Division Difference

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Summary

A single storm changes the course of history, separating the brothers at a young age; forcing them to grow up in two halves of a whole.

Years later, when they finally meet again, Donnie and Mikey no longer recognize their family as their own.

But with enemies bearing down on them, they won't have any choice but to trust each other, even with the divide between their pairs.

Notes

So, I have no excuses for this.
I wrote turtle noises and brotherly moments in my other fanfic and then I couldn't stop thinking about taking it a step further.
Yeah.

(I'm almost 90% this is technically a kink and I hate myself for it.)

((FML))

See the end of the work for more notes.
Four simultaneous mutations, four rebirths, four turtles. Four young creatures completely made anew, and already filled with the potential for the greatest of destinies in the seconds following.

They had one father, a single outcast to raise them.

And he did just that, taking the four children under his protection under the city that never sleeps. Feeding them, keeping them warm, teaching them everything he had learned.

But when you live by the skin of your teeth, surviving only on the barest scraps, any disaster could be the one to tear your family apart.

A storm did just that, with a single wave.

The four children and their father had taken residence in an unused overflow tunnel, making it another temporary home. The children had already reached their third year of life, growing rapidly as time passed. Their father thought it was safe to let them play in the large tunnel, the storm far above their heads along with all of society.

Splinter did not hear the water until it was almost upon them, the rumble shaking the stones as the wall of water thundered into sight range. He moved fast as lightening, grabbing his four sons just as the tsunami slammed into them.

The pipe workers had used the overflow tunnel for its purpose, to prevent flooding of populated areas and important networks; they hadn't a clue they were condemning a homeless family.

The man who'd become a rat clutched his children as tightly as possible, trying to swim free of the current; but he was thrown into the walls of cement as the tunnel veered sharply right.

The blow loosened his grip just enough that two of his sons were swept away.

Blinded by grit and pain, Splinter barely managed to get his claws onto a protruding pipe as he went past. Keeping his remaining sons against his chest, he used all of his mutant strength to haul them free from the water; climbing the ladder rungs to an above tunnel.

He knelt on all fours, coughing up the water he'd swallowed. Leonardo and Raphael cried in misery and shock, huddling against their father; unable to process what had just happened to them.

Splinter crouched over top of his two sons, the sensation of his youngest children being ripped from his grasp ghosting again and again on his hands.

Splinter curled tightly around his sons, giving into animalistic instincts for just the moment, and tried to control his breathing.

There was no hope that two toddlers would have survived that, not when a full grown, trained ninja had just barely.

His sons were gone.
Had Donatello and Michelangelo been human, Splinter's prediction of their demise would have been right. But they weren't, not in the least.

The water kept pulling them along, and they might have been scared and confused, but the two turtles did not drown.

They were turtles after all; they would always be at home in the water, even after three years of being taught how to live like a human.

This did not mean it was an easy journey though. The water tossed and turned so rapidly, it was all the two brothers could do to hold onto one another in the great swell. They were too small to fight the current, and so could do nothing but allow it to carry them as it pleased.

Tunnel after tunnel rushed by them, sweeping them through the heart of New York, and out to opposite of the side they’d come from. The water kept them in its grasp until it arrived in a network that siphoned it apart. The two turtles were sent along one final pipe, just large enough to shoot them along, before the water slowed enough for them to swim to shore in the larger tunnel the pipe connected to.

Gasping for breath, unused to holding it for so long, the two of them clambered onto the stone floor of the tunnel; the water they’d escaped from running along a lower portion of it.

They shook in their shells, chilled from the water and terrified of what had just occurred. Donnie unsteadily stood, helping his brother Mikey up as well. The tunnel they were in was almost too dark to see, only a little light coming from a grate above it; grass and weeds hung over the edge of the opening.

The only sounds were their own panting breaths and the water rushing by. The tunnel was long and featureless, excluding a ladder built into the wall that lead up to a covered man-hole. With nothing else to do, Donnie decided they should follow it; he didn't want them to risk being taken even further from their family by the water.

It took both of them to push the heavy metal off of the opening, careful team work so as to not fall and crack their shells. Heavy rain drops splattered against their faces and they crawled out one after the other; their second eye-lids keeping the world clear for them.

It was dark out still, deep in the night and thick clouds covering the night sky. They'd emerged into a sprawling ravine, a comparably small spot of nature in the enormous city of New York. Had it not been owned by a wealthy company, and used to conduct product testing under long term outdoor conditions, it would have been possibly inhabited by the human homeless population.

Thankfully for the two brothers, they were the only sentient beings in the park that night.

Lightning struck across the sky, making both turtles hiss and grab for each other in fright. They had to get out of the rain, out of sight of potential threats.

So with Donnie leading the way, they left the top of the hill and went to hide in the thick underbrush of the ravine. Their small size made it easy to get through the flora, ducking down to all fours to crawl beneath thick bushes and low hanging trees.

Eventually, they stumbled upon a fallen tree that had knocked another down on its way. They criss-crossed right at the trunk of large pine; whose branches were large and heavy with needles. The softer leaves and branches broken from the other two trees had collected together under the shelter of
the old pine, creating a protected and almost dry place to hide in.

As more thunder rolled across the horizon, the two turtles crawled into the makeshift shelter; out of the rain finally. Had their skin not been thickly scaled along their limbs, the needles would have prickled and scratched them. But their inhuman physiology made it comfortable enough to sleep; their exhaustion catching up with them after the fading adrenaline.

