Family

by Gretccheen

Summary

They fit together about as well as you’d except, but they made it work. That's just what family was all about.

A collection of one-shots featuring Zane, Cole and Lloyd in a family-dynamic. Canon compliant.

[Currently on hiatus indefinitely]

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

“You’ve been staring at him all night, Pinky. Talk to me.” Cole settled on the couch next to Zane and, when the blonde didn’t protest, leant against his shoulder. “Something’s eating you.”

“No?” Zane replied, raising an elegantly arched eyebrow. “Ah, that was a...figure of speech, yes?”

“You learn fast,” Cole complimented. “Guess that’s why you’re the brains of this operation, huh?” Zane looked as if he was going to protest, but Cole pressed a finger against his lips in protest. “Ah-ah, we’re cuddling because you’re going to tell me why you made puppy-dog eyes at Lloyd all throughout dinner.”

“Are we cuddling?” Zane asked, and if he didn’t know better Cole would have assumed he was serious. He laughs at the blonde and pulls away, only to throw his legs over Zane’s lap. “We are,” he says coolly. The other teen blinks at him, and Cole laughs when he notices how red the other’s face had gotten. Hesitantly he brings up a hand and begins to rub at Cole’s calf, making the other boy sigh in appreciation. “You work too hard,” Zane scolded, “and you don’t stretch enough.”

“Kai is the one who doesn’t stretch enough,” Cole retorted. “I stretch plenty. I’ve just been stiff, is all. Haven’t been sleeping well. I train until I feel like I could pass out, and I’m so exhausted I don’t stretch after. Sorry. I’ll try and be better about it.” Zane’s hands still, and Cole bites back a sigh. “I’m the leader, Zane; I’ve got to be on the top of my game.”

“Working yourself to death isn’t the answer.” Zane whispers, and Cole tries to ignore the guilt that sits heavily in his chest. “Promise me that next time you are feeling like this, please come and get me.”

“Only if you promise to tell me what you’re thinking about.” He hums while the blonde thinks it over, knowing that Zane was running the numbers in his head.

“I would have told you anyway,” he says after a moment, smiling sweetly down at Cole. “That is what you do when you are in a relationship, is it not?”

“I didn’t know you could be such a sap,” Cole says with a grin of his own, punching Zane lightly on the shoulder. “Yeah, something like that. I promise I’ll come get you if I find myself awake.” For a few moments the two of them are silent, simply basking in each other’s company and the relief that it provided. Zane was the only one who was able to bring Cole out of his head, and was probably the only reason that he hadn’t keeled over yet. “He reminds me of myself, in a way.” Zane admitted, and Cole hummed, urging him onward. “Lloyd does not have a family, or at least, not anymore.”

“Perhaps,” Cole said, memories of his own family coming to mind. “But...If I’m being honest, you’ve got the much better end of the deal.”

“I do not understand.”

“You don’t remember your family,” he whispered, avoiding the other’s curious gaze. “Lloyd remembers his father, and perhaps his mother as well. Sometimes it’s better to have never loved at all, then loved and lost.”

“I do not believe that is how the expression goes,” Zane muses, but doesn’t press further. Cole is thankful for that. Again, the room is filled with silence, and Zane begins to gently massage his calves again. “Do you think we could become a family to him?” The question caught Cole off guard, and but he tries not to let it show. Instead he hums, his way of letting Zane know he’s thinking, and then
he gives a half-hearted shrug. “Who knows? Besides, he still has Sensei. It’s not like he’s all alone in
the world.”

“Sensei is like a stranger to him,” Zane says softly. “When I first arrived, we were strangers. Our
communication was limited and I did not understand my feelings. It will take time before he is able to
consider Sensei family, blood or otherwise. All we can do is be patient.”

“I suppose,” Cole shrugged again, running his fingers through his hair. “Guess time will tell, huh?”
Zane nodded, and gently pushed Cole’s legs off of him. “What’s up?”

“If I may, I would like to examine your back and shoulders as well?”

“You don’t have to ask, Zane; just give me a shove and I’ll figure it out.” Cole says with a laugh,
moving to sit so his back is to Zane. The other doesn’t bother to answer, instead reaching for Cole’s
shoulders. He leans into the touch, sighing when Zane’s thumbs press against his shoulder blades.
“God, Zane, you’re too good at this.”

“It is a necessity with the three of you so prone to injury,” Zane states, moving his hands so they are
at the juncture between Cole’s neck and shoulder. “Particularly Jay. I do not understand where he
finds such energy.”

“Comes with the territory, I guess; idiot’s lightning for a reason.” Cole has to stop mid-sentence
because of the sigh that escapes due to the other’s ministrations, but Zane doesn’t seem to mind. He
simply applies a bit more pressure and works on the knots that had formed from Cole’s sleepless
nights. He could almost fall asleep, and he thinks he does for a few minutes, but he’s quickly brought
back by the sound of a door creaking open.

“Jay?” He asks blearily, annoyance creeping into his voice. The lightning ninja always seemed to
find him whenever he had alone time with Zane. There’s no answer, and the hands on his neck keep
him from turning too far, but there’s a soft chuckle from Zane that makes him think it might not be
Jay. “Hello, Lloyd,” he says pleasantly, and Cole nearly makes an embarrassing noise when Zane
rubts at the sensitive spots behind his ears. “Is something the matter?”

“I’m interrupting,” the boy says weakly, hovering in the doorway.

“You’re a shitty liar,” Cole says, earning a pinch from Zane. “You don’t have to just stand there, you
know.” Lloyd hesitates, and he shrugs off the other’s hands so he can turn to face him. “C’mere, kid.
We don’t bite.” He extends a hand to the kid in the doorway, heart swelling with pity. He had seen
this before, once, although it played out much differently when he was the one standing in the
doorway. Hell, he hadn’t even been standing—he had been on his knees, peering hesitantly around
the doorframe to watch the woman on her knees beckon to him like a stray cat.

The room is oddly still as Lloyd hesitantly pads closer, glancing between the two of them like they
were suddenly going to strike him ( Maybe he thinks we will , Cole thought, grimacing at the
thought). He stops a few steps away, looking so small in that moment, his clothes far too large on his
small frame. “What’s up, buddy?” He says in a much softer voice, sliding down off the couch so he’s
kneeling in front of Lloyd. Zane tries to slide next to him, but Cole places a hand on his knee to keep
him there. “It’s pretty late, huh? You should be in bed.” Lloyd sniffs at his words, raising a hand to
rub at his eyes. Cole feels ashamed that he only now notices how red they look, how puffy Lloyd’s
small face is. Poor kid’s probably been crying his eyes out for a while.

He opens up his arms, giving the kid a lopsided grin. “The fuckers in your head aren’t shutting up,
are they?” It’s barely a whisper, but Lloyd seems to hear, nodding and sniffing before rushing into
with us.” Lloyd sobbed into his shoulder, and Cole, after a moment’s hesitation, wrapped his arms tightly around the boy. He hummed a note he hoped was soothing, rubbing gentle circles into his back. Lloyd clung to him tightly, and he was sure the poor kid was exhausted, but he sobbed as if he had never done it before.

Zane sunk next to him and placed a hand on his shoulder, unsure of how much help he would be in this situation. He still barely understood his feelings for Cole, and a crying child was much different than a lovestruck teenager, so he simply offered his presence to the both of them, one hand on Cole’s shoulder and the other resting atop the ones on Lloyd’s back. Cole shot him a look, mouthing “Thanks”, before turning his attention back to Lloyd. He gave a little shrug, and Zane removed his hands and stepped back. “C’mon, kiddo, let’s get you a glass of water and then we’ll make cocoa and cookies, yeah?” Lloyd gave a nod Zane would have missed if he were not looking for it, and Cole hummed again, scooping the small boy into his arms and rising with a soft ‘oomph’.

