

**Jaxon Hanawa, Youkai Detective**

**Reforged**

**M. Scott Teets**

It was raining sheets in Kyoto and I had just completed a particularly grueling case. There hadn't been case for a while so I decided to kick back with a book and a warmed bottle of Nabeshima. As I scanned the shelf before me with my fingertips, I found one that I hadn't read since I was seven. I looked over to companion Bakurai. He and I have been friends for a long time.

"How about this one," I asked him.

*You were seven when you read that one, he reminded me, it gave you wild nightmares. They gave me indigestion.*

"So a no then, old friend?"

*What do you think, kiddo?*

I got Bakurai when I was three. I was born a hafu, a half Japanese. Back then we weren't treated very well. I was the son of an American father and a Japanese mother. My eyes were a pale grey blue. That's what marked me. I had an uncle that was a purist. He saw me as a monster, an abomination. When I was three, my parents both had to work. One day they had left me with my uncle. He beat me to a pulp, then left me out in the rain to die. I hadn't been out there long when a much older boy came along.

"Hey little one," he asked, "who left you out here?"

All I could do was cough and whimper with pain. He opened my blankets and sighed as he rubbed my arms and legs. My body was cold, but ai couldn't feel it above the pain.

"This won't do you the justice," he said, "I am Takeshi Tensho, come on now; I'll take you to my house where you you can be warm and safe."

My body still remembers his hands enveloping it to pick me up. He grunted a little as he did. I smiled and went to sleep on his soft shoulder. He took me home to his father, Amaterasa Tensho.

"What did you bring home this time," I heard his voice ask, barely awake.

"Not a what, a little who?"

Not too far away I heard a smaller voice, a higher one. It was as kind as the boy's. It came over to look at me.

"Oh, you poor dear. My brother and I will take splendid care of you."

I smiled and went back to sleep. They did take care of my body, but my mind was a mess. I had nightmares nearly every night. One night, I think I was about five, fate had dealt me the nightmare I thought I'd never forget. My new sister had walked out to get some air and I think to pray for me. She'd left the door open. That's when a little baku strolled in and took a place on my back.

*I could here you from heaven, it said, let's see about these nightmares of yours. If I am hungry enough I can take them all.*

He crawled up my back to my head and placed his trunk by my head. It felt like soft leather and his body like a fur blanket. From that time forward I felt safe. When I was seven I was shown how to make a contract with a Youkai and that's when we became friends forever. I am Jaxon Hanawa, and I am a Youkai detective.

My job, as the Youkai Council has decreed it to be is to seek out strange happenings and determine if they are caused by Youkai, or "Strange Spirits." They can be ghosts, Demons, or Benevolent Spirits like Ki-Rin.

My memories were interrupted by the harsh, high ring of the telephone on my desk. The voice on the other side sounded frantic as it introduced itself. It was the principle of Sagano High School, Akemi Noriyama.

"Jaxon Hanawa," I introduced, "Youkai Detective, how may I help you."

"Mr. Hanawa, I am Akemi Noriyama. I am the Principal of Sagano High School. The last three weeks have been horrible for the school. We've lost three girls from our senior class in the weeks before graduation."

"What do you think is going on?"

"I don't know, but they did say that the energy around them had felt heavy."

"Heavy? In what way?"

"They said it felt as if someone was stepping on their chests and it got really cold too."

I needed more information so I dug a little deeper. There was an ominous pause on her side of the line. Something had gone on, something terrible. I had to find out what.

"What do you think is taking their lives?"

Her breathing had become uneven and shaky. She had her suspicions. I could feel them.

"The police couldn't decide, but they made one thing clear," She fearfully answered.

"What's that?"

"They gave me a card and told me I should consult you."

This told me that the police detectives thought this might be a Youkai or a Yurei, a vengeful spirit. There was only one thing I could tell her.

"Look through your files, see if there were any confrontations between these girls and another one. If there were than we have our culprit."

"Alright, I'll look. We do have one more student left. She'd been feeling that cold, heavy air lately."

"Listen, let's not discuss it over the phone. How about six o'clock at Takakura Nijo?"

"I'll look through the files and meet you there."

We both hung up as I looked into the now misty night. My reading time would have to wait. All parts of me knew what this was. It was an Onryo and I had to find out what girl might have become one. I owed it to all five girls.

"Well, Bakurai," I said, "so much for a relaxing evening."

*Maybe after this case, Jaxon,* he offered.

"Hmm, maybe," I said, doubtful."

