

“WHAT’s up, Rei?” said Akari as Rei walked into the village. “You look tired.”

“Yeah, I am,” said Rei. “I’ve been out for days looking for wisps!”

“Wisps?” said Akari.

“You know Vessa?” said Rei. “Lives over there somewhere?” He gestured vaguely. “She wants me to find all of them – there’s about a hundred out there, though!” He sighed.

“What’s she going to do when you find them all?” said Akari.

Rei shook his head. “At this point, I don’t want to know. Some of the Survey Corps have said things about a ghost Pokémon, though. I guess I’ll see, when I finally find them all!”

“Bet you want some mochi after that,” Akari suggested.

“Do I,” Rei agreed.

The mochi Beni served them had an unusual taste. “New recipe?” Akari asked after a few bites.

“Well, the nights are drawing in,” said Beni. “I thought I should bring out my autumn speciality.”

“It tastes a bit weird,” Rei couldn’t help saying.

Beni chuckled. “I suppose so. But it is the time of year.”

“The time of year for what?” said Akari, but Beni just chuckled again and walked away.

“I think it’s pumpkin,” said Rei, once he had finished.

“Hmm?” said Akari.

“Pumpkin mochi.”

“Oh,” said Akari, “right. Yeah, it tasted a bit funny, didn’t it? I think I prefer the normal kind.” She stretched. “Puts me in the mood for a battle, though. What do you say?”

“Sure,” said Rei.

He beat Akari quite easily, but she didn’t seem disappointed. “You use a lot of Ghost types, huh?” she remarked afterwards.

Rei considered. “I guess.” He’d had the Dusclops for a while, and two of the other Ghost types he had caught recently had some strong moves, so it had made sense to add them to the team. And a few of the others had Ghost-type moves as well, he realised. His Vulpix knew Shadow Ball. That seemed odd.

“I think there’s just a lot of them around,” he suggested. “Lots of people seem to want me to ... I mean, you know Dagero at the photo place? He wants me to find a Pokémon for him, and he doesn’t know what it is, but I’m pretty sure it’s a Duskull.”

“And your wisp thing,” Akari pointed out.

“Yeah,” said Rei. “I hadn’t thought about it before, but ... you’re right. Why are there so many ghost Pokémon around?”

“I bet the professor knows,” said Akari. “Let’s find him!”

Laventon was unsurprised to hear the story. “Well, it’s that time of year,” he said sagely. “They do say the ghost Pokémon are very active in the autumn. But they’ll all be gathering in a few nights’ time, won’t they?”

“Will they?” said Akari.

“Oh yes,” said Laventon. “Once a year, the ghost Pokémon gather on the practice field to honour the spirits. It’s just two nights away. It sounds like they’ve taken a liking to you, Rei – you could probably go along and see it. I’d love to go myself, but I don’t think I’ve won their trust just yet.”

“It sounds a bit scary,” said Rei.

“Well,” said Laventon, “maybe you could take Akari with you? She’s not scared of anything, are you, my girl?”

“Course not!” said Akari. “It sounds great!”

Two nights later, there was a knock on Rei’s door.

“You didn’t forget, did you?” said Akari. “The ghost Pokémon are gathering tonight. Beni said we could take some of his pumpkin mochi to give them as a gift, if they’re interested. Are you ready?”

“Do you think I should bring my Pokémon?” said Rei.

“Maybe,” said Akari. “The ghost ones, anyway. Didn’t you say you have a few?”

Rei gathered up the Poké Balls and followed Akari outside. It was cold; there was a full moon. The two of them walked out to the practice field – even Akari was quiet. And once they arrived at the field, they noticed a circle of shadowy figures in the centre.

Rei could feel the Poké Balls shaking. The ghost Pokémon wanted to be let out. It seemed a bad idea to refuse. They dashed forward into the circle; within moments, he was un-

able to distinguish them from the general vague, dark mass of Pokémon that had congregated there.

Getting closer to the circle seemed not to make it any easier to pick out any individual Pokémon. “Pumpkin mochi?” said Akari, holding up her package. Her voice seemed unusually timid. None of the Pokémon reached out to take the mochi, but within moments, it was gone.

“See,” Akari whispered, “they do like it.”

They watched as the ghost Pokémon conducted their strange ritual. The consistency of the air seemed to change, thickening and turning a little blue at one moment, a little pink the next. Rei looked towards the village and found that it somehow seemed further away than usual. The Pokémon were chanting something, even though many of them usually made no noise. It sounded almost like human language, but the individual words were indistinguishable.

Vague shapes of Pokémon materialised in the centre of the circle, as if drawn in smoke. Some looked like a few of the ghost Pokémon Rei had encountered, while others were unfamiliar. He wondered if he should have brought his Pokédex, but there would have been no conclusive information to record anyway. It was getting colder. He could see his breath in front of him, and Akari’s pale face and wide eyes watching the apparitions. It sounded as if there was music playing, but there were no instruments to perform it.

“Rei,” Akari whispered, “I’m scared!”

She looked it. “Laventon said you didn’t get scared,” Rei reminded her.

“Not usually,” she replied.

A little later, he felt something snatch at his hand: it was her. She held on tightly, screwing her eyes shut. Rei wondered why he wasn’t more scared himself, but, he supposed, he was the one who seemed to be favoured by the ghost Pokémon. Some of these Pokémon belonged to him, after all. He felt instinctively that they would protect him.

The chanting was increasing in volume; the apparitions were growing larger and even less distinct. It was difficult to see very much of anything, just the strange, smoky air, sometimes tinted blue, sometimes pink – the words *almighty Sinnoh* briefly drifted into Rei’s mind. But even though everything was growing more intense, he was starting to feel strangely sleepy. He could feel his eyes close; the cold air seemed to be lifting, replaced by something warm and hypnotic. Once or twice he almost lost consciousness, jerking himself awake as he began to pitch forward into the grass, and then the third time, it happened for real.

He woke at dawn, gradually opening his eyes as he tried to understand what was happening. Akari’s hand was still in his own; she looked much less scared now that she was asleep. The air was silent, and there was no sign of the effects of the ghostly ritual.

Rei tugged his hand out of Akari’s and sat up. His Poké

Balls lay beside them; he weighed them slowly in his hands. The ghost Pokémon were inside, he could tell. The full moon was still visible near the horizon in the brightening sky.

Akari woke up then. “Oh, wow,” she said.

“Are you OK?” Rei asked her.

“As OK as anyone would be, after sleeping on the ground all night,” she said.

“You were scared,” Rei reminded her.

She pulled a face. “I guess. Well, we’re fine, aren’t we? That was actually really cool! I’m going to tell Beni the Pokémon really liked his mochi.” She stood up and hurried towards the village gate.

Rei reached for his Poké Balls and tucked them into his belt, and then he followed Akari, more slowly. Laventon would want to hear about this, he was sure – but he would do his best not to mention the fact that Akari had been scared for once. He knew she would appreciate that.