As they covered themselves in the fallen branches, which still held onto their leaves, the two brothers whispered a plan to look for their family tomorrow. Their father would be looking for them and their big brothers worrying.

Donnie wrapped Mikey up close, tucking his younger brother under his chin, and started humming a soft song in his chest to comfort them both. Mikey rubbed his head against his brother's plastron, humming back the same tune; the one their father had sung to them every night they could remember.

The storm above kept raging, as they fell asleep.

Splinter did not look for them, sure of their deaths. He was too busy trying to assemble a new home to consider searching for his two children's bodies. In the endless feeling sewer systems, it was unlikely he ever would.

He tried to focus on feeding and warming the two sons he'd kept a hold on, they'd lost all of their supplies with the flood and were twice over homeless. Thank the heavens that it was nearing summer, and not the winter, or they would surely have perished as well.

Leonardo and Raphael were not taking the news of their brothers being 'gone' very well, both insisting their little brothers were still alive. Splinter wished he could hold the same optimism, but reality would not afford it.

He'd been trained to recognize a lost cause by his clan, and a fruitless search was one of them.

As the days dragged on, him collecting salvageable items from what had been washed into the sewers, Splinter tried to help his sons through their grief; all the while struggling with his own.

His children were sullen, mourning for two pieces of their four. Splinter could understand, he'd lost his brother not long ago; alongside his daughter and wife. His grief became three fold, and he had to drag himself through the motions of parenting.

Two more lives to mourn, two precious children he'd loved and lost.

The heavens must think it amusing to take and take from him, but he would not let them take his last two sons.

So Splinter kept Leonardo and Raphael close at all times, and set to carving out another home for them to live in. When their safety was assured once more, then he would grieve properly. For now, he would work still to keep them fed and warm.
Not long after Donnie lost count of the days, he gave up on them finding their family or their family
finding them.

He did not know it had been three weeks since the storm, he just knew that he and his brother had
been alone for so long now, it wasn't likely their family was coming for them.

Mikey often would stop in the middle of whatever they were doing to cry, because he was scared
and they were alone and why hadn't their father come and found them yet?

Donnie had no answers, even though he was the older brother.

They were alone, but they didn't starve. It might not have been the foods their father gave them, but
they could find good leaves and tubes to eat around the pond a ways from their shelter. Letting their
instincts guide them as to what they could eat, and what they couldn't. There were even frogs living
in the water, which they'd turned to eating for lack of any other protein. Mikey had been so sorry for
the frogs, crying the whole time he ate his.

The frogs were gross, but days without proper food made them taste less so.

Their tree shelter had worked for the first week, but they'd discovered that humans would come into
the park with machines, sometimes taking ones already there or leaving more. They'd almost been
seen twice by a human who'd gotten too close, both times they had only just escaped by either
swimming deep, deep into the pond or hiding really well under a bush.

They couldn't stay in the park, because otherwise they'd be found and taken away by humans. Their
father had always warned them to never go near a human; they would hurt the turtle children and
steal them away from their family.

They agreed that searching for a new home back in the tunnels would be a good plan. It was scary
going back inside, because what if the water came back and took them even farther from home? But
they made themselves brave enough to go down, hand in hand and only trembling a little.

Donnie was smart to think of leaving a trail of dandelions. They snacked on the leaves, while
dropping the bright yellow flowers onto the stone floors so they could find their way back to the
ravine if nothing came from the adventure.

It took a couple tries, searching and marking the tunnels as they explored each one, but they found
one that connected up to an abandoned subway station. It was on the small side for a station, and
filled with dirt and spiders and rats, but it was safely secluded from the humans above ground.

They used branches from their pine tree to sweep away the worst of the dirt and cobwebs, hissing
and shooing the rats until they learned to leave the turtles in peace. The ravine wasn't too far from the
station, so it could still be their main source of food.

Had they been older, perhaps they would have felt some shame in abandoning what human
standards they had, but they were young, hungry, and desperate. If eating what they found in and
around the pond would fill them up, then they would eat that.

Donnie made sure that their new shelter was better than the last, going so far as to break into the
former staff room to haul out blankets and long forgotten coats; the lock on the door was old and
rusty, only a few yanks and shoves had wrenched it off. They slept together in a pile, inside of what
had been the station managers office; the alcove under the desk just big enough for two small turtles to nestle under.

Sometimes Donnie would consider telling Mikey exactly what he thought was happening, but he didn't. Because sometimes his younger brother would talk about how eventually their father would find them, keeping his moral up by promising himself that.

Late at night, when the two of them went out to get food from Donnie would wonder as much as a three year old could what would happen to them now.

Those thoughts were usually put aside in favor of playing with his brother, or searching for that night's dinner.

Splinter found his family a new home, a safe place for them to grow and learn in, too late for his youngest sons.

The lair they created in the huge subway station was sufficiently warm and dry, and more than big enough for a three person family.

He only wished his two lost sons could have seen it, lived in it along with their brothers. But that loss had been put behind them years ago, now they would focus on the future.

He had a home to make a home, and two sons still to teach the ways of his clan name. Renovations had never been something he was good with, but even as he had difficulty holding a hammer steady in his mutated hands; he swore he'd make this place safe for his sons.

He would see that they grew tall and strong, unbreakable no matter what the world threw at them. With their unique heritage, they would need all the training he could give. They had not an easy road ahead of them; none of them did.

Mikey used to wonder when someone would come for them, but he couldn't recall who that had been any longer. His memories had blurred over time, and the figure he expected to come and find them became just a tall thing with no face.