Lloyd snaked his arms around Cole’s neck, legs wrapping tightly around the teen’s waist. Cole glanced back at Zane, grinned, and started towards the door. He shook his head, but he knew that Cole knew that he was impressed (and he would certainly tell Cole later, most likely when Lloyd had fallen asleep). Grabbing the blanket from the couch, he quickly followed the other two out. *The Bounty* was oddly still in the quiet of the night, and Zane wasn’t surprised. Jay, while having night-owl tendencies, had been pulling all-nighters on and off for the past few days; he had crashed as soon as dinner had finished, and Kai had been kind enough to carry him to bed (meaning, he had taken the first opportunity presented to avoid doing the dishes). Kai had not emerged after taking Jay to their bedroom, so Zane assumed he had fallen asleep as well. Nya had been chatting with Sensei Wu when Cole had told him to go wait on the couch, insisting on doing the dishes himself. Of course, he had known what Cole was trying to do, and it made his heart swell with affection for him. Not that it took much for that to happen--Cole was always making him feel things that he had once thought impossible.

When he entered the kitchen Cole and Lloyd were already there. Cole had set Lloyd on the counter top, and was wiping at his eyes with a damp towel. He was murmuring something that Zane couldn’t hear, but he assumed that it was something soothing, because Lloyd’s shoulders had stopped shaking and he wasn’t as tense. He steps into the kitchen feeling like an intruder, but Cole looks up and smiles at him fondly. “Can Zane finish cleaning you up? I’m going to get you a glass of water. Is that okay?” Lloyd nods, and follows Cole’s gaze to where Zane is standing in the doorway, shocked. He shakes it quickly and crosses the distance between them, setting the blanket neatly on the countertop. Cole presses the towels into his hand and goes to rummage through the cupboards for a clean glass.

He hesitates a moment, but Lloyd blinks up at him with wide, green eyes and he feels any of his anxieties melt away, because the boy in front of him is just that--a boy. Young and innocent and probably more scared than any of them had ever been. He smiles (and he laments the fact that it doesn’t come as easily or look as soothing as Cole’s) and gently takes Lloyd’s chin in one hand, carefully dabbing at the tear tracks on his face. “We should re-apply that bandage,” he says gently, surprised when Lloyd nods.

“Got it,” Cole says, as if reading his thoughts, and drops down to rummage under the kitchen sink for the box of Band-Aids Zane had insisted on keeping underneath it. He pulls up a moment later and turns to them, glass in one hand and box in the other. Zane takes the glass first and sets it beside Lloyd, and then the box. Cole begins looking around the kitchen, most likely searching for the ingredients for whatever cookies they were going to bake. Lloyd is watching him curiously, seeming a bit more relaxed, and Zane gently clears his throat. The boy jumps, and Zane murmurs a quiet apology. “It’s fine,” Lloyd says softly, “sorry.”

“It is quite alright.” He replies, and then removes the bandage as carefully as possible. Lloyd winces
minutely, but says nothing. Zane applies the new one with practiced ease, and when he’s finished Lloyd shakily mutters, “Thank you.”

“You are quite welcome.” He is stopped from saying anything more to Lloyd by Cole tapping on his shoulder. Their signal of switching off. Zane slips past him and picks up where his partner had left off, grabbing the ingredients that Cole had missed. Cole had pressed the glass of water into Lloyd’s hands, and leant against the counter as he watched Zane move with a practiced ease. “He’s a natural in the kitchen; wait until you taste his baking. Closest thing to drugs I’ll ever try.” Lloyd chuckles, setting the now empty glass beside him. “If you bother him enough, he’ll probably even let you help.”

“Lloyd can help. You may watch.” Zane turns to look at him pointedly, and both teens are surprised by the bark of laughter from Lloyd. The child flushes brightly, hands placed tightly over his mouth, eyes wide. “You can laugh, kiddo. Kai sleeps like the dead and Jay is used to all the noise. Everyone else is far enough from the kitchen that they won’t be able to hear you.” Cole says gently, placing a hand on Lloyd’s shoulder.

“Okay,” he replies weakly, lips curling into a small smile.

“Cole, there should be a step-stool in the supply closet. Will you get it for me? The counter is a bit high.”

“Got it!” Cole gave a cheeky salute before leaving, causing Lloyd to giggle again. There’s a few beats of silence as Zane grabs the last ingredients, and then he turns to Lloyd with a small grin. “Well, shall we start?” Lloyd nods hesitantly and, after a moment, Zane added, “Do you need help getting off the counter top?” Another nod, and Zane carefully guides the boy’s arms to around his neck. He helps Lloyd down, and gets a quiet “Thank you” in response. Zane hesitates a moment before giving Lloyd a gentle pat on the head. Cole often did that with Kai or Jay, although often in a teasing manner and not as a genuine comfort.

Lloyd hesitantly follows him to the counter, standing on the tips of his toes to peer at the ingredients scattered across it. “First, we have to preheat the oven, but since I have already taken care of that step, we now have to melt the butter; normally we leave it out to soften, but as this is an unplanned event, melting it should be just fine. It will taste the same regardless. For this particular recipe we need one and a half cups.” He hands one of the sticks to Lloyd. “Will you unwrap this, please?” He nods, a determined expression on his face, and Zane shakes his head and begins to unwrap another. By the time Lloyd had unwrapped his Zane had unwrapped the second one. The lack of efficiency irks him somewhat, but Lloyd seems glad to be helping, and that is more important at the moment. He has Lloyd put it in the bowl with the others, and then sticks it in the microwave.

As the butter melts he grabs the one of the measuring cups and the large mixing bowl. “Next, we will need one and one-fourth cup of both brown and granulated sugar. When Cole arrives with the step stool, you are more than welcome to measure out the granulated sugar.”

“Speak of the devil,” Cole sang as he entered, step stool tucked under his arm. “Here you go, kiddo.” He places the step stool with a flourish, and when he rises he presses a kiss to Zane’s cheek. “So, where we at in the recipe?”

“Please get the butter from the microwave,” Zane said, narrowing his eyebrows. The blush on his face gave away his true feelings, and Cole winked at him as he slipped between them to get to the microwave. “Here; one and one-fourth cup, please.” He pressed another measuring cup into Lloyd’s small hand before handing him the granulated sugar. Zane kept a close eye on him as he carefully measured out the sugar and poured it in the bowl, and then quickly measured out his own. Cole came and wiggled between them before pouring the butter into the bowl with it. “Two eggs, but I shall get
those. One tablespoon vanilla. Cole, will you help him with that?”

“Of course,” Cole replied, grabbing the vanilla and moving over to Lloyd. Zane easily cracked the two eggs, and while washing his hands watched and Cole carefully helped Lloyd add the vanilla to the mixture. “Now, we have to mix them together.” Zane said, already reaching for the spoon.

“Well, we need a strong young man to do that,” Cole said, taking the spoon from him. “C’mero, kiddo, you start it. If you can’t get it all that’s okay; we’ll take care of the rest.” Lloyd stared at him with wide eyes, and when he didn’t take the spoon Cole reached out and wrapped his hands around it. “Alright, hero, let’s see what you’ve got.”

“Hero?” Lloyd echoed, and the teens were surprised when he flushed brightly. Cole reached out and held the bowl, and Lloyd began to mix. After a few minutes Lloyd obviously began to tire, and Cole let out a laugh. “I’ll take care of the rest, alright? If Zane is the brains, then I’m the brawn.” Lloyd smiles at that, and watches with wide eyes as Cole easily combines the ingredients. While the two finished Zane measured out the rest of the ingredients, and when he deemed them mixed enough he began adding them to the bowl. He let Lloyd stir in the chocolate chips, and once those were mixed in he took the bowl from the two of them. “Here,” he said softly, offering the spoon to Lloyd, who took it quickly. Cole sidled beside Zane and began rolling the dough into balls with him.

Once all the dough was rolled into balls and the trays placed in the oven did they turn back to Lloyd. He was smiling, seemingly content, mixing spoon still in his mouth. “We can leave the dishes for tomorrow morning,” Cole said lightly, and when Zane narrowed his eyes added, “I’ll do them myself! Promise.”

“I suppose,” Zane relented. “Lloyd, shall you and I move to the couch while Cole makes cocoa?” The youngest nodded, smiling brightly. He took the spoon and put in the sink before padding up beside Zane, who grabbed the blanket from the counter before leading Lloyd back to the couch. Cole grinned to himself as he began making cocoa. It was the one recipe that even he could mess up.

