in shape, with an impressive musculature and four-fingered hands that were tipped with long, sharp claws.

Its face was less than human looking though. Horns jutted from the top of its head, its nostrils were large and flaring, and its mouth was filled with jagged teeth. Around its entire head was a ring of hair, making it appear to have a mane like a lions.

Mikey was the first to speak. “O-kay. That could stop a train.”

“All you found were the imprints of its hand and the destruction to the track, correct?” Mr. Hidesato asked. “You did not see the Reiki itself?”

“We didn’t see it,” Leo said. “We felt its presence though. The debris fell onto the track while we were there.”

“It came from the hilltop opposite the one we were standing on,” Don said.

“Donny used his tech pack to fly over the cut to that hilltop in the hopes of chasing the creature away,” Leo said.

“You did not use your power? It did not see you?” Mr. Hidesato asked, sounding anxious.

Don frowned as he looked at the man and then said slowly, “I did. I had to. I couldn’t see whatever was causing the debris to fall onto the track, but I had to get it to stop. Worrying about the people on that train activated my magic. The Reiki must have seen me because the shaking stopped as soon as my body began to glow.”

“This is not good,” Mr. Hidesato said, beginning to pace. “It is now aware of you, aware of your power. I had hoped this would not happen yet.”

The brothers had never seen him so agitated. “Mr. Hidesato, tell us about the Reiki,” Leo said.

“It is an ogre spirit, a demon ghost,” Mr. Hidesato said. He stopped pacing to sit in a chair and the brothers followed suit. “Reiki are the ghosts of Oni who have not passed peacefully on to the next life.”

“What are Oni?” Mikey asked.

“They are vicious demons who are taller than the tallest man and have an appetite for humans,” Mr. Hidesato said. “All oni possess extreme strength and constitution, and many of them are accomplished sorcerers. They are bringers of disaster, spreaders of disease, and punishers of the damned in Hell.”

“When a truly wicked human dies they end up in one of the many Buddhist Hells and are transformed into Oni. They become the brutal servants of Great Lord Enma, ruler of Hell. An oni’s job is to mete out horrible punishments. Hell is full of oni, and they make up the armies of the great generals of the underworld.”
“Whoa,” Raph said. “I’m not liking the sound of that.”

“Nor should you,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Oni do not die easily. Those who still have unfinished business or karma left to burn off, or ones who have died such violent or passionate deaths that the soul becomes disjointed at the moment of death remain in the human world as a demon ghost. A Reiki. They appear as they did before death, though they are often accompanied by an aura or an eerie glow. Like ghosts, they are semi-transparent and frequently gain additional supernatural powers in addition to the magic they knew in life.”

“So they have magic just like we do,” Mikey said. “I’ve gotta go with Raph on this one. I’m not liking the sound of that at all.”

“Reiki have but one motivation,” Mr. Hidesato said, “and that is revenge. They seek to bring suffering to the person or people they feel are responsible for their death, or to those who stood against them in life. They can follow a target and haunt them and their families for centuries, or attach themselves to a particular area and assault those who come near.”

“The rail line ain’t responsible for the Reiki’s death,” Raph said.

“Tell me what took you to that location,” Mr. Hidesato said.

Leo told him about the dream he’d had, describing it in detail. After he was finished, Don picked up the story by telling Mr. Hidesato how he’d found the rail line that Leo had seen in his dream and about its history.

Mr. Hidesato was nodding by the time Donatello finished talking about the train derailment that had caused the loss of life. “The violent deaths at that site are what has drawn the Reiki to the rail line,” he said. “The split second awareness that a person has at that moment before death is often accompanied by intense anger. That anger can linger as a malevolence which is palpable. It is clear that the Reiki has attached itself to that area with the intention of assaulting trains as they pass through the cut.”

“Don is right. As soon as they get those boulders off the tracks, the trains will start running again,” Raph said. “The Reiki will be right there waiting for them.”

“It will not merely throw debris onto the track the next time,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It has become aware of the presence of warders. The next attack will be to the train itself. People will die.”

“Is that why ya’ freaked out when ya’ heard that Don had used his power?” Raph asked.

“It is not only that,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The knowledge that warders have found it will anger the Reiki further, but that is the case with most yokai.”

“You said that you hoped it would not become aware of us yet,” Leo said. “That it wouldn’t become aware of our power. Before that you started to say there was something you didn’t expect. What did you mean?”

“I did not expect the Reiki to make its presence known so quickly,” Mr. Hidesato said. “They are powerful spirits and are without fear. This does not mean that they are incautious. Having escaped its trap coin, the Reiki would have retained the knowledge of its capture and would know that warders would pursue it. I had anticipated that you four would have more experience at hunting and capturing creatures before the Reiki drew attention to itself.”

“Ya’ make it sound like it came out into the open on purpose,” Raph said.
“Maybe that’s the trick,” Mikey said. “Maybe it knows that we’re new at this.”

“It cannot have known that,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I fear that its desire for vengeance is less about causing suffering to those who use the rail line and more about a need for revenge against warders.”

“Peachy,” Raph muttered.

“Earthbound oni are humans who are so utterly wicked that their souls are beyond redemption,” Mr. Hidesato said. “These humans transform into oni during life and terrorize the living. They are the ones who pose the most danger to humankind. In death they transform into Reiki and are most fearsome. Though they have not served in hell, Great Lord Enma is very aware of them.”

“Is this Enma a creature we’ll have to recapture?” Don asked.

“No,” Mr. Hidesato said. “He resides in hell and does not leave. Enma Daiō judges each soul who passes his way, giving these souls tests and trials to determine if they must be consigned to hell or if they can be saved from damnation.

“Though Enma Daiō is a demonic figure, Enma’s true form is not only the guardian of the underworld, but also the god of travelers and protector of children. At heart he is a kind and compassionate god. His awareness of the Reiki does not mean hecondones the creature’s behavior. It means that he knows what the Reiki is doing or has done, and has knowledge of every encounter.”

“If I understand you correctly, you’re saying that by using his power to stop the Reiki last night, Don is now on Great Lord Enma’s radar,” Leo said. “What does that mean?”

“Is Enma gonna come after Donny?” Mikey asked. “Can’t he like, tell that Donny’s soul is good?”

“Enma does not pass judgement on the living,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“You’re confusing the hell out of me,” Raph snapped. “Cut to the chase. Enma’s gotta know that warders all have some kind of magical power just from the symbols themselves. Why the fuck would he give a damn about any of us?”

“Language,” Leo murmured automatically.

“He would not,” Mr. Hidesato said flatly. “Unfortunately, as Great Lord Enma is linked to oni and to the Reiki itself, others are linked to Enma. A trio of monsters who are considered the greatest and most evil yokai of all. They cannot be captured because there is no magic strong enough to hold them. The malevolent forces they bring to bear are offset by the good magic wielded by the warder clans. It is how the balance of power is maintained.”

“Enma knowing about Don means that the three monsters know about him too,” Leo said. “It would have happened eventually. We would have had to go after the Reiki sooner or later.”

“I would rather it have been later,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It would have been best if the Reiki was not forewarned that at least one warder hunting him has more powerful magic than is burned into the symbol. He will want that magic. If he can destroy a warder who has such a gift, he can absorb their power.

“Because their interest may have been awakened, the three monsters will focus on your battle with the Reiki,” Mr. Hidesato continued. “If you could have captured him before Enma became
aware of your presence, you would not have drawn the notice of these monsters.”

“Who are they?” Mikey asked.

“The first is the ghost of Emperor Sotoku. Some say after Sutoku Tennō died, he transformed into a terrible onryō while others say he became a great tengu,” Mr. Hidesato answered.

“Marvelous, another tengu,” Raph said with a great deal of sarcasm. “One of them bastards was enough.”

Mr. Hidesato looked puzzled. “Another tengu? I have heard you mention something of this before.”

“We defeated one known as the Tengu Shredder,” Leo said. “He attacked the city as his first push towards subjugating the world. We were trained by the Ninja Tribunal as Acolytes so that we could battle the Shredder.”

“I do not know of this tribunal,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Nor am I aware of an attack upon the city by a tengu.”

“Everyone’s memory was pretty much wiped clean after we kicked his butt,” Raph said. “The only ones who remember anything are those that were involved in the fight.”

Now Leonardo understood why their previous mentions of tengu had not aroused Mr. Hidesato’s curiosity. Not only was he focused on whichever yokai they were hunting at that time, but he like everyone else in the world, did not remember the Tengu Shredder incident.

Warders were not ninja, so the clans would not have had knowledge of the Tribunal. Perhaps in the fourth century A.D. the clans were aware of the Shredder and of the five warrior Dragons who the Emperor of Japan sent to defeat him. It did not appear that the tale had been recorded in clan lore. The only reason that Leo could think of for that would be the fact that four of the warrior Dragons formed the Tribunal, while the other one became the Tengu and was later sealed into a coffin by the remaining Dragons. That seemed to make it more of an in-family fight.