If he could count properly, or tell time beyond the cold and warm and in-between seasons, he would have known it had been four years since he'd last seen his family.

But he couldn't, because why would he? There was no one to teach him.

He and his brother hadn't noticed it, but over the years since they lost their way, they'd also lost much of what had been taught to them. Their English and Japanese vocabulary shrunk, until almost everything they spoke was in their own personal language of clicks and chirps and hisses and everything in between those sounds.
Mikey didn't notice it though, because he didn't remember it being any way else.

Just him and Donnie, living in their nest in the *big-dark-safe-place*. Filled with trinkets they found dropped into the underground by humans above, safe and decorated however they pleased. Mikey had lots of things, lots of shiny toys to play with and colorful pieces of paper to look at. His favorite was the mirror, broken in only a few pieces and still big enough for him to see his whole self in.

Donnie liked the big thick papers all stuck together, liked looking at the pictures inside even if neither of them knew what the black squiggles meant. Mikey made sure he never touched his *older bigger beloved brother's* things, made sure they never got caught in his play; Donnie was mean when his stuff was wrecked by too rough play.

But Mikey knew how to be the best and sweetest so Donnie would be un-mean again, and then he'd be forgiven right away.

Sometimes Mikey would be lonely feeling, even when Donnie was right next to him where he belonged, and not know why. Maybe the too blurry to remember people in his mind were who he was lonely for. But they weren't here, just Donnie and him.

But that was okay, because they were together and that's all they needed.

Leo could barely remember there ever being more than just himself and Raph. His two other brothers had been gone for so many years, that they were only kept alive by his Sensei's story telling.

Leo did his best to mourn for them with his father, but in the end he couldn't find the same grief anymore. He'd forgotten who those two brothers had been, little more than just faded memories now. He couldn't help but forget, they'd been so young when Donatello and Michelangelo died.

Occasionally though, he'd wake to an ache inside his chest; a deep pang of *missing*. Perhaps that was a sign that even if he forgot his brothers, he would still miss them. Those pangs would come to him on nights that storms raged above ground, ghosts of the one that had taken his younger brothers in the first place.

Raph never showed any signs of having the *missing* feeling on those nights, so Leo assumed it was another eldest thing.

Leo wished his other brothers were with them, because then maybe Raph wouldn't be so angry with him all the time if he had other siblings to play with. His only brother got mad at Leo often during sparring sessions, and kept a hold of that anger afterwards; upset by a loss in combat.

Raph would forgive him, given time and space, but it was lonely when his brother wouldn't talk to him. Leo wished they had more siblings, if just so they could buffer between him and Raph.
Donnie would sometimes get the feeling that they had not always lived in their nest, which was almost as strange as when Mikey would have dreams of someone coming to get them.

No one would come to get them; they were too well hidden; safe from the loud dangerous bad humans above.

He would ignore the sometimes feeling of missing missing something someone missing in his chest, because no one was missing; Mikey was right there and he was right here, who would they be missing?

When he woke up, rubbing at his tight feeling chest during storms that tumbled above the safe-dark-nest-home, Mikey would ask what hurts why hurts you you okay? while checking Donnie over for any wounds.

Donnie would push his curious hands off his chest, chirping a comforting fine fine all good just missing feeling I fine. Mikey would insist on being even closer to Donnie on those nights, not taking any protested no's, and curl around Donnie's longer limbs as best he could. Donnie would pretend he did not like it, but Mikey knew he was lying when he said those things; they both liked to be extra close on stormy nights.

Mikey told him that he also got the missing feeling sometimes, and he thought it could be the faceless thing in his dreams that they were missing. Donnie asked him why they would miss something they couldn't even remember, and Mikey shrugged; he didn't know, Donnie was the clever one.

Donnie agreed with that, he was the clever one. He was the one who could take the lost things that humans dropped into the tunnels and make them useful again. Like the pouches he made out of the stretchy weaved things for him and his brother; that way they could carry lots of things at once, and not drop them just so they could run faster.

Fabric, something far in the back of Donnie's mind would whisper when he thought about his pouches strapped across his shell. The word was in the language of humans, annoying to pronounce, so they had to make a new one for themselves. Hiss-cli-click, was the sound they called their pouches. A good name, a name they had made. Better than the human one for sure, it made much more sense to them like that.

Sometimes when Donnie would catch glimpses of the humans, from their tunnels or in the forest where good things to eat were, and wonder why there were so many of the humans, but not of big clever turtles like them. They found another turtle once, but she had been old and small and did not talk as well as them. She had just wanted to keep swimming in the big pond, and not spend time with the two brothers.

It had always been just himself and Mikey, but sometimes Donnie would wonder why that was.

That's why he was the clever-curious-smart brother, and Mikey was the happy-good-at-food-finding-playful brother. Mikey could be smart sometimes too, but that was usually about a new food to eat or game to play; Donnie had smart ideas for building things in their nest, so he was the clever one.

Not clever enough yet to puzzle out the missing missing something's missing feelings unfortunately, but he'd solve that one day.
Raph had that feeling sometimes, the *missing* feeling, but he never told anyone about it and didn't know his elder brother got it too.

Like he would tell Leo about something like that, his brother would make fun of him for imagining things so stupid. Maybe he wouldn't, but Raph wasn't going to risk embarrassing himself in front of his brother any more than he had to.

He wished the stories that their Sensei told them were real, real in the sense that he did have two more brothers to play and fight with rather than just Leo. Who was older, and more mature, and oh so full of himself for being the leader.

