

## The Lighthouse of New Ninjago

The night over New Ninjago was calm in that special way that makes the city feel like it's holding its breath-streetlights glowing like tiny moons, rooftops cooling after a busy day, and quiet trains humming in the distance like lullabies made of steel. In the Monastery, the ninjas had gathered in the common room with blankets, tea, and the kind of tired smiles you only earn after a long day of training and helping people. The windows were slightly open, letting in a soft breeze and the faraway sound of waves. Master Wu placed a kettle down gently, as if even the sound of metal touching wood might disturb the peace. "Tonight," Master Wu said, eyes warm, "we rest. And we listen." Kai flopped onto a cushion like it had personally insulted him earlier. "I'm listening," he declared, "to my muscles complaining." Jay pulled a blanket over his head, then peeked out dramatically. "My muscles aren't complaining," he said, "they're composing a tragic poem." Nya nudged him with her foot. "Then tell them to rhyme quietly." Zane sat neatly with a mug held in both hands, posture perfect, voice gentle. "A peaceful evening is statistically beneficial for team recovery," he said. Lloyd smiled, but there was a small storm behind his eyes-one that hadn't decided whether to rain. He kept glancing toward the window. Master Wu noticed, because he always noticed. "Lloyd," Wu said softly, "your thoughts are louder than Kai's landing on the cushions." Kai gasped. "That is unfair. I land with style." Lloyd rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm trying to relax," he admitted. "But... the city feels too quiet. Like it's waiting for something." "Maybe it's waiting for bedtime," Jay said, attempting bravery through humor. "Bedtime is terrifying. You close your eyes and suddenly it's morning. Time travel!" Nya raised an eyebrow. "That's called sleeping, Jay." Before Jay could argue that sleeping was suspicious, a low tone rolled across the room-deep, steady, and unfamiliar. It wasn't thunder. It wasn't wind. It was a signal. A long note. A pause. Then another note. Zane's eyes focused, listening like a tuning fork. "That pattern originates from the bay," he said. "Near the lighthouse." Lloyd stood up slowly, as if his body had already decided what to do before his mind could protest. "The lighthouse only uses that tone for emergencies." Kai's grin snapped on like a flame. "Finally. Something interesting." Master Wu lifted one finger. "No." Kai froze. "No... going?" "No... rushing," Wu corrected. "If the lighthouse is calling, we go with calm minds and careful steps." Nya was already tying her hair back. "Calm steps. Got it." Jay pointed to himself. "I am the calmest stepper you know." "You once tripped over a shadow," Nya reminded him. They moved through the city without sirens, without drama-just quiet speed, like guardians who didn't need applause. The streets were mostly empty, but not completely. A few people stood outside, looking toward the bay, faces tilted up as if trying to understand the sound. A small child clutched a parent's hand near a corner shop. "Is it a monster?" the child asked. Lloyd crouched to the child's height. His voice was steady, soft. "It's not a monster," he promised. "It's a signal asking for help. We're going to make sure everything is okay." The child's eyes widened. "Are you really ninjas?" Jay leaned in with a wink. "Absolutely. And we are extremely responsible." Nya elbowed him lightly. "We're going. Stay close to home, okay?" The parent nodded, relief mixing with worry. "Thank you." When they reached the bay, the lighthouse stood tall against the dark-its beam usually sweeping across the water like a patient guardian. Tonight, that beam was gone. The top lantern room was dark. But the deep signal tone still pulsed, coming from somewhere inside, like the building itself had learned how to call out. Kai stared up at it. "Okay, that's officially creepy." "Not creepy," Zane corrected, "unusual. A malfunction can appear