“That’s in the past,” Leo said, changing the subject. “We need to concentrate on what’s happening now. The first of the monsters is Emperor Sotoku. Who are the other two?”

“The second is the nine-tailed kitsune Tamamo no Mae,” Mr. Hidesato said. “She is one of the most powerful yokai that has ever lived. She is tricky and has an insatiable lust for power. The third of the trio is the dreaded king of the oni, Shuten dōji. He rules over earthbound oni and yokai thugs.”

“Seems like this was something we should have heard about right from the start,” Raph said, his expression thunderous.

“I did not believe that the recapturing of escaped creatures would attract their attention,” Mr. Hidesato said. “The creatures from our coffer are of no consequence to this trio of monsters. However, the power that the four of you wield would be an incredible enticement to them.”

“Well shit,” Raph cursed.

“What would you have done if we had known about this right from the start?” Mikey asked, staring at Raph. “I know it wouldn’t have stopped you from agreeing to be a warder.”

“That ain’t the fucking point, Mikey,” Raph snapped. “Maybe if we’d known about these
things sooner we could have been a hell of a lot more careful about how we use our powers.”

“We didn’t even know we had any powers,” Mikey said. “How do you be more careful about that?”

“Enough,” Leo said, wanting to stop the argument from escalating. “What’s done is done.”

“I don’t care that the Reiki knows I have magical powers,” Don said. “All I care about is stopping him before he wrecks a train. The one that Leo was riding on in his dream was a passenger train full of people. If we aren’t there, the Reiki will destroy that train and a lot of people are going to die.”

“He knows about Don, but he doesn’t know about us,” Mikey said. “The demon ghost is supposed to be tough, but I’ll bet he’s not as tough as we are if we combine our power like we did while we were creating the amulets for April and Casey.”

“If we do that, the three monsters aren’t gonna be the only ones whose attention we’ll attract,” Raph said. “The High Council will scream bloody murder when they feel us use our powers again.”

“Actually, their only instructions to me were that you not use your combined power to create magical instruments,” Mr. Hidesato said.

“Isn’t that splitting hairs?” Don asked.

“It is within my purview as your advisor to instruct you to utilize whatever weapons are at hand in order to effect a capture,” Mr. Hidesato said. “In this instance you will not be facing the Reiki alone. I shall accompany you.”

“In what capacity?” Leo asked.

“We’ve already got a leader,” Raph said quickly, almost stepping on Leo’s question. “We don’t need two of ya’ barking orders at us.”

“I am a warder,” Mr. Hidesato said. “That is the role I will play. Leonardo will devise the strategy for the capture and I will fulfill my function as I was trained to do.”

“I guess it’s all hands on deck for this one,” Mikey said. “Why do I get the feeling that it’s gonna get ugly?”

“At least this time you’ll have an audience to show off for,” Raph said. “I ain’t talking just about Mr. H either. I’m sure the three monsters will find ya’ real entertaining.”

“You are so not funny,” Mikey said.

“We’ll use the shell cycles and take them up to the top of the hill again,” Leo said. “Mr. Hidesato can ride in the sidecar on Donny’s.” He turned to Donatello. “Find out what kind of progress they’ve made on clearing the tracks and when they’ll start running the trains again. We need to make sure we’re there before the first one is due to go through that cut.”

“Will do boss,” Don said.

“Wait a second,” Leo said as Don started to leave. “Mr. Hidesato, how do we trap the Reiki?”

Mr. Hidesato got up and went back to the desk. When he picked up the journal, the turtles
gathered around him.

“You see this here?” Mr. Hidesato said, pointing at the metal circle attached to the straps that held the Reiki’s cloak in place. The metal piece sat in the center of the creature’s chest, just above his stomach.

“Don’t tell me, let me guess,” Raph said. “The coin has to go in there.”

“Yes,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Like with your symbols, the metal piece is a magical conductor. The Reiki’s supernatural powers and his magic is focused through that ring. It is a part of his body. Placing the coin in its center will draw all of his magic away from him.”

“Look at the size of that guy,” Mikey said. “How are we supposed to slap a coin on his stomach?”

“We’ll use the tech packs,” Leo said. “The ability to fly will balance out the height differential.”

“I have to finish repairing Raph’s,” Don said. “It’s still missing a wing thanks to the Itsumade.”

“I’ll help ya’ with that,” Raph said.

“It’s after two a.m.,” Leo said. “That can wait until after we get some sleep.”

“I agree. It would be prudent to get as much rest as possible,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Your powers require energy and if you are forced to use them in order to capture the Reiki, you will want to be fresh.”

“Let me check on the track repairs first,” Don said.

He went into the war room and Mr. Hidesato bid the other turtles a good-night. After he left the room, Mikey walked to the door and peeked out to watch the man go upstairs.

Walking back to his brothers, Mikey said, “He’s going with us on a capture. What happened to the ‘I’m too old for this job’?”

“He’s spooked,” Raph said. “It ain’t just about the Reiki either. He thinks one of them other three, or maybe all three of them, are gonna show up.”

“If they do, we retreat,” Leo said firmly. “We are not prepared for that kind of demonic power focused in one place. If we have to haul Mr. Hidesato along with us, then we will.”

“Ya’ know how much I hate running from a fight,” Raph said, glowering at his brother.

“We’ll stand our ground if we’re the only thing between those creatures and a train full of people,” Leo said. “If no one else is in danger, then a tactical retreat allows us to fight another day.”

“Hopefully one we’re better prepared for,” Mikey said. “Maybe turning down help from other clans wasn’t such a great idea. Is it too late to send up a bat signal?”

“It’s too late for anything right now. Mr. H ain’t gonna agree to ask for help anyway,” Raph said. He was flipping through the journal that Mr. Hidesato had taken from the shelves. “I don’t see anything in here about how to catch the Reiki. There’s this drawing of the creature and some writing that’s kind of smeared.”
“Let me see,” Leo said, stepping up next to his brother. Raph handed the journal to him and Leo stared at the writing, his brow furrowed. “It looks like some of these pages got wet. I see what looks like a warning and something that says the Reiki is powerful.”

He stopped talking as he skimmed over a page and then turned to the next. Finally Raph grew impatient. “What else does it say?”

Leo slowly shook his head. “There are only a few recognizable words here and they’re without context. I see ‘strong . . . sharp . . . loss of Kenji . . . too many of us’. I can’t read much more than that.”

“Who’s Kenji?” Mikey asked. His brothers shrugged.

“Mr. H said the Reiki was captured before his time. How’s he know how to catch it? He sure as hell didn’t get that info from this journal,” Raph said, tapping the open book.

“Perhaps some stories were passed down,” Leo said. He closed the journal and set it on the desk just as Don came out of the war room. “I’m surprised we haven’t run across more damaged journals.”

“The journal is damaged?” Don asked.

“Wet pages,” Mikey said.

“The track?” Leo asked, more concerned with what was happening at the moment.

“The news channels got hold of the story and the rail line officials are being ultra-cautious,” Don said. “They say they’ll have the track cleared by daylight but it will take them a day to access the damage to the track and make repairs.”

“So it’s possible they could have the trains running by this evening?” Leo asked.

“If they don’t, they’ll have citizens and city officials yelling for someone’s head,” Don said. “A lot of people travel to and from work on that line.”

Leo took a deep breath and released it. “Then that’s all we can do for one night. We’ll monitor the situation throughout the day, but unless I dream something different, the Reiki isn’t going to attack until nightfall.”

“Let’s hit the sack then,” Raph said.

Mikey and Leo led the way out of the room. Raph waited for Don to pass him so he could turn out the lights and then caught up to the genius at the bottom of the staircase. The other two had already disappeared upstairs, but Don seemed to be dragging his feet.

“What’s on your mind?” Raph asked.

“I feel like this new danger is all my fault,” Don said lugubriously. “If I hadn’t activated my power, these other monsters wouldn’t know about us.”

“Can that noise,” Raph said. He put an arm around his brother’s shoulders. “First off, we don’t know that any monster knows anything. Mr. H is doing a bunch of guessing and personally it just sounds like a lot of nonsense doomsday talk to me. Second, ya’ did what ya’ did to save lives and that cancels out any other worry. We’ll deal with whatever happens afterwards the way we always do, together. It’s not like we haven’t battled a few monsters before.”
“And Triceratons, and Federation forces, and the Foot, and the Mystics . . . .” Don said with a smile.

“Etcetera, etcetera,” Raph finished for him.

They were approaching their shared bedroom and heard churring from within. “Now we know why Mikey was moving so fast,” Don said.

Raph came to a stop and spun Don around, planting a solid kiss to his mouth before his brother had a chance to react. “Gotta hand it to Mikey, that right there is a fine idea,” Raph said in a husky voice. He slid a hand down to Don’s rump and squeezed. “Let’s go claim our share of the bed.”

The next day was spent in monitoring the progress that the rail company was making on repairs to the line and in fixing Raph’s tech pack. While Don was downstairs in his work space, his brothers kept up with the news and scanned more of the journals into the program he’d created.