Leo never liked to do the fun things Raph did, like roughhousing and sneaking out of the lair while Sensei slept. No, he was a rule follower of all things, and wanted to watch his dumb space show instead of going out to be real ninja's for a night.

Raph wished he had more brothers; just he'd have someone other than Leo to spend time with. Whoever Donatello and Michelangelo had been, they would have been more fun than Leo was. They probably would have thought his ideas were great, and then Leo would have had to play along too because he would have been out numbered.

Raph wished that storm had never taken his brothers away, it would have been better in their home if they'd stayed.

On the nights that he really felt the *missing* feeling in his plastron, Raph would go and sit out in the tunnels; as close to an open grate as he dared. Leo and Sensei might hide from storms, but Raph went towards them. They were as loud as he was when he was angry, and it made him feel just a bit closer to the brothers he couldn't remember.

Though the water that ran by him as he sat across the tunnel from the grate made him shiver, he'd stay put until his toes were numb against the slick stone. He'd get a scolding every time he came home afterwards, but he was always being scolded anyways so what was one more for something he really needed to do?

Maybe Leo and Sensei didn't get it, but Raph would secretly pretend his brothers would have.

The years went by, and both sets of brother grew older and stronger; never the wiser that they were two halves of four.

One set mourned what had never been, and learned the ways of a dead clan under the tutelage of their father.

The other forgot everything they'd known before the storm, and created a clan of their own; their world centered on just the two of them.

But fate is a powerful thing, and while they could have gone their whole lives without ever meeting one another again, they would reunite one day to face the greatest threat the world had ever known.

All it took was a single, clear frame of footage for the elders to find their youngers.
April was checking the *Supernatural Enthusiasts of New York*’s net page for recent Kraang sightings in the city, her father still missing and their leads few, when she found a small video of something very familiar.

She clicked on the video, and turned up the volume on her computer. The video is blurry and shaking, taken by a camera phone during dusk, but she would know the shape darting across the screen even in her dreams.

A turtle, tall as a human and moving on its back legs, was sorting through a pile of boxes in an alley way. The angle of the camera was from above, taken from a window of an apartment. April watched with held breath, as the mutant turtle pulled a discarded lamp from the boxes, holding it up in the gloom to examine its cracked base. When the camera man shook the phone again, he knocked into the window frame and caused enough noise that the turtle looked straight up into the lens.

April didn't dare blink as the turtle stared right into the camera with wide blue eyes, before it moved so quick the camera didn't catch more than a blur. The turtle sprinted down the alley, and hopped into an open manhole with its prize, disappearing from sight.

The camera man swore once, gasping for breath after holding still for so long, and the video cut off there.

April leaned closer the screen, rewinding the video to look at the turtle again. It stared into the camera with blue eyes a shade too light to be Leo’s, and has faint freckles across its face. This isn’t one of her friends; this is a completely new mutant.

She scrolled down the page, finding that people had linked other photos and pages about sighting of this turtle; they go back years and years, blurry images of a huge turtle being spotted on that side of the city. The video has the clearest quality out of them all, and had only just been posted.

She took screenshots of the best frames, and printed them to her aunt's office down the hall. Then she copy and pasted the article into Word Document, printing that too.

She had to tell the guys, they'd never believe this.
“Guys, guys! Leo, Raph, you've gotta look at this,” April called out as she half sprinted into the lair, being careful not to bump her healing arm as she did; when the brothers had saved her a few weeks back, she'd broken her arm falling from the copter. It wasn't a bad break, and she was already half way to getting out of the cast. She started pulling out the papers from her messenger bag with her normal hand, power walking across the stone floors. “You won't believe what I found on my message boards today!”

“Is it information about your father?” Leo asked, pausing his VHS tape of *Space Heroes*. Raph, also sitting on the couch, but reading a well-thumbed comic, turned his head to look at the human girl approaching.

April sat down next to Raph, beckoning Leo over as well, and showed the printed images with flourish. “I found another one of you guys, another turtle! Isn't that amazing?”

Raph snatched the top paper from her hands, the one of the turtle looking up at the camera; its edges crumpling as he held it tightly. His arms were shaking minutely as he stared wide eyed at the paper. April looked up at the still standing Leo, who's mouth was opening and closing, eyes also wide.

“Sensei... Sensei!” Leo yelled, spinning to run for their father's room. “You need to look at this!”

“What's going on?” April asked. “Is it that shocking that there're more mutants?”

“We... we had...” Raph stuttered, shaking his head. He took the rest of the papers, sorting through the printed pictures one by one. “Holy shit, this could be one of our missing brothers. I can't believe, after all these years, they might be alive.”

“You have more siblings??” April looked at the blurry prints again, wrapping her head around this new information. She hadn’t wanted to assume the mystery turtle was related, feeling it was somehow racist to, but now...

She heard hushed footsteps, and saw Leo and Splinter come into the room; walking faster than his usual languid pace. Raph shoved the papers into his father's hands as soon as he was close enough.

Splinter sifted through the papers, brown eyes moving across the pages rapidly. April watched as the usually stoic mutant press a trembling claw against page he'd stopped on. His whiskers twitched as he swallowed, moving his eyes from the papers to April. “Where... where did you find this?”

“I found it on one of my message boards, for paranormal activity in New York, when I was looking for more sightings of Kraang,” April felt intimidated by the tall rat's intense stare, she wasn't used to Splinter looking so harshly at her. “I came right over after I printed these, I swear. I knew you'd want to see them.”

“For that, I thank you April. These are more important than you can imagine,” Splinter said, inclining his head in a bow. April returned the gesture, mostly out of confusion.