When Cole returned to the living room he found a sight that made his heart melt. Lloyd was settled next to Zane, a controller in his hands, and he was smiling widely at whatever game they were playing (the audio was off, so Cole couldn’t tell). Zane met his gaze when he came in, smiling softly. He took the tray from his hands and set them onto the coffee table. “The time should be going off soon,” he said, and, after a moment, pressed a kiss to Cole’s cheek. “I’ll be but a moment. Cole settled next to Lloyd, snorting when he saw that they were playing the game that was based on them. Cole reached for one of the controllers and, after a moment, tapped Lloyd on the shoulder. “Can I join you?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. Sorry.” Lloyd spluttered, handing his controller to Cole. He set up the multiplayer for three, pausing the game to wait for Zane, who quickly came into the room with a plate full of cookies. He settled to the right of Lloyd, and set the plate on the coffee table between them. “The voices quiet now, kiddo?” Cole asked softly as he unpaused the game.

“Yeah,” he admitted softly. “Thank you.”

“It is what family is for, Lloyd.” Zane added, reaching for his controller.

“Family, huh,” Lloyd echoed, before smiling widely. “I’m gonna win this time.” And if Cole and Zane let him win, well, the other certainly didn’t say anything.

When Sensei Wu found them the next morning he was greeted by a sight that made him believe that perhaps things would turn out alright. Cole and Zane were sitting next to one another, fast asleep, Cole’s head resting on Zane’s shoulder. Lloyd was laid across their laps, face pressed against his
chest. The three all seemed perfectly content, and, if the plates and mugs on the coffee table were any sort of indicator, had had quite the night. With a fond smile Sensei Wu left to go make himself a pot of tea; his students could sleep for a little while longer.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Prompt suggested by Sequoia D! And to answer your question, Lloyd is still a young kid in this timeline. I figured that it worked better for how I want to write him. Although if you wanted I could do some older Lloyd, too! If you want a prompt with an older Lloyd, please specify! Otherwise I’m going to write him as younger! Thank you so much for the prompt! I hope you enjoy it!

Featuring Zane in a turtleneck because the idea makes me weak in the hecking knees, Cole being a Good Boy™, and Lloyd being a kid for once in his life.

It had been a rough week for all of them. The rest of the Serpentine had been released, and Kai and Nya had been at each other’s throats, arguing and bickering about things that they wouldn’t elaborate to the other three. Jay had been nervously trying to keep the peace, filling any empty space with his rambling. Zane had been quiet, and Cole knew he was taking the blame upon himself. He didn’t trust himself enough to intervene, because Kai could be brutal and Jay was just as likely to let something slip that he didn’t mean to. They had gone through one scare where they thought they had lost Zane, and Cole wasn’t going to allow another one.

The person who concerned Cole the most, however, was Lloyd. He had been oddly silent the past few days, barely eating anything and sleeping most of the time. Cole knew little about child development, but he knew from personal experience what Lloyd was doing, and it made his chest heavy with guilt. Determined to keep him from spiraling into the same self-destructive tendencies Cole had had only a year ago (it felt like it had happened lifetimes ago), Cole walked into the kitchen so he could talk to Zane.

“I want to go on a date,” he says bluntly, wanting to get straight to the point. Zane turns off the faucet and turns around to face him, giving him his undivided attention. “And I want Lloyd to come with us, too. Get him out of the ship for a while. It’s...not good for his health, staying here right now.” He knows that Zane is smart enough to catch the implications (and if not, well, even a blind man could see something was up with Lloyd). The blonde simply hums, turning back towards the sink. “Of course. I thought it would be obvious that we were inviting Lloyd.” Cole grins, crossing the distance so he can wrap his arms around Zane’s waist. “This is quite impractical, Cole.”

“Thank you,” he murmurs into Zane’s shoulder, causing the other to still.

“You are quite good with Lloyd,” Zane begins, sounding hesitant. “Do you have younger siblings?”

“No, just me.” He says lightly, trying to deter Zane from focusing on how his grip had tightened considerably at the new conversation topic. “I think he and I are pretty similar, is all.”

“I did not know your father was set on world domination as well.” Cole laughs, but there is little humor in it. “You do not wish to tell me, and that is quite alright.”

“I want to tell you,” Cole admits softly. “I just...don’t have the words for it yet.”

“That is alright,” Zane soothes. “I am here whenever you are ready. Now, where were you thinking
of taking me for our date?”

“We’re broke,” Cole says with a laugh. “Something cheap. There’s a park in the next city over—we could get take-out and eat there. Let Lloyd run around and act his age for once in his life.” Zane hums, and Cole untangles himself from him. “I’ll go talk to Lloyd about it. Lunch sound okay?”

“We might be satisfied,” Zane replies. Cole, after a moment, presses a kiss to the back of Zane’s neck before taking off. His boyfriend rolls his eyes, but there’s a smile on his face as he returns to their breakfast dishes. It will be good for both Cole and Lloyd to get out of the ship—Cole has been greatly affected by the tension between Kai and Nya, although he does a good job of concealing it. Hopefully the two of us can get to the bottom of Lloyd. From what Cole is implying... Garmadon may not have been the best father, and Cole’s may not have been either. Zane shakes his head to clear his thoughts—those are topics for a later date. For now, he has to figure out how to place the order without Cole catching him. The other teen had paid for their last date; Zane was going to pay for this one, whether Cole liked it or not.

Cole had no idea how he was going to ask Lloyd to join them. He’d been living with Zane for almost a year now—and dating for half as long. While Zane managed to surprise him every other day, most of the time Cole could safely predict his boyfriend’s reaction. Lloyd was still a wild card. Not only was he a kid, but he had just switched from hero to villain. He was a ticking time bomb, and Cole wasn’t sure what the explosion would be like. Better to try and prevent it than wait and see what it was like in order to handle it better in the future.

He hesitates in front of Lloyd’s door, trying to figure out what to say. God, he wasn’t good at this whole talking thing. He had always found it easier to communicate physically (punches didn’t lie, and neither did hugs). Zane, even with his odd speech patterns, was a far better communicator. Best to just bite the bullet, huh? So, with a resigned sigh he knocks on Lloyd’s door. There’s a tense moment where he wonders if Lloyd even heard him, and Cole raises his hand, ready to knock again, but then there’s a shifting of movement and he steps back, waiting. Eventually the door creaks open, and for a split-second Cole fears he’s staring at a ghost. “Cole?” Lloyd whispers, rubbing at his eyes. Fuck, did his heart hurt at the sight. He looked tiny, even more so than usual. There were dark circles under his eyes, cheeks flushed and breathing ragged. Liked he’d only just finished crying a few minutes ago. “Hey there, kiddo,” he says when his voice returns, slowly easing to his knees. “You feeling okay?”

Lloyd hums instead of answering properly, and Cole can feel a laugh bubbling in his chest, but there’s no humor in it. He remembers answering in the same uncommitted sort of way when he was young. “I feel you, green bean. Say, wanna come get lunch with Frosty and I? Nothing exciting, probably just take-out, but we’ll eat in the park and I’ll push you so high on the swings it’ll feel like you’re flying.”

“You want me to come?” Lloyd asks hesitantly, meeting Cole’s gaze. He’s searching for a lie that Cole knows he won’t find, and when Lloyd finds whatever it was he was looking for he smiles. It’s weak, a little lopsided, but Cole thinks it’s absolutely perfect. “Go get dressed, kiddo. I’ll wait out here for you.” The young boy nods and slips back into his room. Cole shakes his head, settling more comfortably against the wall. After a few moments Lloyd slips back out, fiddling awkwardly with his sleeves. At least his jeans fit him, Cole thought bitterly, turning to Lloyd with a grin. “Want me to fix those for you?”