At breakfast, Leo had confided that he’d had an odd dream about the Reiki. In it, he and the creature were face to face, staring at one another. Leo said that it felt as though he were sinking into the Reiki’s mind and that he’d begun to hear whispering.

He couldn’t make out the words though the sounds seemed to be all around him and when he tried to delve deeper into the Reiki’s consciousness, a sudden flash of light had woken him. Mr. Hidesato had joined them at the kitchen table and had listened to Leo’s description of the dream with a concentrated look on his face, but he’d offered no guesses as to its meaning.

Sometime after six o’clock, Don told them that the rail company had announced that the track was fully repaired. They would be running a couple of empty cars along the rails, followed by one carrying freight. After that, the passenger trains would begin operating again.

“Sunset will be around seven forty-six,” Don said. “The passenger train will probably reach the rock cut by eight ten.”

“We’ll need to leave here at seven,” Leo said.

“It will still be daylight out,” Mr. Hidesato said. “You will be seen.”

Leo turned to him. “We brought some of the clothing we wear as disguises with us from home. They should suffice in hiding our appearance. It’s worked for us in the past.”

“Then I shall go up and change my clothing as well,” Mr. Hidesato said.

After he left them, Mikey said, “I don’t know about you guys, but I’m not tackling the Reiki on an empty stomach. How about some sandwiches?”

“That’s probably a good idea,” Leo said. “Let’s make it quick.”

They’d finished their light repast and had changed into their long trench coats by the time Mr. Hidesato came back downstairs. He was dressed all in black; black slacks, a long sleeved black pullover, and black canvas shoes. Attached to his belt was a long coil of rope.

Mikey handed him a sandwich wrapped in plastic. “For the road.”

“Thank you, Michelangelo,” Mr. Hidesato said politely.
After retrieving the proper trap coin, the wax tool, and his jacket, Mr. Hidesato locked up the house before meeting the turtles out front to take his seat in the sidecar attached to Don’s shell cycle. He noticed that they now all had on helmets which hid their faces from view and he smiled at the fact that each helmet bore their signature color, as did the shell cycles.

Donatello handed him a spare helmet and Mr. Hidesato dutifully put it on. As they drove to their destination, the man watched the other motorists around them and saw that no one paid any particular attention to the turtles. This was probably as much a testament to the efficacy of their disguises as it was to how a native New Yorker found the unusual to be commonplace.

Flashing lights began to show as they neared the maintenance road they’d used the night before. The brothers pulled off to the side of the road to confer.

“The rail company probably has a guy standing by to monitor the line,” Don said. “He’ll radio in to report us if we try to get past him.”

“Is there another route?” Leo asked.

“I think I saw a bike path on the other side of the rails,” Mikey said, pointing back the way they’d come. “Bet that’d take us up on the opposite hill. That’s where Don found the handprint.”

“We’ll go that way then,” Leo said. “Lead on, Mikey.”

The bike path went partway up the hill and then circled back down again when a fence blocked off access to the peak. The wires that stretched between posts were no match for Leo’s katanas and the brothers rode single file through the opening he made.

Parking their shell cycles several yards down the hill, the turtles removed their trench coats and Mr. Hidesato dropped his jacket into the sidecar. After the brothers strapped on their tech packs the group walked towards the peak, noting that the hand print was still visible, but that it no longer glowed.

Mr. Hidesato squatted next to it, lightly touching the soil. “There is no residual energy here.”

“What does that mean?” Raph asked. “Did the Reiki leave or something?”

“He’s here somewhere,” Leo said, looking in the direction of the rock cut. His eyes were unfocused, like he was peering at something that couldn’t actually be seen.

“How do ya’ know?” Raph demanded.

“I can feel him,” Leo answered. He blinked before turning to his brothers with a frown. “I can’t get a sense of exactly where he is though.”

“We can’t fight what we can’t find,” Don said.

Walking up to stand next to Leo, Mr. Hidesato set a hand on his shoulder. “Close your eyes and focus on the creature,” he instructed. “Tell us your impressions.”

Leo nodded and shut his eyes. After a moment, he said, “He’s hiding; he’s waiting for us to show our powers first.”

“Not too soon,” Mr. Hidesato said, taking his hand from Leo’s shoulder. “Let him believe for as long as possible that only Donatello has any sort of magical gift.”
“We’re sorta on a time clock here,” Mikey said. “You know, train coming and all that. We can’t wait forever.”

“We will not have to,” Mr. Hidesato said as he pushed back the sleeve on his right arm. Using a fingertip, he traced over the symbols on his warder brand.

They started to glow. Holding his arm up, Mr. Hidesato began to slowly move it from left to right.

The ground beneath their feet shook violently. Mr. Hidesato made another pass with his arm and they saw an unnatural bluish light emanating from the rock cut itself.

“Michelangelo,” Mr. Hidesato said, holding his arm steady, “repeat what I have just done. Do not show him your full ability, but we must make him visible.”

Mikey lifted his arm to find that his symbols were already glowing. Lifting his arm into the air as Mr. Hidesato was doing, he aimed the symbols towards the rock cut.

A loud roar blasted through the air and was followed by a flash of blue light. Before them appeared the Reiki, its head and shoulders showing above the ridge.

“He’s standing on the tracks!” Raph shouted.

“It’s nearing eight,” Don warned. “We don’t have much time.”

Raph pressed the button to activate his tech pack and flew into the air. “Then let’s kick this thing’s butt right now!”

“Raph, wait!” Leo called out.

Ignoring him, Raph pulled his sai and dove directly at the Reiki. It bared its teeth and swung at him, the creature’s clawed fingers just missing Raph’s head as he dodged the blow.

Using both weapons, Raph stabbed at the Reiki’s chest. Rather than connecting with solid flesh, the sai and Raph himself went right through the creature.

“What the hell?” Raph yelled as he pulled up and turned.

Before he could move again, the Reiki swung back with a fist and struck Raph full in the chest. The blow sent him hurtling towards the hillside, but Raph spun around at the last second, hitting the rock wall with his sai.

The impact with the Reiki had cut off the power to Raph’s tech pack, so he used his weapons to climb up the side of the hill. When he reached the top and stood up, he saw his brothers whizzing around the Reiki.

Leo flew up in front of him. “You okay bro’?”

“Just marvelous,” Raph growled. “Ya’ know when Mr. H said these things were semi-transparent, he didn’t mention we could go right through them.”

“Maybe he didn’t know,” Leo said. “The thing’s punch is solid enough.”

Raph started his tech pack again, lifting off from the ground. “Ya’ got a plan?”

“Yes,” Leo said, turning towards the Reiki. “Now we use our powers. We have to solidify
that creature, otherwise the trap coin might not work.’”

He flew upwards and Raph followed. When Leo was far above the Reiki and well out of its reach he stopped and waved at Don and Mikey to join them.

“Hold hands,” Leo said when they were all together. He caught hold of Raph’s. “Form a circle and focus on your power. We need to direct it at the Reiki and make him just as solid as we are.”

The Reiki was swiping at them as it tried to claw the turtles out of the air. They remained high above it as they gripped each other’s hands and concentrated.

Their bodies began to glow, the brilliance engulfing all four of them. As a single mind they aimed the flow of energy at the Reiki.

A ball of pure force formed between them and then surged downwards, striking the Reiki full in the face. It howled as the magic hit and then stumbled back, partially curling in on itself.

Breaking the circle, Leo pulled his katana and nosedived right at the creature. The Reiki lifted its head when it heard him and swept out with an arm, which Leo deftly avoided while slicing at the Reiki’s hand.

The sword connected with solid flesh, nearly shearing off one of the Reiki’s fingers. Bellowing loudly, it pulled its hand back and then Raph struck, sinking both his sai into one of the creature’s shoulders.

When the Reiki reached for him, Raph pulled free and flew back. Don swept in and hit the Reiki behind one knee while at the same time Mikey clouted the creature on its head.

Straightening to its full height, the Reiki roared and grabbed at Don as he sped past. One of its claws caught the bottom extension on Don’s tech pack, sending the genius into a tail spin.

“Donny!” Raph cried out, diving for his brother.

As Don neared the ground, the Reiki lifted a foot to stomp on him. “Oh no ya’ don’t!” Raph yelled, his entire body suddenly engulfed in the bright red glow of his warder power.

Lowering a shoulder, Raph plowed into the Reiki’s side and knocked the creature off its feet. As it fell, its claws raked against the side of the hill, ripping through the wire mesh and sending a cascade of small stones directly at Raph.

Shouting defiantly, Raph punched at the stones, pulverizing each into powder. Below him Don managed to pull out of his spin and rocketed back up to join his brother.

The Reiki quickly gained its feet. To their surprise, the turtles saw that the injuries they’d inflicted on the creature had healed.

Once more Raph rocketed towards the Reiki, evading its fists as it attempted to hit him. Though he tried to get in close to its chest, the Reiki turned its body and Raph ploughed into the creature’s bicep.