She watched Leo and Raph impatiently read over their father's shoulder as Splinter read the article she'd printed. April bit her lip, knowing she'd stumbled into a very personal matter for the family. “Raph said that it could be a sibling you've lost. I never knew you had any more than just the two of you. What happened to them?”
“Once... once I had four sons,” Splinter said, his voice soft. He made a gesture, signalling his sons to sit down. Raph took his seat beside April again, and Splinter sat on her other side; Leo sitting on the end. Splinter traced the edge of the photo on top, the one of the turtle jumping into the sewer system. “Many years ago, before we lived in this place, April, we had no proper home. It is because of that, that I lost my two youngest sons. A great storm flooded the tunnels, and took them from me. I thought them dead, but this, this has given me hope that they may yet live.”

“We have to find them,” Leo said seriously, not taking his eyes off the paper. Raph nodded an agreement, looking as focused as his brother did.

Splinter handed the papers back to April, placing them gently in her hands. “Please, go, and take my sons with you. Find this turtle quickly; he might still be in that area of the city.”

April held the papers in lap, feeling overwhelmed by what was happening; but she squared her shoulders and nodded. “I've already got the address. We'll go tonight.”

As Leo and Raph went to go gear up, April handed back the close up she’d edited to Splinter; the image still legible despite the alterations. It was of the turtle's up turned face, blown up in the Paint program on her lap top. Splinter took the paper, saying thank you once more, before going to the dojo with the image held against his chest.

April took another once over of the article, checking if she had the numbers memorized correctly. She'd just gotten everything stuffed into her bag again, when Leo and Raph reappeared with their weapons strapped on.

It was already past the evening, so they set out right away.

Good thing April had brought her bike, otherwise it would have been impossible to keep up with the brothers. And even with her peddling quickly and carefully, because of her arm, she barely kept them within sight on the roof tops. They split up briefly so she could take a train to the other side of the city, while the brothers went back under ground to hop on the train’s roof there.

They reconvened properly at the apartment complex where the video had been shot.

It hadn't been more than a day since they video was taken, indicated by the still there boxes of trash; garbage was taken every two days by the city workers. April chained her bike to a rack in front of the apartment, and followed her mutant friends down the man-hole they'd seen the mystery turtle duck into.

It was the same as every other sewer tunnel April had been in, dank and dark. She carefully avoided stepping in the guck that flowed down the center, following the two turtles as they searched for clues as to where their maybe sibling had gone.

“Hey, hey look at this,” Leo said, pointing at the tunnel leading to the right. April and Raph came over, and looked at what he'd indicated. Scratched onto the wall, were three deliberate grooves in the stone; perfectly lined up together in a row horizontally. “I think this is the way he went.”

April turned around in a circle, checking for any other marks. She spotted some more, right on the underside of the tunnel next to the now covered exit. “I think your right; it's probably how he can tell where to go.”

Raph started down the tunnel the marks went along, looking back over his shoulder at Leo and April. “You two coming, or are we gonna stand around sightseeing?”

Leo frowned, annoyed by his brother's attitude, but followed the younger ninja. April took one last
look at the marks, before following as well.

The marks were set at the beginning and end of each tunnel, indicating which ones to take. As they followed the markings, the tunnels got drier and larger. April tugged out her phone, checking her GPS. The connection was iffy, but she still had a signal. Comparing their positions with a sewer systems map, she found they’d moved into overflow tunnels. Their trek leads them finally to a huge open area, with tunnels leading off in many directions and water rushing below.

“Now what, it just leads us right into a drain,” Raph asked, looking down at the watery swirl.

Leo stepped up beside his brother, leaning a bit out into the air to look upwards. He smiled, and nudged Raph with his elbow. “Look up, Raph, that’s our next step.”

Raph leaned forwards as well, and snorted. April crept close as she dared to the edge and looked up as well, wary of falling. Above their current tunnel, was another that had no water coming from it; and had the three distinct scratches right beneath it, this time vertical to show the correct path.

“How do get up there? There’s nothing to climb,” April said, stepping back from the edge.

“Noope, but there’s stuff to jump from,” Leo said, leaping into the open air. April watched, startled from the knee jerk reaction that he was going to fall, as Leo bounded off a thick pipe stretching across the room and up into the tunnel above.

“Fucking show off,” Raph grumbled. He leaned out and shouted up at Leo over the water noise. “And how’s April supposed to get up there?”

“Carry her up! You’re strong enough!” Leo shouted back.

“So are you, why didn’t you do it?”

“Dibs out!”

“You don’t call it after you duck out!”

“Don’t I get any say in this?” April said, unimpressed by their squabbling. Raph shot her a glare, but April just crossed her arms and leveled a flat look at him until he looked away. “Just do it Raph, we’re wasting time.”

Raph huffed, but held out his arms to pick her up. April let him, telling him to be careful not to drop her and to watch her arm, and then held on for dear life as he jumped. April tried not the scream as they rebounded off the pipe and Raph launched them into the next tunnel. He dropped her back on her feet right away, and she smoothed her metaphorically ruffled feathers.

“Thanks for not dropping me,” April said as they started down the tunnel.

“Hmph,” Was all Raph said, making April roll her eyes. If she didn’t need these two to hunt down leads on the Kraang, and be her bodyguards in general, they probably wouldn’t hang out very much. Raph was too surly, and Leo tended to have a one track mind and a holier-than-thou attitude.