“You want me to come?” Lloyd asks hesitantly, meeting Cole’s gaze. He’s searching for a lie that Cole knows he won’t find, and when Lloyd finds whatever it was he was looking for he smiles. It’s weak, a little lopsided, but Cole thinks it’s absolutely perfect. “Go get dressed, kiddo. I’ll wait out here for you.” The young boy nods and slips back into his room. Cole shakes his head, settling more comfortably against the wall. After a few moments Lloyd slips back out, fiddling awkwardly with his sleeves. At least his jeans fit him, Cole thought bitterly, turning to Lloyd with a grin. “Want me to fix those for you?”

“Please.” Lloyd says shyly, holding out his arms. Cole laughs and kneels down, carefully taking one of the other’s small hands in his. It’s one of Jays sweaters, he thinks, soft and well-worn, colored a faded baby blue with white paint stains along the sleeves. “Want to go clean your face, too? Get a
glass of water?” Lloyd nodded, watching with wide eyes as Cole skillfully rolled up his sleeves.

“Alright, c’mere.” He holds out his arms and Lloyd scrambles into them, wrapping his arms tightly around his neck. Cole laughs, taking a moment to make sure his grip was secure before standing.

The two head to the kitchen, Lloyd tucking into Cole when they passed Sensei Wu on their way. He simply nodded, and Cole could have sworn for a moment that for a moment he had looked hurt. But he pushed the thought to the back of his mind, plopping Lloyd on the counter and rummaging through the cabinets. “We’re gonna need groceries soon. And you need clothes that actually fit. Maybe next Saturday? I think we’re swinging by Ninjago City, anyway, because Jay needed parts or something. Should work out fine.” Cole normally kept his thoughts to himself--Jay was the one who rambled--but he figured that it would comfort Lloyd, so he kept talking about things that honestly didn’t matter.

“Close your eyes, kiddo,” he instructs gently. Lloyd does as he ask, and Cole dabs at his face with a cool towel. “Not sleeping either, huh? Next time you can’t sleep, come and find me. There’s enough room in the bunk bed for two.” He grins, reaching up to ruffle Lloyd’s hair. “Between you and me, Zane’s a horrible bedmate.”

“What do you mean?” Lloyd looks delighted, like Cole is trusting him with a secret.

“He’s always cold. Guess it just comes with the territory. When we first got here, Zane rose with the sun. He’d wake Jay and I up by placing his hands on the back of our necks. You’d think we were being ambushed with how loud Jay screamed the first time.” Lloyd is clinging to his every word, watching him with wide eyes. Cole laughs, reaching up to run his fingers through Lloyd’s hair. “Then the little shit figured out Spinjitzu first. Still hasn’t let the four of us live it down.”

“Is Spinjitzu hard?” Lloyd asked, practically bouncing because of his curiosity.

“At first. It’s a lot to piece together at one time. It’s kinda like a puzzle.” Like a dance routine, a nasty voice in the back of Cole’s mind sneers, and he presses forward to try and drown it out. “If all the pieces aren’t laid in just the right spot, it looks wrong. Make sense?” Lloyd looks thoughtful for a moment, and then nods. “I’m glad. Ready to go find Zane?” Another nod. Cole sets the now-empty glass in the sink before holding out his arms to Lloyd, who grins widely. He nearly falls in his rush to get into Cole’s arms, and the older boy laughs into the messy blonde hair as Lloyd wraps his arms tightly around his neck. Honestly he’s amazed at the kid’s ability to bounce back--none of them really know what exactly was going on or when it had started, but Cole recognized some of the signs and had just enough experience to get the two of them through most experiences; enough to chase away the voices that whispered in both of their heads, even if it was just for a little while.

The two head towards Cole’s bedroom, the older bouncing Lloyd slightly as they walked (because he was nervous, because he knew Zane would put two and two together and see it for what it was--a nervous tick). He opened the bedroom door, narrowing his eyes slightly when he saw Kai and Jay were in the room. Jay looked half-asleep and was leaning precariously off the edge of his bed; Kai was scrolling through his phone, scowling at whatever it was that he was looking at. He hadn’t bothered to look up when Cole entered, so he ignored him as well. Zane was nowhere to be seen, but that wasn’t too uncommon, and Cole didn’t mind waiting him out. Setting Lloyd down first, he takes a moment to stretch before sitting down on the floor. Lloyd, after a moment, plops beside him. Cole pulls out his phone, unlocks it, and passes it to Lloyd, who stares at him like he’s grown a second head. “Just don’t drop it, okay?” He says easily, reaching up to ruffle Lloyd’s hair. “I’ll watch you.” After a moment Lloyd nods, and Cole grins, letting his hand fall to the kid’s shoulder. He almost laughs at how the similar the two of them are. Lloyd simply scrolls through the various apps, finger hovering over a few before he decides against it. Cole’s content to let him do what he
pleases—the kid isn’t hurting anyone, and it’s a better alternative to discovering that Lloyd was similar in more ways than he thought.

The door opens, and Cole looks up, heart skipping a beat at the sight. *God,* was Zane attractive. (He knew this before they started dating, of course, but he was finding new things about the blonde that made his heart race.) Today was no exception, and Cole found that the anxiety that had been building in his chest all but melted (hah!) away when Zane caught his gaze. He had chosen to wear a turtleneck in a light grey color along with a pair of khaki-colored jeans that made Cole swallow on instinct. The guy was built like a Greek statue, all sharp jawline and strong features and legs that looked like they could be chiseled from marble. And then he smiles, that same fond smile that Cole catches him giving at the others when they think he’s not looking, and his heart beats against his chest and he’s so, so glad that out of all the people in the world, Zane is the one he’s fallen in love with.

“Hey,” he says, stupidly breathless.

“Hello,” Zane replies easily. “Ready to go?”

“Let me change first.” He runs his fingers through Lloyd’s hair one more time, causing the younger boy to look up. Cole grins, although it’s a little lopsided, and moves to the dresser he shares with Zane. He grabs a tank top with a picture of them from some video game that had released recently, white in color and the four of them in an almost Lego-like style, dressed in their uniforms. With little care he shucks off his pajama shirt and slips it on, taking a moment to roll his shoulders and make sure everything felt right. He then grabbed the leather jacket he had hanging on one of the dresser-drawer knobs, easily sliding into it.

“Lloyd,” Zane says softly. “Are you ready?” The younger jumped, glancing up at the taller teen in shock, before nodding shakily. After a moment he tugged on Zane’s hand, causing him to peer at Lloyd curiously. Cole laughed, shaking his head, and as he walked out the door he said, “He wants you to pick him up, Frosty.” He leans against the wall, grinning when Zane comes out, Lloyd held easily in his arms. “Guess I’m driving, huh?” Cole says lightly, starting to walk out to the deck. “At least you’re good at giving directions. Pull it up on my phone, yeah? Remember the password?” Zane hummed, murmuring something to Lloyd, who cautiously began typing into Cole’s phone.

“It’s close enough to walk,” the blonde stated, placing a hand on Cole’s shoulder when he began to reach for his weapon. “Unless...it is too difficult for you?”

“Damn, Zane! I didn’t know you had it in you.” Cole laughed, bumping his shoulder against Zane’s. “Give me your strength then, Jack Frost.” When Zane’s brows furrow he laughs again, reaching over to take Zane’s hand. Lloyd shifts until Zane puts him down, grabbing the older boy’s hand. Cole watches the exchange fondly, glad that his boyfriend was kind enough not to comment on the expression he was sure was on his face right now. It was probably extremely embarrassing.

The walk there was peaceful. Lloyd had clambered back into Zane’s arms when they reached the city, clinging tightly to him. Cole had stepped closer, clung to his boyfriend’s hand just a little tighter. Most people didn’t recognize either of them outside of their uniform, but he knew that Lloyd didn’t know that. Besides, crowds set him on edge. Zane didn’t seem to mind the sudden closeness, simply adjusting how Lloyd’s weight sat on his arm and brushing his thumb against the side of Cole’s hand. He spoke easily about topics he knew Cole would be relaxed by—dinner plans, a tea he thought Cole should try, the benefits of certain essential oils. Things Cole could listen to and not have to give much thought about answering.