Looking at myself, I saw that I needed a bath and a change of clothes. This suit had had it, and it was my best one too. As I looked through my closet, I found my second best. It was grey and fit comfortably. I also took my sword belt as I knew I might need Wisteria Rain for this one. It was a good purification that I would need later. Gathering my fresh clothes, Bakurai and Wisteria Rain I left for the onsen. Time was of the essence so I drove my Mitsubishi Model A.

Once I was clean, I donned my new clothing and headed out for Takakura Nijo. My heart raced a little as I passed the imperial palace. I had lived in Kyoto most of my life, but never gone there, never taken a tour. *Maybe after the case, maybe.*

Right now my focus had to be on this last young girl. She might not deserve saving, but still it was an obligation. Besides, I could always make her bait for the onryo for her actions. *Maybe it would further her repentance.*

I pulled up to Takakura and gathered my two partners, looking around as I emerged from the car. She wasn't there yet.

Upon entry I was greeted by Akira Takeshi, the owner's son one of many people who knew me by name.

"Good evening, Mr. Hanawa," He said, "What can I get for you today?"

"Two specials and a warm bottle of sake."

"Will that be your usual sake, sir?"

"No, the next one up on your list."

The boy smiled. It was a smile that told me he thought I was on a date. Technically I was, but not like his younger mind was thinking.

"With a lady tonight?"

Before he could say anything more, he was interrupted by another familiar voice. It was his father Yoshihiro Takeshi. When I looked back, he was wagging his head.

"Akira, stop bothering the man and seat him, will you?"

"Sorry, father it's just...he's with a lady tonight."

"It's probably business, you know that?"

"I know, but I can hope for him can't I?"

He was right. He could hope for that for all the good it would do him, which wasn't much because I just wasn't ready to settle down yet. I am twice his thirteen years, but he treated me like family, like the lonely, distant uncle that always gets worried about. Still, I had to at least smile at their interaction.

"I do need one more thing."

"Anything sir."

"Two cans of mango juice for my friend."

"of course."

Akira seated me at my usual table by the television which was playing Ghost in the Shell. I watched for a few moments until Miss Noriyama walked in the door. Then time seemed to stop. She was just that beautiful. Everything about her was just right, nothing was out of place. Nothing was too big or too small. As soon as she sat down across from me, Akira and Yoshi came with our meal. She poured a cup of sake and took a sip.

"You can tell a lot about a man by the sake he drinks and how he takes it. That's what my father used to say," she said.

She intrigued me, but I was here on business. Anything else would have to wait for another time. As soon as our bowls were placed I took my first sip. She handed me five files the first one was for a girl named Brittany Kamakura. It surprised me as she began the introductions.

"Brittany Kamakura," she began, "She was new last year. She was well liked and accepted by most, but the four girls made her life hell."

"I can see why," I told her. She had a look really close to mine, so close that if my parents had been permitted to have a larger family, she would have been my youngest sibling. She was gorgeous too, "Think there was some jealousy going on here?"

"It's always possible Mr. Hanawa," she replied, "of the four girls, only the bottom file is still living."

"I can relate."

I looked through all of the files. Each girl had been brought to the principal's office for bullying the hafu girl. I could do nothing but release a sigh of regret for Brittany. My next thought slipped out of my mouth before I could stop it.

"Some people just can't accept others for who they are inside or what they could become. It's a sad thing."

"It truly is," she agreed pulling some noodles from her bowl.

Now I knew that the only thing I could do was to look at the last girl in the morgue, then go talk to the last girl on the list, Aika Komenichi. We finished our meal and we shook hands and she gave me a fat envelope. The parents were serious, even if they didn't believe in what I do for a living.

"Thank you for dinner," she said.

"The pleasure was mine," I returned.

We walked out together and bid final good-bye's. I knew what my next stop was. Making sure of what I was dealing with made seeing the coroner even more important than usual. The air felt heavy and a little chill for May as I pulled up to the city building. At least one spirit was present here. Fortunately, none of them were Brittany. However, they all needed proper burial ceremony. There wasn't time for that just now. My old friend Kai Watanabe greeted me as I crossed the examining room floor.

"Jaxon," he exclaimed, "How good it is to see you. Got your text. You want to see the last Sagano girl to be attacked, right?"



"That's right."

Kai took me to locker number 34 and pulled her out. When he pulled the cover away from her face, her skin was stark white. I ran my hand through her aura. It almost wasn't there. Her spirit was barely hanging on.

"Mariko," I told her, "it is time to go now. You ought not stay here. Go become Kami."

The spirit rose from its shell. It had brightened already. She looked at me with a half-smile; self-disappointed. Some of the heaviness lifted.

"Is there another of these girls here?" I asked Kai.

"Just one more. Her family hasn't come for her either."

"Shame."