Snarling, the creature snapped at him, grazing the outer edge of Raph’s energy field. Jerking its head back, the Reiki dragged some of the power away from Raph’s body and swallowed it.

With an evil laugh, the Reiki caught hold of Raph and dragged the fighting turtle towards its
open mouth.

“No!” Mikey yelled. He flew at the Reiki, his arm outstretched as bands of energy rolled outward from his warder symbols. The laser like reddish orange blasts crashed against the Reiki’s skull, burning its skin.

Releasing Raph, the Reiki swung at the fast moving Michelangelo. It missed with its first attempt, but quickly swatted at him again with the other hand. That blow connected with Mikey’s tech pack and smashed the power cells.

“Mikey!” Don screamed as sparks flew from the pack and his younger brother plummeted to the ground.

In the distance a train’s horn sounded.

“Shit! The train’s on its way!” Raph called out.

Mr. Hidesato had watched the fight from the top of the hill. The magic in his warder symbols kept the Reiki from hiding itself again, but he could only watch as the turtles battled the creature.

He was dismayed to see it consume some of Raph’s magic. He knew from the old stories that warders had captured the creature through sheer numbers, but his forces were small.

Taking the rope from his belt, Mr. Hidesato swiftly formed one end into a lasso and shouted, “Leonardo!”

Flying close, Leonardo saw Mr. Hidesato take the trap coin from his belt and place it between his teeth. Their eyes met and Leo nodded his understanding.

“Keep it busy!” Leo ordered his brothers as he shot towards the Reiki.

He knew of only one place that Mr. Hidesato could lasso and that meant the Reiki needed to lower its head. Flying down, Leo zoomed past the Reiki’s legs, his katana cutting a long trench into one thigh. With a burst of speed, he avoided the Reiki’s clutching hands.

“Down here!” Leo shouted as Raph and Don drew near the creature.

Following his lead, the pair began buzzing the Reiki’s lower half. Don had thrown a protective shield up around his body and the Reiki seemed intent on catching hold of him, perhaps wanting to consume some of his magic too.

The train sounded again, this time seeming much closer.

As soon as the Reiki ducked its head, Mr. Hidesato tossed the lasso. It sailed out over the rock cut, dropping in what seemed like slow motion onto one of the Reiki’s horns.

Mr. Hidesato yanked back on the rope, tightening it around the horn. Holding onto the rope, he took a running leap off of the hill.

With one hand gripping the rope, Mr. Hidesato took the coin from his mouth as he swung towards the Reiki. Leo and Raph were to either side of the yokai, keeping its hands occupied, and it wasn’t until the man neared its body that the Reiki noticed him.

The Reiki had no chance to strike out at him as Mr. Hidesato smashed feet first into its stomach. Bracing himself there, he slapped the trap coin into the center of the metal ring.
Growling angrily, the Reiki shook its head and snatched at the rope, dislodging it from its horn. Mr. Hidesato fell away with a cry, plunging towards the track.

Raph flipped in midair and shot after him, catching Mr. Hidesato’s outstretched hands before the man could hit the ground. Lifting him, Raph flew back up to the top of the hill, setting Mr. Hidesato down and landing next to him.

When Don flew near them, Mr. Hidesato lobbed the wax tool up to him. A loud buzzing sound drew their attention back to the Reiki.

It was flailing at the air, the buzzing noise issuing from its open mouth. Red light flashed from its eyes and hit Raph, who dropped to one knee as his stolen power was returned to him.

The blue glow that had suffused the Reiki’s body began to fade inward into the trap coin. In seconds its body was once more transparent and the buzzing grew loud enough that the warders had to cover their ears.

As the Reiki’s body disintegrated and was sucked into the coin, the creature snarled and snapped at anything that moved. Hovering nearby, Don stayed well away from it until finally the teeth filled mouth vanished into the trap coin.

The coin hit the tracks with a metallic clang and Don swept down to retrieve it. In the meantime, Leo had been at Mikey’s side, holding his little brother until the Reiki was captured. As the Reiki disappeared, Leo thought he saw a giant bearded figure floating where the creature had just been. Then it too was suddenly gone.

“Time to get out of here,” Leo said, looking at his brother. “You okay?”

“I think I sprained my ankle,” Mikey said. “Don’s gonna kill me for wrecking my tech pack.”

Leo laughed. “I doubt it. Come on, you don’t want to be on the track when the train gets here.”

He scooped Mikey into his arms and flew skyward with him. “Geez, I feel like the damsel in distress, saved at the last minute by the dashing hero,” Mikey said with a grin.

Leo smiled. “I’m fairly sure that’s the first time anyone’s called me dashing,” he said. “Does the hero normally get some sort of reward?”

“The comics always end before that part,” Mikey replied cheekily. “I guess I’ll have to use my imagination once we’re home again.”

It took a moment for it to sink in to Leo that his brother had just called HQ ‘home’.

End Reiki
Mikey sat on the exam table in the basement infirmary, trying not to squirm as Donatello wrapped his sprained ankle.

Arms crossed over his chest, Raph leaned against the wall and watched them. Leo was seated in a chair near Don’s desk, flipping through a book but not actually trying to read.

It was Raph who finally spoke. “He went with us, he kicked butt, and then we get back here and he disappears upstairs without a damn word.”
“He said good-night,” Mikey said.

“Ya’ know exactly what I mean,” Raph snapped.

Don gave Mikey’s ankle a final pat and then looked up. “Those were some serious moves he performed tonight, what with lassoing the Reiki and swinging over to plant the trap coin on it. A dangerous set of moves for someone of his age. Adrenalin would have kept him going, but by the time we got home, that adrenalin would have worn off.”

Leo closed the book and set it aside. “Pride would have kept him from showing us that he was hurting.”

“To hell with that,” Raph said, sounding exasperated. “We get hurt doing this job and don’t try to hide it, why should he? I’ll tell ya’ why. It’s ‘cause he still don’t trust us.”

“Or he thinks we won’t respect him if he exhibits any sort of weakness,” Don said. He went over to his medicine chest and began tossing some items into a little black bag.

Mikey flexed his toes experimentally and then carefully climbed off the table. “I think Mr. H trusts us a lot,” he said. “If he didn’t he wouldn’t have gone with us in the first place.”

“That makes zero sense,” Raph said. “He came with us ‘cause he thought we’d screw this up.”

“Nope,” Mikey said, staring at Raph. “He came with us ‘cause we’re more to him than just a means to an end. I think he wants to feel like he’s a part of something again. You know, not all alone anymore.”

Don walked towards the door, black bag in hand. Frowning, Raph asked, “Where are ya’ going?”

“Upstairs to check on Mr. H,” Don said. “He could easily have anything from a mild strain to torn muscles or tendon fibers from the hard jerk he sustained when you saved him from that free fall.”

“Be sure and let me know if he thanks ya’ for your effort,” Raph said in a snide tone of voice.

Without bothering to reply, Don left. Leo walked over to Mikey and slid an arm around his carapace to support him.

“Don’t put any weight on that ankle,” Leo warned. “Let’s get you up to bed.”

“The two of ya’ are just gonna hit the sack while Don’s playing doctor to Mr. H?” Raph asked incredulously.

“Actually, Mike mentioned something about a reward for getting him off the train tracks,” Leo said. “I thought I’d collect.”

“You could join us if you wanted to,” Mikey told Raph, a roguish twinkle in his eyes.

“We ain’t done talking about this,” Raph said as his brothers moved past him.

“We are for tonight,” Leo told him. “This was a rough capture, bro’. How are you not feeling as drained as the rest of us?”
“Who said I wasn’t?” Raph frowned, following along as Leo helped Mikey up the stairs. “I just have a shit load of unanswered questions floating in my head.”

“We had those before we left the house tonight,” Mikey said. “They’ll still be here waiting for answers in the morning. Ow, ow. Slow down.”

“Do you want me to carry you again?” Leo asked.

Raph snorted derisively. “He’s being spoiled plenty as it is.”

They went upstairs together, but when Leo and Mikey entered the bedroom, Raph stopped at the door.

“Not coming inside?” Leo asked.

“I’m gonna wait for Donny,” Raph said. He caught the look on Leo’s face and shook his head. “It ain’t what you’re thinking. Don might need help with something.”

Leo didn’t appear fully convinced, but rather than argue, he simply nodded and helped Mikey to the bed. Raph pulled the door shut and then went over to the staircase and sat on the top step. From there he could look into the second floor hallway and also easily hear Don if his brother called out.

Minutes earlier Don had knocked on Mr. Hidesato’s door and been invited to enter. He found the man kneeling on a rug in the center of the room, a kit containing acupuncture needles in front of him.

As Don approached, Mr. Hidesato opened his eyes. He was shirtless and despite the fact that the lights had been dimmed, Don could see that there were several needles protruding from his shoulders, arms, and upper back.

“I came to check on you,” Don said. “I was concerned about the beating your body might have taken.”

“The unfortunate side effect of growing older,” Mr. Hidesato said. “As you can see I am tending to my own aches and pains.”