alarming when it interrupts a familiar routine."Jay swallowed. -"Unusual can still be creepy."They entered through the heavy door. Inside, the air smelled like salt and old stone. The spiral staircase climbed upward, but there were also maintenance panels along the walls-modern additions to an old structure.A small red light blinked near a control box. The signal tone came again.Nya knelt by the panel and listened. -"This isn't the normal alert system," she said. -"It's like... a backup calling for attention."Lloyd's voice dropped. -"Then why would the backup be on?"A faint sound answered him-tiny footsteps, quick and panicked, skittering across the stone floor.Jay spun. -"Did the lighthouse just grow mice?"From behind a crate, a little shape darted out-small, fluffy, and very much not a mouse. A kitten, black with a white star on its chest, raced straight toward them, tail puffed like a bottlebrush.It stopped at Lloyd's feet and stared up, eyes bright with urgency.-"A kitten?" Kai blinked. -"That's... not what I expected."The kitten meowed sharply and ran to the stairs, then looked back as if shouting with its whole face: Follow me!-"I speak fluent cat," Jay announced. -"It says, 'Welcome, honored heroes, please accept this ceremonial fish.'"Nya stood and crossed her arms. -"It says, 'Stop talking and move.'"Lloyd followed the kitten up the spiral stairs. The stone steps were cool, and the higher they went, the stronger the feeling became-like something important was wrong, but not in a way that wanted to hurt them. More like something trapped, trying desperately to be understood.At the lantern room, the door was partly open. Inside, cables and gears sat alongside old brass fixtures. A modern battery unit was mounted near the wall, humming softly.Zane's eyes flicked from system to system. -"The primary power is offline," he said. -"But the emergency unit is functional. The signal tone is being broadcast intentionally."Kai frowned. -"By who? The kitten?"The kitten jumped onto a worktable and pawed at a small metal device-half hidden under a folded tarp. It was shaped like a compact speaker with a lens on one side.Lloyd's heart squeezed. He recognized that kind of lens: a message recorder-something used by rescue teams when voice communication failed.Nya carefully picked it up. -"This is a distress recorder."Jay leaned close. -"So the lighthouse... left us a voicemail?"Nya pressed the button.A voice crackled out, shaky but determined-an older lighthouse keeper named Mara, who had worked here for years. -"If you are hearing this," Mara said, -"the beacon has failed, and I could not reach the city line. The storm earlier damaged the main relay. I am in the maintenance tunnel below. The door sealed behind me. The kitten-Star-ran out before it closed. Smart girl. She knows the way. Please... someone bring light."The message ended with a soft breath, like someone trying not to cry.Silence filled the lantern room. Even Kai didn't joke.Lloyd swallowed hard. -"She's trapped under us."Master Wu nodded once. -"Then we bring light."They hurried down-past the stairs, past the control panels, following the kitten as it sprinted with fierce purpose. Star led them to a low door near the base, half hidden behind storage shelves. The door was sealed with a magnetic lock-its indicator flickering weakly.Nya examined it. -"Power's unstable," she murmured. -"I can bypass it, but I need a steady current."Jay stepped forward, hands already glowing faintly with lightning energy. He wasn't joking now; his eyes were focused, almost tender.-"I've got steady," he said. -"Tell me where."Nya guided him. -"Here-careful. Just enough."Jay pressed his palm near the lock. Lightning danced, controlled and precise. The indicator stabilized, then clicked.The door opened with a sigh.A narrow tunnel stretched into darkness, lined with pipes and damp stone. The air was cooler here, thick with the smell of ocean and earth.Kai's hands flared to life with gentle fire-not roaring flames, just warm light like handheld lanterns.-"I can do subtle," he muttered, almost offended at himself.They moved carefully, footsteps echoing. Star trotted ahead, fearless, stopping now and then to make sure they still followed. Finally, they reached another door-this one bent slightly, jammed.From behind it came a