“Before we return for the evening, may we stop and pick up some of the oils I mentioned? I believe they are instrumental in maintaining your good health.”
“That’s fine. Which way, Green Bean?” Cole asked, glancing around. He had a general idea of where he was going, but…

“Left?” Lloyd says uncertainly, holding the phone so Zane could see.

“Left. I know where we are going from here.” He replies smoothly. “Thank you for all your help.” Zane carefully takes the phone from Lloyd and hands it to Cole. True to his word, Zane did know where they were, and within a few minutes they were settled at the pavilion at the park. Zane had refused to put Lloyd down (which Cole thought was absolutely precious, if not a bit out of character) and was listening intently as the kid explained some superhero comic he had read while he was at his boarding school. Occasionally he’d ask a question, usually along the lines of how something worked, and Zane was quick prompt Lloyd into explaining his ideas first, and then clarifying anything that didn't quite add up.

It was comforting, how domestic this all was. The tension on the ship was one thing, but with all the pressure on them to try and save the world (from a threat that they didn’t understand, no less) it was a miracle none of them had broken yet. The four of them were still kids, with Zane assuming the role of the oldest (based on a hushed debate during one of their first breakfasts together as a quartet) and Jay cheerfully taking the youngest. Nya was just a few months older than him. And Lloyd...God, Lloyd was too young for any of this.

He must have looked upset (and he hates it, hates that he’s so easy to read, he’s the leader, dammit, he can’t be weak, not anymore) because Zane’s expression softens and he places a tentative hand on his, which had curled into fists. “Breathe,” he murmurs, and Cole’s breath shakes so badly it could hardly be called one.

“Cole?” Lloyd whispers, narrowing his eyes in concentration.

“M fine,” he replies weakly, brushing away Zane’s hands. “Wanna go play on the swings?” Lloyd looks torn, and ends up turning to Zane, who raises an eyebrow at the blonde. “He’s asking for permission, Frosty.”

“Go.” Zane says, and Lloyd scrambles off of his lap. Cole laughs, but there’s something somber in it. His boyfriend turns to him, studying his face. Running the numbers to see if a confrontation will result in an episode. “Cole?”

“Later?” His voice gets painfully high, but Zane relaxes slightly. Guess this was the favorable outcome.

“Will you keep him entertained while I go pick up lunch?” There’s no more uncertainty in his demeanor, and Cole can’t keep back a sigh of relief. Zane doesn’t press him for an answer, simply leans down and presses a kiss to his forehead, saying something Cole doesn’t quite catch before he begins walking the way they came. He sits there for a moment, trying to go through some of the breathing exercises they did during their morning stretching. “Cole?”

He opens his eyes to see Lloyd looking back at him. He had only gone a few feet, and was looking at him nervously while he fiddled with the hem of his sweater. Cole rises with a groan, choosing to ignore how his joints cracked. Lloyd perks up a bit when he does, and Cole flashes him a grin. “First one to the swings gets to be pushed first!” He calls, already starting his sprint. Lloyd laughs and takes off. Cole slows to watch him, heart aching at the sight. God, this fucking kid. Zane and I are going to have a long chat tonight...I wanna give this kid everything. “I beat you!” Lloyd cries, and Cole grins, picking up his pace to meet him. Yeah. I’m going to give him the world.

Zane felt his heart race at the sight that he came back to. Lloyd was on one of the swings, grip tight
on the chains as Cole easily pushed him higher than (at least, in Zane’s opinion) than any child should go. The boy’s laughter filled the air, and after a particularly high swing Cole let out a whoop. As Lloyd’s coming down Cole catches his eye, and he waves wildly, smile blinding. Zane felt his heart pound against his ribcage, and let’s his lip curl into a small smile. He watches as Cole grabs the swing’s chains, digging his feet into the ground and stopping the motion. Lloyd let’s go as he does so, falling back into Cole’s chest, who simply laughs. He ruffles the boy’s hair fondly before scooping him up. “Hungry, kiddo?”

“Yeah,” Lloyd says, breathless. He’s flushed, and his hair is a mess, but he looks far happier than he’s been in days. Cole bounces him lightly, leaning over to press his chin against Zane’s shoulder. “Hey,” he giggles. “Missed you.” Zane raised his shoulder once, bumping his boyfriend’s chin. A silent agreement and affirmation that the sentiment was shared. Months of working together and eventually being together had taught them how to communicate with nothing more than a few gestures and a look. Lloyd looked between the two curiously, brows furrowing in confusion. “You guys are weird.” He declares, and Cole bursts into laughter.

“That we are, kiddo. Now let’s go eat, yeah?” He doesn’t give either a chance to answer, shifting Lloyd into a more comfortable position and walking back towards the pavilion. Zane shakes his head and follows, bumping shoulders again with Cole. You’re ridiculous, and I love you all the more for it. Thank you for taking care of him. I have never been happier than I am with the two of you. “And Jay says I’m the sap,” Cole says, raising an eyebrow at him. “It’s you, Frosty.”

“It is the silent ones you have to worry about.” He says coolly. Cole makes an offended noise, and Lloyd giggles into his neck. The two banter back and forth as they walk, with the occasional question coming from Lloyd, which the two easily answered between the two of them. When they reached the pavilion Cole sat Lloyd between them, ignoring his indignant cry when he reaches over to grab one of the cartons of fried rice. Zane laughs softly, setting several boxes on the table. “Were you raised by animals, Cole?” he teases, holding out a set of plastic silverware.

“No. I live with Kai and Jay.” Cole grins widely, and Zane let’s out a sigh. “Just help yourself to whatever, kiddo. We don’t mind sharing.” Lloyd nods, looking a little unsure. For a few moments he just sits there, watching the older boys. Only when Cole rolls his eyes and reaches over to steal one of Zane’s dumplings does he carefully unwrap his silverware and reach for one of the containers. Both teens hum their approval, and Cole sets his carton aside to reach for one of the clear Tupperware ones. “This one’s really good. I’m surprised you didn’t get soup, Zane.”

“And have to endure you drinking it straight from the container? No, thank you.” Cole splutters, and Zane takes a pointed bite of his lo mein. It continues like this until all the food is gone, the three happily chatting back and forth. Eventually, though, Zane notices Lloyd beginning to falter, poorly trying to hide yawns behind his hand. “I think it’s time for a nap,” Cole replies, stretching. He begins picking up all the trash, and gestures to Lloyd. Pick him up. Hold him. Don’t let him fall asleep at the table. Zane hums softly, setting several boxes on the table. “Were you raised by animals, Cole?” he teases, holding out a set of plastic silverware.

“Poor kid,” Cole coos sympathetically. “Do you mind if he sleeps in the room while we talk?” I don’t want to leave him alone.

“Of course,” Zane says, expression softening when Lloyd wraps his arms around his neck.

“I’ll drive us home, if that’s alright with you?” The blonde hums, and Cole steps out to get his vehicle in order.

“Did you have fun today, Lloyd?” He murmurs, running his hand along the younger’s back. “I am certain Cole did. He sees himself in you, I believe. And if my suspicions are correct, he is trying to keep you from having the same sort of childhood he did. As long as he is around, you will be in
good hands. I promise.” He looked up to see that Cole had his vehicle summoned, and had begun to walk towards them. “Between the two of us, everything should turn out well. And I do not need to run any numbers to be certain on that.”
He’s still deciding what to wear when there’s a knock at his door. For a split-second he thinks it’s Zane, and is about to yell at him to go away when he remembers that Zane isn’t even on the *Bounty* yet. He pauses, carefully folding the shirt in his hands and setting it on the dresser. “Who is it?”

“Sorry,” barely comes through on the other end, and Cole’s brows furrow in concern.

“Lloyd, kiddo, you can come in.” As the door creaks open he adds, “And you don’t have to knock, either.”

“’kay,” comes the muffled response, and Cole flops unceremoniously onto the bed to watch Lloyd shuffle in. He shuts the door behind him and hesitates, fiddling with the hem of another borrowed sweater (Zane’s this time, so long on Lloyd it’s almost comical). “What the matter, kiddo?”