“I’ve studied human anatomy extensively,” Don told him. “I have also had a number of opportunities to apply my knowledge in real world situations. I’ve lost track of how many times I have seen to Mr. Jones’ injuries. Perhaps you would allow me to assess the extent to which you may have strained your muscles.”

“I see that you have brought along your medical bag,” Mr. Hidesato said. He contemplated it for a moment and Don waited without saying anything. Finally Mr. Hidesato sighed and said, “It would be rude of me to decline such a magnanimous offer. Where would you like to perform this examination?”

“You can remain where you are, if you’re comfortable,” Don said. He set his bag down on the writing desk and moved to stand behind Mr. Hidesato. “I’ll work around the acupuncture needles. Please be honest with me about any pain you might be feeling.”

“I will do so,” Mr. Hidesato said.

Don spent some time in his examination, working hard to be as thorough as possible. He was both surprised and reassured to find that Mr. Hidesato had nothing more than some sore
muscles. After rubbing a pain relief gel into the effected muscles, Don also used his knowledge of pressure points to further ease the soreness.

When Don was finished, Mr. Hidesato lifted his arms in order to rotate his shoulders. Finding that there was now only minimal discomfort through an entire range of motions, he smiled and stood up.

“Thank you, Donatello,” Mr. Hidesato said as he removed the acupuncture needles. “I believe I will be able to sleep comfortably now.”

“Let me know if you have any recurring pain,” Don said. As Mr. Hidesato pulled his shirt on, Don noticed a number of small scars on the man’s chest and stomach. There were scars on his back as well, and though Don was curious, he didn’t ask about them.

Don started for the door but stopped when Mr. Hidesato called his name. “Is there something else I can help with?” Don asked.

“I would prefer that you not discuss my treatment with your brothers,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I am not trying to hide anything, it is merely that I am a very private person.”

“Though I don’t have a medical degree, I still adhere to the principles of medical confidentiality. I won’t talk out of turn,” Don assured him.

“I appreciate your discretion,” Mr. Hidesato said. “One more thing. Could you please give my thanks to your brothers as well? I am frequently remiss in expressing my gratitude and I hope to do a better job of that. Perhaps you could assist me in that area too. I find that your . . . even temperament and advanced intellect make it easier for those around you to . . . share their own thoughts and feelings.”

“If you’re in need of a confidant, I have to tell you that I won’t keep secrets from my brothers,” Don said. “Not discussing your personal medical concerns is one thing, but having to hide anything else from them is something I won’t do.”

“I also admire your honesty,” Mr. Hidesato said. “I would not dream of placing you in an awkward position. I understand perfectly that your brothers come first in all things.”

Don smiled. “With that clearly understood, if you just need someone to talk to, I’ll be happy to listen. We all need some sort of connection. Anything you share of a personal nature I can promise to keep to myself.”

Mr. Hidesato bowed politely and Don let himself out of the room. He didn’t go upstairs immediately though. Standing in the hallway, Donatello was lost in thought.

It was possible that Mikey was right about why Mr. Hidesato had joined the hunt. The man was alone in the world, with no family or clan. Most living things needed a connection. Mr. Hidesato had been aloof when they’d first met and that was probably because he didn’t want to experience the pain of loss if one of the turtles perished during a creature hunt.

They had shown themselves to be more than capable. Though Mr. Hidesato conversed more with Leo than any of them, what they talked about was mostly related to the job.

Don had a feeling that Mr. Hidesato knew that it was him knocking at the door wanting to offer assistance. Whether it was because he sensed Donatello’s presence the way Master Splinter did, or because he knew the sounds of their individual footsteps, it didn’t matter. Don was fairly certain that Mr. Hidesato would not have invited anyone but him to come inside.
Still deep in thought, Don started up the stairs. He was halfway up when a shadow moved across the risers and startled him. Lifting his head he saw Raph standing at the top of the stairs.

“Told ya’ long enough,” Raph said. “Is he in bad shape or what?”

“Everything is fine,” Don said, joining Raph. “Are Leo and Mikey in bed already?”

“Yeah, they started without us,” Raph answered. “Probably finished by now too. If everything was fine, ya’ would have been out of his room a half an hour ago.”

“I don’t actually take anyone’s word for that,” Don said. “If I’ve learned anything from being your doctor, it’s that the patient will try to keep things from me.”

“He’s sure the master of that,” Raph said.

“When are you going to stop being so suspicious of Mr. H?” Don asked.

Raph harrumphed. “When I’m sure he’s not still hiding anything from us.”

“Give him a break,” Don said. “He’s been by himself for a long time. When a person has spent years being totally self-reliant, it’s hard for them to fully open up to anyone.”

“I don’t need him to suddenly be all touchy, feely,” Raph said. “What I want is for him to start being straightforward about the shit he’s dragged us into.”

“Not exactly dragged, Raphael,” Don said as he started moving towards the bedroom. “We volunteered.”

“Everybody is so damned literal tonight,” Raph griped. He reached out to put a hand on Don’s arm, stopping him before he could open the bedroom door. “Different subject. Did ya’ notice anything odd about the way Leo was acting tonight?”

Raph’s voice had dropped to a near whisper and Don frowned. “Odd like how?”

“He was too relaxed,” Raph said. “No, that ain’t the word I’m looking for. He was too casual, too easygoing like.”

“Cavalier?” Don offered.

“If that means he was too laid back, then yeah,” Raph said. “He ain’t ever that way after a hunt. I mean, he’s always wound up a little tight. Tonight he should have been throwing out dire warnings and shit. We did just get done kicking ass on a pretty big yokai and we had to use our combined power to do it.”

“You know he did keep information from us the first couple of days we were doing this,” Don mused. “He was trying to protect us from worrying.”

“He does enough worrying for the rest of us combined. What’s that got to do with how he’s acting tonight?” Raph asked.

“Maybe he didn’t want us thinking too much about the attention we’re likely to draw from using our gifts to capture the Reiki,” Don said. “The Council will have felt it, and then there’s that trio of monsters that Mr. Hidesato warned us about. There’s no way we wouldn’t have drawn their attention this evening.”

With a grimace, Raph said, “Yeah, you’re right. Leo let me go on about Mr. H ‘cause he
was probably glad we weren’t talking about the other stuff. Someday he’s gonna learn that trying to keep us from worrying only makes us worry more.”

A high pitched whine came from inside the bedroom, interrupting them. It was followed by, “Come on, Leo! Stop teasing me.”

Raph and Don looked at each other and started to grin.

“Speaking of Leo, ya’ think he’s going slow on purpose ‘cause he’s waiting on us?” Raph asked.

“Yep,” Don said. “If we don’t want Mikey to start complaining a lot louder, we’d better get in there. Waiting for anything is pure torture for him.”

Leonardo’s sleep was dreamless until the early hours of the morning. It was a smell that first alerted Leo that he was entering a prophetic dream. He smelled food.

All around him images began to come alive, until Leo found that he was standing on a street in the East Village. Leo recognized the restaurants that were lining the street, they were located in an area locals referred to as ‘Little Tokyo’.

The rich scents made his mouth water. He could see food out on display every few feet and began to walk towards a particularly delicious appearing tray of nigiri and sashimi.

When Leo reached for the food, it was suddenly whisked out from under his hand. A little farther along, an old man beckoned to him to try the bowl of tonkotsu soup he was holding, but as Leo approached, the bowl vanished.

Leo began to feel a deep sense of frustration as food continued to elude him in the dream. He was growing more and more hungry, but no matter what he tried, he could not get anything to eat.

The dream eventually faded. Leo slept for a couple of hours more, but woke early because his stomach was rumbling. Without disturbing his brothers, Leo left the bedroom and went down to the kitchen.

It was the lack of a warm body to curl against that brought Michelangelo out of his slumber a short time later. The blankets had gotten tossed to the far end of the nest of mattresses, so Mikey flipped over to seek another body to hug.

Raph was nearest and Mikey pressed against his side, sliding his feet against Raph’s legs for warmth.

“Shit!” Raph yelped, lifting his legs away from Mikey. “Your feet are cold!”

“Sorry,” Mikey murmured. “My blanket left.”

“That was not the way I wanted to wake up,” Raph complained, dislodging Mikey as he pushed himself into a seated position.

“What’s going on?” Don mumbled.

“Nothing,” Raph said. “Mikey don’t know how to keep his cold feet to himself. Go back to sleep.”

“No, I’m awake,” Don said. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. “Leo practicing already?”
“Probably,” Raph said as he climbed out of bed. “Get your ass up, Mikey. I don’t want to hear Leo ragging on us about being lazy.”

“April’s supposed to come this morning to start her lessons with Mr. H,” Don said. He stood up and pulled Mikey to his feet. “I need coffee.”

After taking care of a few necessities in the bathroom, the trio headed downstairs to the kitchen. To their surprise, they found that Leo was seated at the kitchen table, working his way through a bowl of rice and some hard boiled eggs.

A couple of other plates sat near him, all empty but containing the remnants of food. From the way Leo was eating, it looked as though he was near starving, with no signs of slowing down.