Were they friends? In a way yes, but April didn’t feel like spending enormous amounts of time with the turtle brothers. Maybe the one they were looking for might be a better companion.

The markings this time only went for another fifty feet, before telling them to climb a ladder upwards. They emerged into yet another tunnel, but this one had rusted rails in it and small stones are a floor. April turned on her phone’s flashlight, examining the aging metal; the tracks were covered in
dirt and had rust creeping along the edges.

Leo whistled, listening to the echo. “This is probably one of the many abandoned subways under New York, like the lair. That turtle probably lives here somewhere.”

“Duh, we already could tell that, Leo,” Raph said in a bored tone. “Now which way, I don’t see any more scratches.”

April shone her light further down the tunnel, the light reaching down to the end, where she saw something catch in the light. “Guys, look at that.”

They all went to investigate, and found a large and roughly sewn bag with the lamp from the video beside it. April picked up the bag, rummaging through its contents. Inside were various broken electronics and glass bottles, with one packet of cracked candles still in its plastic.

“What the heck is all this junk for?” Raph said, picking up the lamp. Its base was riddled with spidery cracks and the bulb was broken.

“Maybe he likes to collect things?” April suggested, handing the bag to Leo while she looked closer at a particularly pretty bottle; its bright red glass and tasteful label were very appealing.

“Why did he leave it all here though, this isn’t a very good place to live,” Leo turned in a circle, looking at all the possible directions they could go next. The tunnel they’d come from merged into a transfer circle for trains, tracks leading off into three other tunnels.

April turned her attention from the glass bottle back to looking around the tunnels, using her flashlight to see better; the brothers could see much better than her in the dark, so she avoided shining it right in their eyes. April carefully stepped in a circle like Leo had, steadily looking down each tunnel. Nothing jumped out at her as the next way to go though.

On a whim she shone it upwards, and gasped, her weak hand dropping the bottle to the ground. The shattering glass startled the brothers, immediately drawing their attention. They looked at her, vaguely annoyed she’d broken the bottle, and April shakily pointed upwards where her light illuminated the ceiling.

There right above them, crouched on long dead wires with expert balance, was the turtle from the video.

“Holy shit,” Raph whispered.

The turtle tilted his head, blinking big blue eyes down at the trio. With smooth movements, he crawled across the taunt wires on all fours, up to the wall. He then got down by sliding on a length of snapped wire, dropping onto the stone in a low stance. None of them moved as the turtle approached them slowly, but April could see Raph and Leo tensing up in case this turned into a fight.

The turtle stopped when he was ten feet from them, eyes flickering back and forth between Raph and Leo both. Then, he smiled. April watched as the turtle stood up from his crouch and started chattering at them. But.

Not in English.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Raph whispered, as the turtle kept chirping and clicking at them. “Why isn’t he talking English, Leo, what’s wrong with him?”

“I don’t know, he should be the same as us,” Leo said, looking panicked as the turtle stepped closer
to them; still talking only inhuman sounds. April peered around Leo, looking closer at the new turtle. He had a pea-pod shaped satchel against his chest made in the same rough stitching as the large bag forgotten on the ground, and bracelets made from bright ribbons and weaved string spaced up and down his arms. A few were around his ankles, the occasional glass bead winking in April’s flashlight.

“Do you understand us?” April asked, stepping up to meet the turtle. What she got as a response was a hiss and snapping teeth, the turtle’s demeanor doing a one-eighty.

“Whoa, okay, that’s not safe,” Leo said, pulling April behind him. He spread his arms out, blocking the turtle from April. “Calm down, she’s with us.”

Raph put himself between the turtle and his brother, sizing him up. The other turtle was smaller than him, in both height and bulk. Raph crossed his arms, frowning at the smaller turtle. “What’s your deal, don’t you talk?”

The turtle was looking at them with a confused expression, one that was steadily looking sadder. Raph stepped forwards again, almost looming over the other mutant. “Well? Say something!”

The turtle hissed again, following up with rapid clicks mixed in-between trills. Raph clenched his hands, looking frustrated with the mutant. “Why won’t you speak English?!”

“Raph wait-!” Leo started, but it was too late. Raph tried to grab the turtle’s shoulder, but he jumped away before Raph made contact. The turtle dropped onto all fours, hissing balefully at them, retreating backwards towards a tunnel.

“Wait, please, we didn’t mean any harm!” Leo said, starting to move for the other mutant. The feral turtle cried out a single long sound of warning, before turning and dashing into the darkness. Leo turned on his brother, looking furious. “Now look what you did, he ran away!”

“No my fucking fault he didn’t know what I was saying!” Raph shot back.

“We don’t have time for this; we need to go after him right away. We might not ever get another chance-” April started to say, but Leo and Raph were already off and running. “-to find him. Great, leave the human alone in the sewers with a feral mutant running around. Thanks guys, really appreciate your ethic as bodyguards!”

No one answered her annoyed exclamations, the brothers long gone. April sighed, and counted to ten, before starting after the three turtles. At least they’d left a trail of disturbed dust and scuffed foot steps to follow.

Mikey ran as fast as he could, panting as he turned another corner and his limbs skidding slightly on the stones.

He’d been overjoyed, more turtles! Like him, like Donnie! But then they’d started talking like humans did, and they had the smell of steel all over them, and a human with them too.

Now he was scared because they were following him almost fast enough to catch up. No one had ever been that fast, not even Donnie was fast enough to catch him when Mikey really tried.
But Mikey could hear the two bigger turtles following him still; running all wrong and just like the loud dangerous humans from above his home. He never should have gone against Donnie’s rule about going out on his own, now he was in danger and it was all his own fault.