“I was watching Kai and Jay play video games,” he sniffles miserably, “and then, then they got really loud, and they moved their hands a lot. And I, um, I freaked out a little, and then they tried to ask me what’s wrong but I didn’t wanna tell them what’s wrong because I didn’t want them to get mad at me.” Lloyd pauses to take a shuddering breath, reaching up to rub at his eyes. “And then I started crying, because I thought they were already mad at me, and then Jay yelled at Kai and Kai yelled at Jay and--and then Nya came in to see what they were shouting about and she told me to come find you.” Lloyd’s eyes widen and he quickly adds, “I’m sorry! You have a date and I’m bothering you.”

“Stop.” He says, and when Lloyd flinches he takes a shaking breath. “I’m sorry, that was a little rough, huh? But you aren’t a bother. I don’t know who told you that, but they’re wrong. You certainly aren’t one to me.” The blonde studies him, and Cole sits up with a groan. “And my date with Zane isn’t until later. I can cancel if I need too--he’d get it.” Lloyd shakes his head, and Cole hums in response. “Well, you’re more than welcome to stay in here for a while, if you’d like?”

“Really?”

“Really. I was just about to go around asking for second opinions, anyway.”

“Why?”

“Can’t decide what to wear. Zane thinks khakis and a button up is acceptable casual date-wear. I always feel underdressed next to him.”

“I think you look nice.” Lloyd admits shyly. Cole laughs, sliding off the bed and heading towards his dresser. He extends a hand to the blonde, who hesitateantly comes to stand next to him. “First things
first, though. Promised Zane I would paint my nails.”

“Boys can paint their nails?” He asks, eyes widening.

“As long as you aren’t hurting anyone, kid, who cares what you do? Paint your nails, wear makeup, hell, wear dresses if that makes you feel good.” Cole ruffles Lloyd’s hair before he starts rummaging through the drawers. “I can paint yours too, if you’d like?” The gasp in response makes him laugh, and he grabs the basket he had been searching for. “Alright, kiddo, why don’t you sit down and pick out a color?” Lloyd takes the basket reverently and sits down, peering up at Cole. “It’s alright,” he says gently, “go ahead.”

Lloyd clambers to the floor, and he laughs, watching as the young boy carefully examines each bottle. He has a hunch on what color he’ll pick, but keeps his mouth shut, walking to the dresser to rummage for a sweater. Eventually he settles on an olive green one (a gift from Zane after he had stolen it for the fifth time). When he glances over Lloyd is debating between a gunmetal grey similar to the sweater he was wearing and a vibrant green. “You can pick both, if you can’t decide.” Lloyd hums in response, thinks a moment more, and carefully places the grey back into the basket. Cole slips the sweater on and comes to settle beside him, grabbing the white from his selection and setting it aside. “Alright, kiddo, let’s do this.”

Lloyd watches with wide eyes as he taps the bottle against his palm, practically vibrating in his excitement. Cole sets it aside for a moment after he deems it well shaken, smiling fondly at the smaller boy. Carefully he takes Lloyd’s left hand in his and begins to roll up his sleeve. “Green’s a good color. I think it suits you well.”

“Really?” he asks tentatively, holding out his other hand for Cole. “What color are you doing?”

“White. Don’t tell him this, but it feels like I have a part of him with me with my nails painted in his color. Sappy, huh?” Lloyd shakes his head rapidly, causing Cole to laugh. “Zane appreciates the gesture, regardless. If the other boys give you any shit for it, just let me know. I’ll take care of it.”

“Thank you,” Lloyd says genuinely, and Cole is relieved that he doesn’t shrink away when he reaches to ruffle his hair.

“You’re always welcome in here, alright? Even if Zane’s with me. You’re a priority to us right now. I get what you’re feeling. I understand. Kai and Jay can overwhelm me too. If you ever feel like that, just come in here. Knock first, though. Think you can remember that?” Lloyd nods, staring up at him with starry eyes. Cole ruffles his hair again, smiling fondly. He hadn’t had many moments like this when he was growing up. And the fact that he was now able to give the feeling of safety he so desperately craved to someone just like him made his heart swell painfully in his chest. He takes one of Lloyd’s hands in his and has to pause, just for a moment, because his hands were so small, before picking up the bottle of nail polish and carefully opening it.

Lloyd’s fingers curl in anticipation, and Cole carefully spreads his fingers apart with a patience even Zane would envy. “Talk to me, kiddo. What’s been going on lately?” He asks conversationally, carefully applying polish to Lloyd’s pinky. Of course, he already knows--more often than not, Lloyd is attached to either his or Zane’s hip (quite literally, in the former’s case), and he follows them around like he’s worried they’ll disappear if he doesn’t. Cole finds the act horribly endearing, and he supposes that’s why Lloyd follows him the most out of the four boys. He’s the only who will carefully adjust his behaviour with the slightest indication that Lloyd is uncomfortable; will patiently kneel down and explain why things are happening and offer his hands when the small boy is frightened by a shouting match being held in the kitchen. Zane tries, he truly does, but even his sixth sense can’t make up for his lack of emotional experience. Jay’s ramblings are comforting, to a certain degree, but he’ll start going too fast and get too loud and Cole knows from personal experience that
if he doesn’t leave quickly after the tipping point in Jay’s rant then he’ll say the one word needed to set him into something bordering hysterics.

“Not much,” Lloyd says, eyes fixed on Cole’s applications. “I beat Nya in Go Fish the other day, while you guys were out.”

“I didn’t hear about that. We should let you play monopoly with us one night. Kai and Jay can get really loud, but it’s fun. Sensei even played one night. He wiped the floor with all of us. Zane held his own, though. I thought he would win for a while there.” He moves to the next finger. “It might be a little hard for you. There’s probably a kid’s version somewhere...Oh, Jay’s parents are coming next week! I’ll ask them to bring a bunch of his old board games and stuff. They live in the junkyard, remember? I bet they’ll have them. You don’t have to meet them, if you don’t want to.” He adds the last bit quickly when he notices that Lloyd’s face had crumpled into something guilty, the kind that shouldn’t have been on anyone’s face, let alone a child’s. “They aren’t upset, kiddo. I’ll pinky promise you once your nails are dry to prove it.” Cole moves onto the next finger, and the two sit in silence until he finished Lloyd’s left hand.

“Can I be on your team? When we play?” He asks tentatively, eyes staying focused on his hands.

“Of course you can!” Cole smiles widely, hoping it will soothe Lloyd’s worries. It does the trick, and Lloyd smiles back at him. “Keep your hand on your leg and try not to move it. Moving it makes the polish go all over the place.” Lloyd nods, expression becoming determined, and Cole takes his other hand once he’s settled. He paints the other’s nails, listening intently as Lloyd slowly begins to open up about his day. It’s little things, things most would deem unimportant, but Cole is thrilled to hear them. He guarded things like this when he was younger like they were government secrets, keeping them close to his heart. Hearing Lloyd speak easily for once was a far greater victory than beating the Serpentine ever was. Once he finished Lloyd’s nails he guides the boy’s hand to his thigh. “Alright, sit pretty for a couple minutes. Need anything from me, green bean?”

“No, thank you.” Lloyd said softly, studying his nails. He wiggles his fingers just the slightest, grins, and Cole shakes his head fondly as he carefully arches his back in a stretch. “By the time I finish mine, yours should be good. I’ll leave my phone here when I go on my date,” this causes Lloyd to look at him, confused. “So you can call me if you need me. I’ll take the password off, too, so you don’t have to wrestle with it. It’s pointlessly complicated. You’re welcome to stay in here while we go out, if you don’t want to deal with the others.”

“Really?”

“Yeah; my bed’s pretty comfy. Feel free to take a nap. Zane’s used to me sleeping in his bed, anyway, so if we get back and you’re still asleep it’s no big deal. And if you wake up and get scared, feel free to call. I won’t be mad. Promise. I’d rather leave my date early than have you suffer through that shit alone. Deal?”