faint tapping, rhythmic and tired. "Hello?" Lloyd called. "Mara? It's the ninja. We're here." A shaky laugh answered. "Thank the tides," Mara said. "I was starting to think I'd have to teach the pipes to talk back." Nya knelt by the jammed edge. "Stand back," she called. Kai stepped in, but Lloyd held up a hand. "Together," Lloyd said quietly. They placed their hands-Kai warming the metal carefully, Nya leveraging with a tool from her belt, Zane bracing the frame, Lloyd steadying the pull. The door groaned and then gave way. Mara sat on the floor inside a small maintenance chamber, hair damp, face pale but stubborn. When she saw Star, her whole expression melted. "There you are," she whispered, and the kitten sprang into her arms, purring like a tiny engine of relief. Mara's eyes shone. "I tried to stay calm," she said, voice wobbling, "but the dark feels heavier when you're alone." Lloyd crouched beside her. "You weren't alone," he said. "Star got us." Mara stroked the kitten's head, tears slipping free. "She's brave," she said. "Braver than me, and I've spent my whole life listening to storms." Jay scratched the back of his head, suddenly shy. "For the record," he said softly, "being scared doesn't mean you're not brave." Mara looked up at him, surprised. "You believe that?" "I live that," Jay admitted. "Daily." Nya helped Mara to her feet. "Can you walk?" Mara nodded, still hugging Star like a lifeline. "Yes. My legs are angry, but they'll cooperate." They guided her back up, step by step, light by light. When they returned to the main floor, the lighthouse felt less like a mystery and more like a friend who had been coughing in the dark, finally able to breathe. But the beacon was still out. Mara looked up at the lantern room and sighed. "The relay is fried. Without the beam, boats at night..." Lloyd felt that familiar pressure in his chest-the responsibility that sometimes made it hard to sleep. He imagined the water, the unseen rocks, the trust people put in a simple sweep of light. Master Wu placed a hand on Lloyd's shoulder. "A burden shared becomes lighter," he said. Zane examined the systems. "The mechanical rotation is intact," he reported. "The lens assembly is undamaged. Only the relay requires replacement." Nya's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "We can route temporary power directly from the emergency unit to the beam, bypass the relay." Kai grinned. "Now that's my kind of fix." "It must be stable," Mara warned, worry returning. "If it surges-" Jay raised his hand, palm open like a promise. "No surges," he said. "I can regulate the flow. Like... lightning with manners." Nya gave him a look that was almost proud. "I never thought I'd hear you say that." "People grow," Jay replied, then added quickly, "Sometimes by accident, but still." They worked with quiet teamwork-no shouting, no dramatic leaps. Nya rewired with careful fingers, Zane stabilized the connection, Jay fed controlled energy, Kai provided heat where needed to set a new contact, and Lloyd held the lens housing steady while Master Wu watched like a calm lighthouse of his own. After a final click, the lantern room hummed. A beam of light burst out across the bay-strong, steady, sweeping slowly over the water. Down below, people on the shore cheered. From the distant docks came a horn of gratitude. Mara covered her mouth, eyes shining again. "It's back," she breathed. "It's really back." Lloyd exhaled, a long release he hadn't realized he was holding. "Good," he said quietly. "Now the city can sleep." Star meowed once, as if agreeing. Back at the Monastery later, the blankets were warmer, the tea tasted sweeter, and the night felt peaceful in a way that was earned. Kai stretched out, finally relaxed. "Okay," he said, "I admit it. That was... kind of nice." Jay yawned. "The heroism? The kitten? The teamwork? The fact that I did lightning with manners?" Nya smiled. "All of it. Especially the manners." Zane looked at Star-who had followed them home temporarily, now curled like a comma on a cushion. "Star displayed advanced problem-solving under stress," he noted. "I find that admirable." Master Wu's eyes twinkled. "Even the smallest among us can carry the brightest message," he said. Lloyd stared at the sleeping kitten for a

moment, then finally let his shoulders drop. -"I think," Lloyd murmured, voice soft as the night, -"I can actually rest now." Master Wu poured one last cup of tea and spoke like a story closing its own gentle door. -"Then close your eyes," he said, -"and remember: light is not only something you see. It is something you become." The lighthouse beam swept across the bay outside, far away but steady-like a promise that would keep turning through the night, again and again, until morning arrived.

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