Mikey ran down the tunnels, trying and failing to lose the two pursuing turtles. Mikey chittered to himself, disappointed beneath his fear that the first two turtles he ever met that were like him and Donnie, were enemies.

Mikey turned another tunnel, and realized what he was doing. He was leading them right to their nest, which was a bad, bad plan and would get them both found and cornered. He made a split second choice to leap through an open doorway that lead to a tunnel that ran along the one he was in. He and beloved older clever brother Donnie had discovered the small tunnel within the tunnels years ago, and had taken all the dusty, but neat things from inside. They’d also broken both doors, just in case something like this ever happened.

Mikey heard the two hostile turtles making angry sounds on the other side of the tiny tunnel, and sped up again.

He used all four of his limbs to get ahead of them, racing for somewhere to hide. His pouch knocked against his chest, probably bruising all the leaves he’d gotten from the forest earlier. Mikey spared a moment to regret this, he’d found lots of the yellow flower plants and had been looking forwards to sharing with Donnie as an apology for going out alone.

The sound of the turtles emerging into the tunnel behind him made Mikey forget his regret, and focus again on running.

As he came into another large cavern much like where he’d met the bigger turtles, he realized he’d made a big mistake. He hadn’t come down this way in many, many weeks, and he’d forgotten in his running that the one that lead further from his nest was blocked off by collapsed stone and the other was a dead end, sealed with man-made stone.

Mikey skidded to a stop, looking around in the cavern hoping a way out would show itself. But the wrong-walking-acting turtles showed up, and he was forced to back further towards the collapsed tunnel.

Mikey lifted himself onto his back legs, hissing a low warning that they weren’t to get any closer, but they kept advancing. Their human words buzzed at his ears, not making sense as they flowed rapidly from the two. Mikey’s shell knocked against stone, and he whimpered; he was trapped and at their mercy. He hadn’t brought his sharp metal cutting tool because he thought he was only going to the food place, now he was unarmed and up against enemies much bigger than him.

The bigger one, with two metal cutting tools on his belt, was talking in low tones; less threatening than he had been earlier, and not so close. The thinner one though, with two long cutting tools across his shell was getting too close, and though he was talking in a soothing tone; Mikey knew it had to be a trick.

The turtle reached out for him, and Mikey couldn’t move, scared to make things worse. As the turtle closed his hand around Mikey’s defensively raised arm, Mikey did the thing Donnie always told him to do if he was caught.

He screamed for his brother.
Raph watched Leo jerk away from the turtle, backing up quickly as the smaller turtle screamed out shrill sounds.

“Jesus Christ, you barely touched him,” Raph said, reeling from the decibel the feral mutant was reaching.

“I know! I don’t know why he’s doing that!” Leo stepped back again when the turtle lunged at him, hissing before retreating against the stones and screaming the same sounds again. “This isn’t working; he doesn’t understand what we’re saying at all.”

“Please. Stop. Screaming.” Raph said slowly, raising his hands in a calming gesture and stepping towards the turtle. “We aren’t here to hurt you; we just want to take you to see our dad, okay?”

The feral mutant let out an angry yell of trills, still pressing himself against the rocks. Raph grit his teeth, this wasn’t going at all how they’d planned. Trust Leo to set the guy off, now the turtle wasn’t even trying to listen to them.

Raph refused to acknowledge that he was the one who made the mutant run in the first place.

A new sound came from behind him, sounding like pounding feet; maybe April had finally caught up with them. He turned his head to look, and was bowled over by a speeding green shape bigger than him.

Another turtle had entered the tunnel without them seeing, and had rebounded off the curved walls to tackle Raph with a flying leap. The new turtle stood in front of the smaller feral, screaming loud and angry at Leo and Raph with a very clear message: Back Off.

He was a lot taller than the first, way taller, and had a knife in his hand. He had less things tied on his arms than the smaller, only a couple bracelets were on his upper arms; a single small necklace of brown twine was around his neck, purple beads interspaced in the braid.

Raph backed up to be beside Leo, hands going to sit on the hilts of his sais. Leo’s hand hovered over his own weapons, expression grim.

The feral turtles and the brothers stood still, sizing up their potential fight. Raph knew he and Leo could probably take them, they had better weapons and training on their side; but something told him they wouldn’t get out of the fight unharmed. If his assumptions were right, the two mutants in front of them would aim to kill if they attacked.

Carefully, Raph pulled his sais from his belt, sliding his three fingers along familiar wrappings. The taller feral hissed warningly, white eyelids showing he meant business. Raph continued to pull his weapons free, but only held the very ends. If they wanted to talk, they were going to have to calm things down. Ironic, since he was best at escalating things rather than calming the down.

He dropped his sais, the metal clattering on stones, and kicked them to the side. Then he lowered himself, despite Leo’s whispered questions, into a position where he was smaller than them.

Raph had dealt with stray dogs before, cats too, and they didn’t like it when he stood over them. He’d forgotten that earlier, too shocked by the lack of humanity in the turtle to think clearly.

“Get down Leo, we’re scaring them,” Raph said, hoping his brother would listen for once. Leo’s
hand twitched around his katana hilt once more, before following along. Leo half knelt as well, one knee on the ground and the other in a position he could spring from; mimicking Raph’s.

The taller feral stopped hissing, but was making a rumbling sound in his plastron still. The smaller turtle was on all fours still, and looked ready to run at any moment; a quiet keening noise escaping him.