“Deal,” Lloyd says after a moment. Cole grins, tapping the bottle of white polish against his palm. The two sit in comfortable silence as he carefully paints his nails, Cole humming bits and pieces of various songs. Once he’s finished, he turns to Lloyd, smiling easily. “Okay, pick one of your nails and just kinda? Lightly touch it? That’s usually what I do.” With a determined nod Lloyd did as he was asked too, and Cole hummed when no polish came up. “You’re good, kid. Why don’t you hop up on the bed and make yourself comfortable? I’ll come join you in a minute.” The young Garmadon eagerly bounces up onto the bed, making himself comfortable. Cole can only sigh in relief, glad that Lloyd didn’t feel the need to tread on eggshells when around him.

He watches Lloyd curl up in the blankets, peering at him curiously from his new cocoon. The boy looks exhausted, now that Cole really studies him; the nap was a damn good suggestion. Poor kid’s
got the world on his shoulders. Cole gives his hands a shake and then tests to see if the polish is done. It’s mostly dry, but that’s good enough for him (and he’s always been careful), so he rises with a groan and pads over to the bed. He lays back on the bed and moves his arm so his side is free, an open invitation for Lloyd to come and curl up against him, which the younger boy eagerly takes. He’s asleep within minutes, the occasional whimper easily soothed by Cole’s fingers running through his hair. Cole scrolls through his phone, making sure to send a message to Zane (accompanied by a picture that makes his heart feel ten times as full) telling him to tread carefully when he enters.

When the door creaks open Cole is half-asleep himself, smiling when Zane steps into view. “Are you sure you want to go?” He asks, studying the two fondly.

“I hate to bail, but the look at him. He’s too cute.” The taller boy hums, seemingly expecting this response. “Get me some makeup remover, please. And shut off the lights?” Another hum, and Cole sleepily watches as his boyfriend flicks off the light before heading to his vanity, easily finding the item amongst the chaos. Zane comes to Cole’s side of the bed, carefully removing one of the towelettes from the package. Gingerly (after a bit of protest from Cole) he begins to wipe at Cole’s face, cupping his face in one hand. “You’re too good to me,” the dark haired teen declares, reaching up to take the towelette from Zane’s hand. “Put on some comfy clothes and come join me. We’ll fit.” Zane narrows his eyes as Cole roughly scrubs at his face, but does as the other asked without complaint.

He slips into the bed, hesitating when it groans under the combined weight. “It'll hold,” Cole assures. “We’re sparring Kai and Jay tomorrow.”

“Are we?”

“Yeah; unintentional or not, they made Lloyd cry. Nobody makes my baby cry.”

“Baby?” Zane asks, furrowing his brows. Cole flushes, mumbling something incoherent as he turns so he’s facing his boyfriend. The blond takes the hand offered to him, running his thumb along the side as Cole collects his thoughts. “Technically we’re not old enough to be his parents, but fuck, Zane, he deserves some better ones. And if we can provide that for him...well…”

“I understand,” he replies, and he means it. His understanding of family is spotty at best, but he knows that he loves Cole, and that he wants to protect both him and Lloyd. If that’s what family is, if that’s what it means to be a “parent”, then he’ll stick by Cole’s side and help him through it. Lloyd was in their care now, after all. “As long as you will have me, I will form a family with you.”

“You’re such a sap,” Cole says, voice dangerously tight. He sniffs, squeezes Zane’s hand, and burrows deeper under the blankets. “But we can talk about that later. How much do you think he learned at that boarding school of his?” The blonde smiles, and the two go back and forth like that until Cole eventually falls asleep. Zane stays up a little longer, watching his mishmashed family finally get the sleep they both needed. Yes. If it means protecting the both of them, then I will do whatever it takes. That is what it means to be a family.
Man, I wrote this one quick! At Selly's mention of the reverse of the previous chapter happening, I just couldn't help myself!!

God I love this precious family so much

Today had been Bad. Capital B necessary for emphasis, because today, shit had really hit the fan. He hadn’t come out of his room at all, and had even sat in front of it for a few hours to try and keep everyone out. Zane had stopped by once or twice, knocking gently. Each call of his name made his heart ache, and every shaking call of, “Please, not now,” brought it one step closer to shattering. Currently he was tucked in their room’s bathroom, tucked tightly between the sink and the toilet and wrapped snugly in a blanket Zane had placed in front of the door, among other things, when he had stepped in earlier. There was a headache blossoming behind his eyelids, his joints felt like lead, and his legs had long since gone numb.

He groans at the sound of a knock at the door, drawing his knees tighter to his chest despite the pain the action brings. “Cole?” Zane, gentle and soothing, voice warm enough that it makes tears prick in his eyes, worsening his headache.

“I’m sorry,” he calls back. “I’m sorry.”

“Cole?” A new voice, soft and hesitant, followed by a timid knock at the door. “Can I come in?” God, he can’t say no to that voice, but he doesn’t want him to see him like this. See him shattered, see him broken, see him anything as less than heroic. Heroes don’t cry, after all. He had saved the world from Garmadon; he had ridden dragons and stared death in the face. This wasn’t bad. This was tame, far tamer than any other threat he had faced, but it was so, so much worse. It had no right to bring him to his knees like this, to make his hands shake and tremble and his eyes fill with tears. But he’s always been weak, always been soft (his father’s words ring in his ears, cold and sharp, making him choke on a sob) so he weakly says, “Come in.”

The door creaks open, and Lloyd tumbles in, staring at him with wide eyes. “Hey, kiddo,” he croaks, reaching up to rub at his eyes. “What’s up?” Lloyd unceremoniously throws himself on top of Cole, wedging a space between Cole’s knees to wrap his arms around the older boy’s chest. Zane pads in after him, hovering nervously in the doorway. He brings up a hand to run through the boy’s hair, tilting his head back to study his boyfriend. Zane’s brows furrow in concern, but he doesn’t push (at least, not yet).

“Did you have a good day, kiddo?” He asks, wincing at the cracks in his voice. Lloyd nods, mumbling something into his chest. “C’mon, Lloyd, you’re too good for the bathroom floor.” The boy makes a confused noise, and Cole carefully adjusts his grip until he’s got a somewhat secure hold on Lloyd. He shares a look with Zane—Please, come closer, just in case I drop him—and the blond steps closer, watching the two closely. Slowly, slowly, he rises to his feet, immediately placing his hand on the counter to keep him upright. Lloyd clings to him tightly, arms in a vice grip around his neck. Zane steps closer, hands hovering nervously, and Cole shrugs the blanket off his shoulders. Just to the bedroom, Cole, you can do it. “Cole, I will—”

“I can carry my fucking kid,” he snaps, tightening his hold on Lloyd. They both knew he probably
couldn’t, with how bad his legs were shaking, but Zane backs off, letting Cole pass him before slipping behind him to pick up the blanket. Cole waits until he’s sure Zane is behind him (because even his own stubbornness won’t let him risk carrying Lloyd without a safety net) before heading into the bedroom. He sets Lloyd on the edge of the bed, and the moment his arms are free Zane steps behind him, strong hands steadying him. “Cole,” he says softly, like he’s talking to Shard when he’s overstimulated, like Cole is some fucking wounded animal, but it makes him melt, makes him lean back into those waiting arms and sigh in relief. Zane rubs at his shoulders, and Cole squeezes his eyes shut so he doesn’t have to see Lloyd’s face become distorted with concern he doesn’t deserve.

“Have you eaten today?” Zane tries gently, pressing lightly between Cole’s shoulder blades.

“No,” he says, laughing bitterly. “Would probably throw up again if I tried.”

“What’s wrong?” Lloyd asks, and Cole has to bite back a scathing remark. He’s a kid, Cole; he doesn’t need to learn that you’re a ticking time bomb, that he needs to walk around on eggshells with you, too. Zane answers for him, which he’s grateful for, saying, “Not quite. You and Cole are quite similar.” Lloyd ponders the comment as Cole is carefully guided to sit on the bed. Zane brushes Cole’s bangs out of his face, humming, and the dark haired teen takes a shuddering breath. “Will you be alright for a moment?” He asks softly.