Don shifted course away from the coffeemaker to approach Leo. Slowly taking a seat next to his brother, he asked, “Are you feeling okay, Leo?”

“Sure,” Leo said after swallowing a bite of food. “Why do you ask?”

“You’re stuffing your face, that’s why,” Raph said. “Ya’ never eat this much in one sitting.”

Mikey said, “And never before practice.”

Leo slowly lowered the bowl to the table and glanced at the empty dishes. From the puzzled look on his face, it was clear he hadn’t realized he was eating so much.

“It had to have been the dream I had last night,” Leo said.

“That must have been some dream,” Raph said. “What the hell happened in it to turn ya’ into an eating machine?”

Leo recounted the dream, telling his brothers where he had been and how the food had kept eluding him. The more he talked, the more uncomfortable his stomach began to feel.

“I woke up to an insatiable hunger,” Leo said. “Now I feel like I’ve got a bowling ball sitting in my stomach.”

“I’m going to guess that it probably wasn’t you in the dream, but rather a yokai whose perspective you were experiencing,” Don said. “You were still partially attached to them when you woke up.”

“That’s not creepy at all,” Mikey said.

“It gives us some clues about which creature we’ll be hunting for next,” Don said. “Hopefully enough so that Mr. H can pinpoint the exact one for us.”

“Maybe there’s some reports about weird stuff going on in Little Tokyo,” Mikey said. “That would give us even more clues.”

“Mikey, you check the news reports and I’ll look at the police blotters,” Don said. As an afterthought, he asked Leo, “What about practice? You aren’t going to want to be very active after eating so much or you’ll get sick.”

“Don’t forget that I’ve got a sprained ankle,” Mikey said.

“How could we forget when ya’ remind us about it every five minutes?” Raph asked.
Leo got up and began clearing the table. “I hadn’t planned to do anything physical today. What we really need to work on is the mental side of our training. That fight with the Tenome and now against the Reiki has reminded me of our need to get better control of our warder gifts. We have to be stronger and faster than the things we’re hunting.”

“April will be training in the dojo with Mr. H. Where do you want to go?” Don asked as he made his way over to the coffeepot.

“The sitting room,” Leo said. “It’s where we first manifested our combined powers.”

“It’s a relaxing space,” Don said. “You can feel that as soon as you walk in.”

“We’ll start after April arrives and goes downstairs to work with Mr. Hidesato,” Leo said.

“Good,” Mikey said, rubbing his hands together. “That gives the rest of us time to eat breakfast.”

“If Leo left us anything,” Raph said with a laugh.

They didn’t get a chance to converse with Mr. Hidesato about Leo’s dream because the man didn’t appear until just as April arrived. Dressed in a traditional keikogi uniform, Mr. Hidesato opened the door to her and commended April on her punctuality. After she greeted the turtles, Mr. Hidesato led the way down to the dojo.

With the pair downstairs, the turtles filed into the sitting room and closed the door. They moved the furniture off of the large throw rug and then sat cross legged on it, forming a circle.

“Focus on your symbols,” Leo instructed. “Try to find the magic that is infused into them. Once you’ve found it, concentrate on becoming one with it, on making it such a natural part of you that you can control it.”

“Like how you tell your arm to do something?” Mikey asked.

“Yes, exactly,” Leo said. “Accessing the power should be an almost unconscious act. It should be a part of you just like any other.”

“So when I need my sai, I don’t even think about it, I just grab them,” Raph said. “What you’re saying is we should be able to do the same kinda thing with our powers.”

“To a certain extent, yes,” Leo said. “I think it should be faster.”

“Faster than I can pull my sai?” Raph asked. “Yeah, right.”

“According to Efferent neuron transmission rates, it takes anywhere from fifteen to thirty milliseconds for the brain to complete the entire circuit from your motor to muscle spindle,” Don said. “Our reaction times might be a little faster because we’ve practiced our entire lives on developing them.”

“Just like we practiced to enhance our motor skill reaction times, we have to practice using these new powers,” Leo said. “It’s not just about being able to access them faster, it’s also about making the best use of them that we possibly can. It’s about understanding them and what they, what we, are capable of doing.”

“Does that include figuring out how to use them so they don’t hurt?” Mikey asked. “Cause I really don’t like that my arm burns whenever I’m using my built in homing beacon.”
“Then you need to find a way to control that,” Leo told him. “Change how the power manifests itself.”

“Become stronger as the magic grows,” Don mused. “I would like to be able to use my gifts without having them drain me so much.”

“I think that happens because you are having to put so much conscious effort into using your power,” Leo said.

“That makes sense for Donny, but using my power has the opposite effect from his,” Raph said.

“Don’t we know it,” Mikey said. “Explain that, Leo. I get pain, Don gets drained, and Raph gets hyper horny.”

“Maybe Raph’s magic is amplified by a surge of adrenalin,” Don said. “We all react to danger in different ways.”

“Yeah, Raph charges at it head on,” Mikey said. “It gets him all excited.”

“And you’d rather know what’s out there first before trying to tackle it,” Don said. “Could be that’s why you received the power to locate and make visible the danger.”

“Donny is the least aggressive of us, so maybe that’s why he’s got kind of passive powers,” Raph said. “If we’re using that line of thinking, then I can understand why Leo gets the prophetic dreams. It gives him the advantage of seeing and analyzing what’s about to happen so that he can plan for it.”

“The powers we’ve been given do seem to suit us individually,” Leo said. “Understanding them is good, controlling them is better. Let’s try an exercise now. We’ll all close our eyes and focus on connecting to the core of that power. Try to activate the magic.”

He waited until he saw his brothers close their eyes before shutting his own. Very slowly, Leo relaxed into himself, shutting down each of his five senses until only the sixth existed. This was the internal perception, the one that humans called extrasensory.

His heart rate slowed as did his breathing. Leo backed away from his physical form, his mind freeing itself from the harnesses that tethered his psyche to the small universe of his body. He had done this nearly every day of his young life, had perfected the technique under Master Splinter’s tutelage.

When he put his mind to it, Donatello was as adept at it as Leo. The trick for Don was in his letting go of the other things that filled his brain. It helped Don to have a specific task to focus on, such as searching within himself for the core of his warder magic.

Michelangelo too could be motivated to focus on his inner chi. His imagination, though one of his greatest strengths, could also be a detriment. But when he had control over it and didn’t allow it to run away with him, Mikey could exploit a depth of incredible talent.

Meditation came harder to Raph than the others. He was a being of the here and now, his mind geared to the present and very much to the physical aspect of himself. Master Splinter had worked tirelessly with him to help him find the mechanism that would allow Raph to direct his energies inward.

Each of the brothers employed the skills they had acquired during their lifelong training to slip
into a deeply meditative state.

Don was the first to locate the new energy that pulsed inside of him. He had originally comprehended that power when they had encountered the Hari onago and having once touched it, had maintained a general idea as to how he could reconnect.

Rather than trying to force it to work with him, Don let his psyche drift towards the shimmer produced by that internal power. Its warmth washed over him, bringing with it a sense of protection and safety. The symbols on his arm began to glow.

When Leo found the warder magic inside of him, it manifested to his mind’s eye as a set of images that flashed in front of him at incredible speeds. He did not try to slow the pictures or even to pin one down, he simply allowed the magic to play at the speed it chose. On his arm, the symbols started to slowly light up.

For Michelangelo, the core of his magic was a raging inferno, burning hungrily and with a force that was frightening. It flicked out at him and though Mike’s first instinct was to escape, he held his ground, chanting a calming mantra as the fire moved over his psyche. Becoming one with the flames meant that Mike felt no pain. The symbols on his arm flared to life.

As he drew closer to the warder magic, Raphael felt himself start to quiver as though jolted by an electrical shock. The power was energizing, making him want to flex and strike out at something, at anything just so he could feel the pure raw potency of his added strength. Instead he focused on his Master’s teachings, forcing himself not to react quickly. His symbols flickered and then flamed on.

With the external manifestation of their magic, the turtles almost as one opened their eyes.

“Expand the energy,” Leo instructed in a low, husky voice. “Reach out with it.”

Maintaining eye contact, they each drew on their gifts until first their arms and then their entire bodies were infused in a magical glow.

Leo could feel himself begin to strain to hold onto the external manifestation of his power. From the looks on his brother’s faces, they too were struggling.

“Connect,” Leo said. “Complete the circle.”

A moment passed and then Raph huffed in frustration. “We can’t, we gotta join hands like we did before.”

“No!” Leo exclaimed, his brow furrowed with determination. “No. We have to find a way to do this without touching each other.”

Raph growled, his lips curling back against the strain. Beads of sweat formed on Don’s brow and Mikey leaned forward, trying hard to push his power outward.

The magic sputtered, flickering the way an old lightbulb did. In seconds it winked out.

Blowing out a long sigh, Mikey fell to the side, breathing hard. Don leaned into his hands, resting his elbows on his legs to prop himself up.