"I think that's what it is. They have to get over it before they can claim her."

With a sigh of both relief and needing to get back on the path to a solution, we shook hands and I left. I had to get to Aika Komenichi, before Brittany did. Her Address was in the better part of Nagakyo Ward. They lived just above the imperial palace. As soon as I pulled up, the air got cold and heavy.

I got into my trunk and grabbed some candles from my toolbox along with some sage bundles which I lit and dropped every few feet as I approached the house. Once at the door I lit candles, placing them on either side of the front door. If Brittany was here I would know it by the candle I placed on the windowsill.

Taking a breath I knocked on the door. An unsurprised Aika opened it.

"Who are you?" she asked, "Are you from the police?"

"No, I'm not," I told her presenting my card, "I'm a Youkai Detective."

It popped into her head right away. She knew why I'd come. Still, she asked anyway, "Is this about Brittany?" I nodded and sighed as she inspected her walkup, "Daddy's not going to be pleased you know."

"I know, but I think he'll make an allowance if it's to keep you safe."

She smiled and let me in, sat me down and brought tea for s to drink. She was still a little frightened, but I guess she felt a little more secure with me there. I told her I could protect her, but my sword needed to be re forged. There would be no getting out of this unless it was. I pulled out my phone and made a quick call to Tensho-san.

"Tensho here," he answered, "is that you Jaxon?"

"Yeah, it's me and I have a problem."

"Let me guess, your sword needs to be reforged? Well, it about time the old girl is almost three times your age, little one?"

"I know."

"Alright, how long do we have?"

"Half a day, day at the outside."

"Meet me at Fushimi-Taisho in an hour. I'll call ahead and have them prepare the steel. Is there anything else you need?"

"A barrel of wisteria water for quenching the steel and a clear place to take my charge."

"Will do. See you soon, little one."

"And could you stop calling me that. Haven't been that little in a long time."

"But your spirit still projects that little boy for me."

"Understood, not going to happen until you blissfully pass on."

"Right."

As soon as I hung up the candle in the window blew out. There was no forecast for wind tonight so I knew what it was. It was a challenge from Brittany; one I had to take but couldn't yet. I told Aika to leave her father a note telling him where he could find us and why. Wisteria Rain drawn, I slowly opened the door, I took Aika by the hand.

"Come now, I have her trapped here for a while. We can make it to my car."

She gripped my hand tightly. It felt like a vice crushing the bones with fear. Her fear was justified. Now she was bait for a vengeful spirit that used to be a fellow student. I could also feel the regret of her part of what had been done to this girl. She was ready to repent for it whatever it took. We made it half-way to the car before Brittany attacked.

Every stroke for Aika was met with a defensive slash of Wisteria Rain. Every hit was like acid to her spiritual form. It made her angry. But that was a risk I had to take to get Aika to my car and get out of there.

When we arrived at the shrine, priests ushered us to the forging area below it. Tensho met us and we sat down to receive the new blessed steel and they took Wisteria Rain to cleanse its steel for the journey of becoming new again. The forge and the water were waiting as they brought just the blade to me. We would handle the forging of the new blade. The forge priests would handle the casting and forging of the other parts of new Wisteria Rain.

"Well kiddo," Tensho said as four priests joined us, "Let's get to work. We only have so much time before this creature comes to claim its final victim."

"Let's hope it doesn't have to. I'd rather cleanse her and send her to the Kami realm."

"Indeed."

The priests prepared her current steel for welding into the new blessed steel. She was heated, folded, pounded and quenched with wisteria water and blessed until she reached one thousand folds. With five people beating, it took much less time for Wisteria Rain's new blade to form. Now she was ready for her new hamon.

I made it a wave this time, heated her and quenched a final time with a powerful prayer. All of the other parts came to us as the blade was completed.

She was more powerful than before. Her power surged through me as I placed her into her new clothes. Habaki, tsuba, tsuka. They had already wrapped the tsuka and placed everything on it. They presented me with her saya. It was light violet with a white sageo. All that was left was to re-assert her name with the spell that had first created her. I could still remember the old spell. Now however, it would need a change. Nothing big, a purification intent. As I drew her from her saya, felt that energy again. She was new and brimming with power. I went through all of the kata I could remember from my younger days, which was pretty much all of them. I allowed my ki to flow through her blade and connect with her. She sent me some back as if to say, *save a little of that, partner. You're going to need it for the spell later.* I took a deep, final cleansing breath and released it as I slid her back into the saya.

I called Aika to my side, "Stay with me," I told her. She nodded to signify that she would. The clearing I needed was five minutes away. I would have preferred to take her further away, to give us more time, but this was best at the time. When we arrived at the circular stand of cypress trees, Aika took a seat on a nearby fallen tree. There were already some candles here set on small stone altars. All I had to do was light them, which I did.