“Yeah,” Cole replies, but there’s little force behind it. “We’ll be fine.” Zane presses a kiss to his forehead and quickly leaves the room. Cole moves back so he’s sitting against the headboard, pulling the blankets up to his chin. Lloyd hesitates a moment, and Cole gently says, “C’ere, Lloyd.” The blond scrambles next to him, curling up against his side under the covers. “Sorry I wasn’t around today.”

“Are you going to be okay?” Lloyd asks instead of answering, voice wavering dangerously.

“I’ll be fine. It’s just...just a bad head day for me, I guess. Tomorrow will be better.”

“I wanna help!” Lloyd presses himself against Cole’s side. “I wanna help you get better.”

“You already are, kiddo,” Cole smiles for what feels like the first time in ages, reaching a hand up to ruffle Lloyd’s hair. “I’ll probably be in bed for the rest of the day. Well, until Zane makes me get up so I can stretch. You’re welcome to join us then, too.” Lloyd nods, peeking around him when the door creaks open. Zane steps in, with a bottle of red Gatorade in one hand and a bottle of pills in the other. “Melatonin, so he can sleep,” he explains softly, setting them both on the bedside table. “But you need to stretch first.” Zane is surprised when Cole doesn’t complain, watching as his boyfriend maneuvers out of the covers and settles on the edge of the bed.

“I need a shower,” he mumbles, “and to get dressed. Later, though. After everyone’s gone to bed. Can’t stand the remarks they make when I need you to help me.” Zane quietly agrees with him. Cole’s bad days had been few and far between with Lloyd now in the picture, but they had both known that the stress of the Serpentine was going to catch up to him one day. This was the worse Zane had ever seen him, but from the way Cole would let bits and pieces of his childhood slip he knew this wasn’t the worst he had been. Still, it creates a dull ache in his chest, seeing his partner like this, and he’ll do his best to make sure that he helps Cole in any way possible. Jay was a bit more sympathetic, but Kai was always just a bit too rough (never on purpose, of course, but both he and Cole had agreed it was in Cole’s best interest to avoid him on days like this). “Can I take it now? Is that okay?”

“Of course,” Zane says before carefully easing to the ground. Cole is mindful of him as he stretches over to the bedside table and taking two pills from the bottle. He swallows them down with the Gatorade, and then blindly pats behind him until he finds Lloyd’s hand. The blond quickly comes up
next to him, attaching himself to the older boy’s side. Cole reaches up and runs his fingers through his hair. “What time is it, Frosty?”

“Almost seven,” Zane replies, carefully beginning to massage Cole’s calf. “We ordered takeout for dinner. No one touched your usual orders. When you feel up to it, I’ll bring them in.”

“I’ve taken ten milligrams, Zane. I’ll probably be out for most of the night. You think you’re going to be awake that long?” Cole’s voice had gotten stronger, and there’s a playful warmth there that makes Zane’s shoulders sag in relief. The unspoken I’ll wake you up, regardless, hangs in the air between them, and Zane moves his ministrations to Cole’s other leg. “It was a body thing,” Cole offers into the quiet. “A couple head things, too, but mostly my body. I’m unhappy with it.”

“But you’re so strong,” Lloyd gasps, and Cole laughs.

“I wasn’t always. I just...kept thinking that I was more attractive back then, when I was lean and slim and could barely bench the bar.”

“But you’ve got a hero’s body!” Lloyd cries. “What could be better than that?” Cole pauses, and Zane hums his agreement. Silence falls over them again as Cole thinks, Zane reach for Cole’s hand to rub the feeling back into his fingers. His boyfriend sighs, flexes his fingers impatiently, and tilts his head up to look at the ceiling. “This body does save a lot of people, huh?”

“It has certainly saved me,” Zane whispers into his palm. Cole groans, playfully kicking Zane’s shoulder. Lloyd makes a confused noise, not understanding the double meaning behind the words. Cole ruffles his hair before wrapping his arm around his shoulder. “Come cuddle.” Zane laughs, squeezing his boyfriend’s hand before rising. He takes a moment to stretch, carefully rolling his shoulders and cracking his back. Cole and Lloyd take it as an opportunity to make room for him, Cole moving so he was on his side with Lloyd pressed against his chest. The smaller boy makes a happy noise, clinging tightly to Cole.

Zane slides behind him, tangling their legs together and wrapping an arm around the dark haired teen’s waist. He presses lazy kisses to the nape of Cole’s neck, rubbing circles into his hip. Cole’s breathing eventually evens out, and after a few seconds of silence Lloyd tentatively asks, “Is he gonna be okay?”

“He will be,” Zane replies softly. “Cole hardly gets the sleep he needs, so this will help. The next few days will be rough, but his thoughts should clear up soon. For now, we just have to take it day by day.” It wasn’t a lie, but it certainly felt like one. This was the same thing the two of them had done, even before they started dating. Cole would freeze up, or lash out, and Zane would gently coax him out of locked closets and tight corners, rubbing the feeling back into his fingers and legs and sit with him until he eventually fell asleep. Every so often, if Zane was very careful and very lucky, Cole would let tidbits of his childhood escape. My dad was never gentle when he pulled me out of cupboards, or, My stomach is used to being empty, or, the worst, I promise I’ll come out if you promise not to hit me.

The words still sit with him, ring in his head when he cannot sleep at night because his sixth sense is telling him Cole is going to shatter soon and he best prepare to pick up the pieces. He doesn’t care that it hurts, that Cole lashes out and shrinks back like he’s afraid that Zane will retaliate in some way; he knew the risks of picking up glass with his bare hands, and he was willing to nurse the cuts if it meant that Cole would be able to stomach breakfast the next morning. He felt that he did more harm than good most times, but Cole hadn’t left him yet, hadn’t truly pushed him away; he always smiled the morning after, and thanked him genuinely, despite the shaking of his voice and trembling hands. Cole put on the face of a leader, even though Zane could see how he flinched whenever the group became too loud or if the Serpentine hit in just the right spot he would freeze up, just for an
instant. Long enough for Zane to piece the fragments of Cole’s childhood into a twisted, grotesque picture.

“Right now, Cole needs his family more than anything. You and I need to protect him. Do you think you can do that?” It’s a large task, one that should make him feel more guilty than it does placing it on Lloyd’s shoulders. But when he glances over Cole’s shoulder the Garmadon is beaming, nodding his assent. “It’s like...the night we made cookies. I have to do that for him, too. I dunno how good I’ll be, but I’ll try my best!”

“That’s all we ask, Lloyd.” He smiles fondly, watches the boy settle into a more comfortable position against Cole’s chest and easily fall into sleep. For Zane, however, sleep does not come as easy. He isn’t sure how long he lies there, running his fingers through Cole’s hair or tracing circles on his hip. Long enough for the melatonin to fade and for his partner to sleepily roll over, jostling Lloyd enough that he makes a soft whine, but not enough to cause him to wake. “Morning,” he says softly, although he knows it’s barely so.

“Love you,” Cole says back sleepily, reaching underneath Zane’s arms to grip at his back. “I think...I wanna sleep some more?”

“That is quite alright.”

“Good. Hey, Frosty?”

“Hm?”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

"Cole?"

"Yeah?"

"May I ask you something?"

"Shoot."

"You called Lloyd your kid."

"Did I? Huh. Sorry." Cole shifts back enough to peer at him.

"I am...not opposed to such a thing." The words feel heavy in the stillness of the morning. "I would be honored to form a family with you." Cole doesn't say anything, just presses his face to Zane’s shoulder and cling to him tighter. Zane runs his fingers through his hair, waiting once again for the sign of his partner's breathing to even before letting himself slip into sleep as well. He would need the rest, after all—he had a family to take care of, now. Family. The word sat nicely in his chest, felt good on his lips when he had said it to Cole. It was the first one he had had—or at least, the first that he remembered. And he would do everything in his power to make sure it remained that way.

It was the least he could do after everything Cole had done for him, after all.

End Notes
So! This was a silly thing that blew out of proportion lmfao. If you have any suggestions for scenarios regarding this little family, please feel free to let me know in the comments! The updates will be sporadic, but I'll try to write fairly frequently. I hope you all enjoyed, and I hope to see you again soon!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!