Raph rubbed a hand over his face. “Shit. I couldn’t hold onto it. I think we gotta touch each other to complete the circle.”
Jumping to his feet, Leo slammed a fist into his palm. “We have to try harder! Out there, when we’re trying to capture these creatures, we aren’t always going to be close enough to touch. We’ll be in situations where it isn’t practical.”

“Even if it’s possible to do it, we aren’t going to perfect that skill in one sitting, Leo,” Don said, striving to strike a reasonable tone.

“Then we’ll keep working at it until we do,” Leo said. “I won’t accept that it can’t be done. We aren’t going to quit on this!”

Standing up, Raph approached his brother. “Chill, Leo. Nobody said they’re quitting.”

“I heard the word ‘can’t’ come out of your mouth,” Leo railed. “That’s not what we need to be telling ourselves. Do you want some creature to come between us? Do you want one of them to beat us, to . . . to . . . ?”

Grasping Leo by his forearms, Raph pulled him forward until they were flush against each other. His mouth found Leo’s, the kiss rough and forceful against the older turtle’s struggles.

When Leo’s began to relax, Raph broke the kiss, but maintained his hold on his brother.

“Stop imagining the worst case scenario,” Raph said. “We ain’t been at this long enough to be flawless at it and if Mr. H don’t fully understand how come we’ve got these powers, we sure as hell can’t be expected to master them yet. It’s new territory, Leo. I promise ya’ we’ll work hard and that none of us is gonna bite off more than we can handle until we do get better at this.”

“We all managed to bring our powers online and to hang onto that for a few minutes,” Don said. “That’s a big step in the right direction.”

Raph studied Leo’s expression and then said, “Something else happened last night, didn’t it? Something that the rest of us didn’t notice. What was it?”

Both Don and Mikey got up to join their brothers. They looked expectantly at Leo.

“When Mike was down,” Leo began. He stopped, swallowing some emotion, before speaking again. “I was on the tracks with Mike when the Reiki was being pulled into the coin. Just as he disappeared, I saw a giant bearded figure with a fearsome expression on his face staring down at us. He was just . . . floating there amongst the clouds. He was visible for only a second or two and then he vanished.”

“What do you think it was?” Don asked.

“Remember what Mr. Hidesato said about the oni being linked to the Great Lord Enma? I think that’s who I saw,” Leo said.

“Ya’ saw this Enma character watching us take down the Reiki? Peachy,” Raph said. “That means the monster trio knows all about that fight.”

“Maybe that’s why Mr. H joined the hunt,” Mikey said. “To draw their attention off of us.”

“Well, shit, if that’s the case then maybe I was judging him too harshly,” Raph said. “Be nice if he’d just tell us what’s going on in his head instead of making us guess.”

“If we’re not on the radar of those three monsters after last night, then we soon will be,” Leo said. “We need to be ready for them and right now our powers are all hit and miss.”
“You’re getting to be as bad as Mr. H about keeping stuff to yourself,” Raph griped as he released Leo. “How about ya’ make a pact with us not to do that anymore? Ya’ ought to know by now that we can handle it.”

“Yeah, Leo,” Mikey said in agreement. “Let us have some input on this stuff. I kinda think we have enough to worry about without worrying about you too.”

The sound of voices interrupted their discussion and the brothers left the sitting room to find that Mr. Hidesato and April were going into the office.

“How did the training session go?” Don asked, walking into the office behind them.

“Quite well,” Mr. Hidesato answered. “Miss O’Neil is an excellent student and already very well trained.”

“Master Splinter is a great teacher,” April said. “So is Master Hidesato. They both push a person really hard.”

“Only because we know what you are capable of,” Mr. Hidesato said politely.

“Since you’re here, Mr. H, Leo had another dream last night,” Don said. “We’re hoping it will tell you enough so you can point us at whichever yokai it might represent.”

“Indeed,” Mr. Hidesato said. He looked at Leo. “Please, describe in detail everything you experienced.”

Beginning with the scent of food, Leo walked Mr. Hidesato through the dream as it unfolded, telling him how the feeling of hunger lingered into his waking hours. Upon mention of the old man in Leo’s dream, Mr. Hidesato expression changed, though he said nothing as Leo finished his tale.

“You know what it is, don’t you?” Mikey asked when Leo stopped talking.

“The old man, did he appear more than once in the dream to tempt you?” Mr. Hidesato asked.

Leo thought back to the dream and then nodded. “He was there with soup once, and with a tray of cooked fish another time. He was the only other person to appear in the dream.”

“Is the old man the demon?” Raph asked.

“Has to be,” Mikey said. “Anyone who would take food away from a hungry turtle has to be evil.”

“Figures ya’ would say that,” Raph said.

“No, the old man is not the demon,” Mr. Hidesato said, surprising the group. “He is, in all probability, the one who attracted the yokai.”

“How so?” April asked.

“His behavior in the dream was of a greedy man, a man who is so frugal as to be considered by his family and acquaintances as something of a miser,” Mr. Hidesato said. “He is mean about money and would not give a hungry man food unless the man was able to pay.”

“So he could be a real person,” Don said. “Little Tokyo is full of food establishments.”

“How does his being greedy attract a yokai?” Raph asked.
“This particular yokai is used as a punishment,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Men like these draw upon themselves a curse brought about by wicked deeds. They often abandon family because they do not want to pay to support them. If they employ workers, they pay them very little and often place people into situations where they cannot leave.”

“I’m starting to feel less and less like this is a creature we should be hunting,” Raph said. “Maybe we should let it do its thing. What exactly is its thing?”

“It eats,” Mr. Hidesato said. “It is a Futakuchi onna, or the two-mouthed woman. They appear to be a regular woman, often slight of build and young of visage. These women seem to require no food, and are hard workers. Exactly the sort of woman to attract a stingy man.

“Once she is welcomed into his home, most commonly as his wife, he begins to discover that his food stocks are dwindling. The man will not be able to figure out why, because he never sees his wife eat.”

“But she is eating, right? Just not when he is around?” Mikey asked.

“On the back of her head is a second mouth, hidden by her hair, which she keeps tied up,” Mr. Hidesato said. “When she unties her hair, the second mouth is revealed, complete with ghastly full lips and sharp teeth. Her hair comes to life, reaching out with tentacle-like stalks to scoop up food and stuff it into the mouth. Her appetite is insatiable and she will eat as long as she is alone.”

“That’s why Leo was stuffing his face until we showed up,” Mikey said.

“I’m glad you guys didn’t decide to sleep in,” Leo said, grinning sheepishly.

“We had a game plan this morning for figuring out where the creature might be,” Don said. “Mikey is going to check news reports and I’m going to find out if any food thefts have been reported.”

“Wait a second,” April said, stopping them as they started moving. “I think I can help you find this yokai.”

“How’s that?” Raph asked.

“You guys know how much Master Splinter loves the sata andagi that I get from the little bakery on East 9th street, right? The woman who runs the bakery comes by my shop once a week with a delivery. She rents her space from the man who owns the restaurant next door; in fact, her shop, the restaurant, and an ethnic food store are all connected to each other. The man, who is her landlord, owns the entire block. She’s often told me that he is very mean with money.

“Anyway, she called me day before yesterday to tell me she couldn’t make her usual delivery because all of her finished product had disappeared. She said the restaurant and store had both lost food but that none of the establishments appeared to have been broken into.”

“This happened once?” Don asked.

“No,” April said. “She told me that it’s happened three times now. It’s the first time she’s lost everything. The man won’t spend money on a security system. All he did was to change the locks but that was no deterrent. If it continues, she’ll have to go out of business.”

“Okay, I take it back,” Raph said. “As long as this creature was only hurting the penny pincher I didn’t give a damn, but she’s hurting other hard working people too. Time to stuff her ass back into the coin.”
“Mrs. Ueda told me the man lives above his restaurant and she doesn’t understand how he
and his wife couldn’t have heard anything,” April said. “The wife is a recent fixture, they’ve only
been married a little over a week. Mrs. Ueda says it must have been an arranged marriage because
he’s too cheap to have courted anyone.”

“Wifey slips out of bed in the middle of the night to eat him out of house and home and he
doesn’t notice?” Mikey asked.

“It is a yokai, not a woman,” Mr. Hidesato said. “She has no doubt lulled him into a deep
sleep with her charms.”

“Now there’s a mental picture I could have lived without,” Raph said.

“I could probably tell Mrs. Ueda some story about a private detective service being willing to
catch the thief if she’d give me keys to her place, but then I’d have to try to explain the wife’s
disappearance afterwards,” April said.

“Don’t do that,” Don said. “We’ve never met a lock we couldn’t pick. It’d be better if it all
stays a complete mystery to your friend.”

“How do we catch the Futakuchi onna?” Leo asked.

“Trick her into eating the trap coin,” Mr. Hidesato said. “Onigiri are a particular favorite of
this creature’s.”

Mikey’s eyes lit up. “I’m at expert at making rice balls. I can make enough for her and for us
too.”

“What’s the name of Mrs. Ueda’s place?” Don asked.