"Alright Aika, you ready?"

"Yes, Mr. Hanawa. I have to do this. No I want to do it."

I gave her a smiling nod. She was going to do whatever it took to make this right. She was such honorable ghost bait. I took a breath and gently drew Wisteria Rain again.

Just before dawn all of the candles went out. The air got cooler, the energy heavier. Brittany was here and she wasn't pleased, but I didn't care. I wasn't here to let this girl die over a spirit's rage. I was here to prevent that and purify the spirit, turn it to something as close to kami as possible. As soon as kisasi left saya there she was with her flaming black aura. A surge from Wisteria Rain told me she was ready to defend every living spirit present. As soon as I drew my first breath Brittany lunged at me. I took another breath and parried closer to Aika.

"You don't want to do this," I told her trying to keep a determined calm about me.

"What do you know of it?" She growled.

"Take a good look at me. I'm just like you, a Hafu. A Hafu that by all rights would be dead if not for kindness."

She came and inspected me closer. I could feel anger's energy seething in her. I uttered a warding Kotodama and she started to pull away, but it wasn't to halt her desire to kill Aika. She came after her again, bony fingers ready to strike. Rain and I were also ready as Brittany tried again. For some reason this angered her more. Was she ignored school official before the current principal? I knew the answer to that. It was a part of her truth. She reached out toward Aika with what would have been a killing blow. My body just reacted, blocking her. That began the duel between she and I that went on for several minutes. We were both losing energy rapidly. She lunged at me with both of her claws. Both missed. With my breaths now quick and uneven, it was now or never.

Pushing a final burst of both vital energy and reiki though Wisteria Rain, I pushed myself into the canopy and threw her to a spot just below Brittany's feet and began the purification Kotodama spell.

"Stop, or I'll end you," She called out. I paid her no mind. She was already trapped by the sage that had been hung in the tree earlier. The priests tried to keep this place as pure as possible. It had already been lit.

"Thank you, guys," I muttered to myself.

"You won't escape me!"

"Won't have to! Just settle and become kami-like, Hmm."

I took a few final breaths to relax for the spell. Rain had been right. This was taking a great deal of energy from me. I had to be careful not use too much. I know what that's like. The spell came rushing back to me as I filled it with fresh intent. My body descended to the earth quickly as the sweet smelling, purple rain began to fall. I moved over to sit with Aika.

"Are you okay, Mr. Hanawa," she asked.

"I'm fine," I replied, "Just need to let my body drink in some of the wisteria rain."

We both watched as Brittany's spiritual aura began to change. All of the anger, sadness and resentment was being washed away. Her spirit was becoming what it was truly meant to be. She was a beautiful female spirit with a pure white aura now. She floated over to Aika and I left for a moment so they could talk and Aika's penance could end well.

"Brittany, I am so sorry," I heard her say. I think she meant it too. I let them talk choosing meditation to regather my strength through the earth.

When she was ready, Britanny came to me. Her tirade was over. She was ready to be released into the middle world. I went over to my bag and took out her file.

"Are you ready to go and wait to be kami?" I asked her.

"Yes, I am. Please send me."

I took out my lighter and performed her death ceremony as perfectly as I could. She waved good-bye to us as heaven opened up to receive her into the middle world. In the distance I could see two men traversing the trail. They were Tensho-san and Aika's father. He had a slight look of double disappointment on his face.

"I am grateful to you for saving my daughter and helping her repent for her actions."

"I suspect she was already in the process," I told him, "don't be too hard in her. She'll probably have seriously bad dreams for a while."

"I suppose you would know," he said looking over at Tensh-san's passenger, "She's been punished enough. She was ghost bait after all."

We all shared a laugh about it. Mr. Komenichi shook my hand and walked the path back to the shrine, talking the whole way. Aika turned her head back to me. There was a smile on her face as she waved at me. As they continued, I could hear her father



tell her, "Enough of leaving you alone at home. I'm making more time for you, starting now."

I gathered Wisteria Rain and re-sheathing her placed an arm around the father fate had given me when my real one was taken. I think I appreciate him more now. There were two things that were certain. First, book and Sake were waiting for me back home. Second, I had a lot to thank all of the gods for. When I returned there was a stack of mail on my window table. At the top, were two letters. One was from the Youkai Council, the other from Kotodama Junior High School. They both seemed to howl at me to read them. It was too bad, they would have to wait as my body needed an onsen, some warm sake and a long rest. Tomorrow will be better. Tomorrow.