April told him and added, “She closes shop around six, but the restaurant and store stay open
later.”

“I can look them up for exact times,” Don said. “We wouldn’t want to go in too early
anyway. We’ll have to give the Futakuchi onna time to work her magic on her husband and make
him sleepy.”

Raph groaned. “Again with the innuendo. Can we please agree not to talk about creatures in
this context?”

The rest of the group laughed and then April said that she had to get back to her own shop.
Mr. Hidesato walked her to the door and after seeing her out, he went upstairs.

“Think he’s trying to avoid us as much as possible today?” Raph asked.

“Oh, I forgot,” Don said. “After I checked on Mr. H last night, he asked me to thank you
guys for everything. He said he’s often remiss in expressing his gratitude and wants to get better at
it.”

“Aw Donny, are you and Mr. H getting chummy?” Mikey asked. “Does he appreciate your
light touch and gentle bedside manner?”

“Don’t you have some rice balls to make?” Don countered.

“Donny and Mr. H sitting in a tree,” Mikey sang as he danced out of the office.
Rolling his eyes, Don went into the war room, leaving Raph and Leo alone. Leo walked over to the shelves and began scanning the journal bindings.

“Ya’ looking for something in particular?” Raph asked.

“I vaguely recall seeing something about someone with two mouths in one of these journals,” Leo said.

“Maybe it’s a journal that Don looked at too,” Raph said. “He’ll remember right off.” Going to the entrance to the war room, Raph posed the question to Don and received an answer. Looking back at Leo, he said, “Don says fourth bookcase over, third row down. The binding is dark brown with a little tear on the bottom edge.”

“He’s better than any computer search engine,” Leo said, finding the journal right where Don said it would be.

He took a seat on the couch and Raph sat next to him. “Maybe we should just have Don read all of these journals instead of trying scan them. He’d access the info a lot quicker.”

“I think the point of his program is to leave a searchable record for future generations of warders,” Leo murmured, flipping through the journal until he found the notation he was looking for.

Holding the book so that Raph could also see the pages, they read about the Futakuchi onna together. The only new information it contained was a warning that it was not wise to try to get between the creature and its food.

“That’s it?” Raph asked. “Two pages full of flowery language and all it says is what not to do. Nothing about what would happen if ya’ did.”

“I suppose recording their exploits in these journals might have been something of a chore,” Leo said.

“If it was that big a pain, why didn’t they just get to the point? I mean, I ain’t all that thrilled with writing a damn diary either, but I can manage to get the key facts down on paper,” Raph said.

Leo closed the journal and grinned at his brother. “Is that so? When is the last time you wrote in your journal?”

“Been a few days,” Raph admitted. “It’s hard to keep up with the journal with all the other stuff going on.”

“Then now seems like a good time to do some writing,” Leo said, getting up. “I’ll grab both of our journals and we can keep busy catching them up to date.”

Raph grumbled something under his breath about Leo’s idea of fun as his brother left the room. Then he remembered that Leo had told him to invite Casey over to watch Thursday night football.

He was still talking to Casey on the phone when Leo returned. The older turtle took a seat at the desk and began writing in his journal while Raph finished his call. Then Raph pulled a chair up to the opposite side of the desk and got to work as well.

The remainder of the day passed quietly enough. Mr. Hidesato had come down to assist Mikey with preparing the onigiri, making certain to insert the proper trap coin into one of them. When they finished the job and packed up the rice balls for transport, the pair began making dinner.
Casey arrived as they were setting the table and joined them for the meal. At table, Mr. Hidesato did not speak much, instead listening to the banter between the four brothers and their guest. He appeared at ease, smiling with good humor at their antics. Mikey seemed to feed off of having an appreciative audience, and was at his most entertaining.

Mr. Hidesato chased the group away when it came time to clean up, telling them he would handle it himself. That was Raph’s cue to fire up the flat screen television in the media room and put the game on.

Donatello had learned that the restaurant closed at eleven thirty. With cleanup and morning prep, he figured that the last employee would leave around one a.m. Leo said that they would leave the house at one thirty in the morning and go in through the bakery’s back door.

After the first half of the game ended, Don excused himself, saying that he wanted to spend some time working on his computer. Leo went with him to the office in order to continue scanning journals.

At the time appointed for them to leave they found that Casey had fallen asleep in one of the reclining seats, saving the brothers from arguing him out of going with them. Mikey grabbed the container of rice balls and the turtles made the drive to the East Village in the sedan, which Mr. Hidesato had thoughtfully parked at the curb. With all of the restaurants and other eateries closed, the street was quiet.

Because the Rolls was so conspicuous, Don left it parked in an alleyway a few blocks from their destination. Sticking to the shadows, the foursome made the trek to the back of the bakery without being seen, though they had to twice hide from police patrols.

Scanning the area around the bakery’s back door, Don whispered, “Looks like April was right about there being no security system.”

“Guess the owner figures bitching to the police to up their patrols is gonna get him enough security,” Raph said as he worked the lock.

“None of that will do him any good when the problem is coming from inside the place,” Mikey said.

When the lock clicked back, Leo held up a finger to indicate that his brothers should wait where they were. He slipped inside the bakery and did a quick sweep, determining that all three of the connected establishments were empty.

Returning to the back door, Leo signaled for his brothers to come inside. Mikey took a quick look around and then went over to the main display case. Taking an empty tray from one of the shelves, Mikey began arranging the rice balls onto it.

He was nearly finished when he heard the sound of footsteps drawing near. Looking over at his brothers, he saw Leo gesturing at him to hide.

Mikey dumped out the remainder of the rice balls, leaving the tray atop the display case. Taking the empty plastic container with him, he darted into hiding near Leo.

If he had been a second slower, he would have been discovered. A petite young woman glided through the entryway between the restaurant and the bakery, moving towards the display case without turning on any lights.

She wore a full length dressing gown and her thick, black hair was pulled up into a bun at the
back of her head. As she neared the food, she reached up to remove the clips that held her hair in place.

When her hair was released, it rose into rope like tentacles, each strand whipping around in the air. On the back of her skull was a grotesquely huge mouth filled with tiny sharp teeth.

The tentacles immediately began to snag the rice balls, stuffing them into the second mouth so that the yokai could gorge itself. As food entered the mouth, the fat lips would smack and slurp, small bits of food and spittle forming a nasty ring of detritus on the creature’s slender shoulders.

It was a disgusting scene, one that had the turtles wishing the creature would hurry up and swallow the trap coin. They could do nothing but wait, not daring to move lest she suddenly stop her frenzied eating.

In his hurry to hide, Mikey had left the tray sitting right on the edge of the display case. Unfortunately, as one of the tentacles grabbed for a rice ball, it clipped the side of the tray. Wide eyed, Mikey watched the tray teeter precariously, and then slide off the case.

The tray hit the ground with a clatter, sending rice balls in all directions. Mikey’s reaction was pure reflex; he started forward.

A hand shot out of the darkness and caught Mikey’s arm, pulling him to a stop before he could be seen. The Futakuchi onna must have heard something, because it suddenly froze.

Maintaining an iron grip on Mikey’s arm, Leo put a finger to his lips. The four turtles were like statues, each of them barely breathing as they watched the yokai look around the room.

A full two minutes passed before the creature began to move again. Tentacles of hair swept along the floor, retrieving and eating the rice balls that had fallen.

Mikey was starting to wonder if he’d somehow forgotten to bring the rice ball containing the trap coin with him when the Futakuchi onna began to choke.

Both of the creature’s mouths were wide open, a raspy hacking noise coming from deep inside its throat. It began to spin, bumping into the display case and then into a grouping of small tables and chairs. Its hair tentacles were thrashing around in the air as the creature clutched at its neck, stumbling and then falling to its knees.

The hideous second mouth opened impossibly wide, hanging that way for a second before the corners split. Its upper lip slid back over the top of the Futakuchi onna’s head, while the bottom lip slipped down the back of its neck.

In a slow motion parody of eating, the creature began to consume itself. The mouth continued to stretch, swallowing the upper half of the yokai’s body and then working down until it had completely eaten itself.

The trap coin lay on the floor, the yokai’s fat lips still sticking out of its center as they smacked at the empty air. Then they too were sucked into the coin.

Letting go of Mikey’s arm, Leo took the wax tool from his belt and dashed out of hiding to snatch up the coin. While he sealed the yokai inside of it, his brothers straightened up the bakery.

When Leo held up the coin, Don let out a sigh of relief. “I don’t want to jinx anything, but that was the easiest catch by far.”
“What’s that thing ya’ always say about the law of averages, Donny?” Raph asked rhetorically. “I figure we were owed one.”

“Let’s get out of here before the miser comes downstairs looking for his wife,” Leo said.

As they moved towards the back door, Raph started to laugh. “Hey, anybody want to grab a late night snack?”

“So not funny, Raph,” Mikey said.

Behind them, unseen by the turtles, a pair of glittering dark eyes hung in midair, watching their departure.

End Futakuchi onna

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