“We just want to talk, can you talk?” Leo asked, making sure to talk slowly. The tall feral tilted his head, wary, but listening. Leo tried again. “We came from the other side of the city; we think you could be our lost brothers. Do you understand that? Brothers?”

The small feral made some sort of mangled sound, close to the word ‘brother’. He inched a little out from behind the taller, chirping a question and saying the sound again. Raph nodded at the turtle, smiling to show he was happy. “Yeah, that’s right. Brothers.”

“Bruh’ers,” The feral sounded out, smiling small like. He nudged the taller mutant, chattering quickly to him. The taller one had a lower voice, returning the chattering while shooting glances at the brothers. Raph watched them exchange information, hoping they were getting something right.

The taller one was relaxing, the knife in his hand drifting to be at his side instead of pointed at Raph and Leo. The small one stepped back from behind his brother, making happy sounding croons at the ninjas.

Raph opened his mouth to respond, when crunching gravel behind them made him shut it.

“You two seem- to forget- that I’m not a ninja,” April huffed, stepping into the tunnel, and unknowingly triggering the feral turtles again.

“April, wait-!” Raph tried to warn her, but the two mutants sprang over Leo and Raph’s heads, racing for her. Leo moved before Raph could stop him, and the flash of steel accompanied April’s shriek.

Raph only saw April being shoved down by the tall mutant, and then Leo was on him with a drawn blade. Red splattered across the stones, like Raph’s mask, from Leo’s slice. The tall feral howled, and kicked Leo hard in the head. Leo had cut him down along the arm, slicing off three bracelets in the process.

“Shit!” Raph ran to help April up as the two ferals ran back into the other tunnels.

Leo was standing again, slightly woozy, looking down at the red on his drawn sword. “I’m sorry, I panicked! I didn’t mean-”

“I know, but you did anyway!” Raph snapped, hauling April off the ground. She winced, dusting gravel off the back of her back. Raph held up her cast, looking for dents. “He get your arm?”

“No, I’m fine,” April replied, brushing Raph’s concern off. “I’m sorry I scared them, I didn’t know you had them cornered.”

“Doesn’t matter, right now we have to find them,” Leo said, flicking the blood on his blade off. He grimaced, most of it stayed stubbornly on the sword. “Now that we know both of them are alive, we have to keep looking. Plus… I think I nicked an artery. He’ll need stitches if he doesn’t want to bleed out.”

“Fuck,” Raph grabbed his sai off the ground, roughly shoving them back into his belt. “Then we better get moving.”
“How’re you gonna find them, I could barely find you two,” April said, looking down the tunnel the two mutants had run into.

Raph stepped around her, already scenting the air. “I can smell the blood, there’s too much for them to hide.”

“That, and he left a trail,” Leo said, nudging some stones with drips on them with his foot. “They’re panicking, so they won’t think to cover their tracks. If we follow these, it’ll lead us right to them.”

“. . .I think I’ll hang back, they don’t seem to like me,” April said, following the brothers at a sedate pace. “Go on ahead, I’ll back track to where we first came in and head back to the lair. Someone needs to tell Splinter what’s happening.”

“We’ll call you on a pay phone if we can’t get them back with us,” Leo said as he started to run. Raph nodded at her once over his shoulder before they both vanished into the dark, and left April standing alone with her flashlight.

Raph followed his sense of smell, the tang of salty-metallics heavy in the air. It wound all the back to the tunnel where they’d crossed through the conductor’s maintenance office, and down that first tunnel. The tracks had drips of blood every few feet, showing they didn’t have much time before the tall feral was in real danger.

Mikey pulled his brother along, whining and crooning concern at Donnie. The blood coming from his wound wouldn’t stop, and he couldn’t staunch it while they ran.

Part of the ways back into the heart of their territory, Donnie had stumbled and almost fallen over. He’d lost too much blood to run alone, so Mikey had slung Donnie’s long arm over his shoulders and half carried him the last while.

They entered their nest; the lights of many burning sticks letting him see the full extent of the damage. Mikey trilled high and scared notes, because Donnie wasn’t walking right and there was blood everywhere.

Move move hurry bandages hurry hurt you brother hurry Mikey urged Donnie, pulling them into their sleeping place and letting him collapse on the soft ground. Mikey grabbed the basket of fabric strips, kneeling beside his beloved friend brother companion and shoving them into his hands.

Donnie picked up a long strip, and started tying it around his arm. But his tying was sloppy, and he kept losing grip on his bandage.

Help me too weak help Mikey please Donnie asked him, releasing his hold on the bandage. Mikey started wrapping the bandage tight against Donnie’s scales, going back for another when the first one ran out of length.

But the blood wasn’t stopping, and it stained the bandages red before Mikey was even done knotting them. Mikey whined, he didn’t know what to do, this was Donnie’s job, he was the smart clever careful brother. Mikey was the one who found the good foods, and shiny trinkets; not patch up wounds.
Donnie was slumping to the side, his breathing shallow and short. Mikey clicked and bumped his cheek against Donnie’s, asking what he was supposed to do now. Before Donnie answered though, they both froze at the sound human like voices calling out in their nest.

The other turtles had found them.

Mikey rumbled in his chest, pushing Donnie to stand and get behind the large wooden thing and hide with him. They’d shoved it mostly to the side of the room over the long time they’d lived there, and made a big sleeping place with big soft fabrics and fluffy-feathers- inside-pouches. Now, he hoped it would hide them enough from the dangerous bad pretending-to-be-humans wrong turtles that they wouldn’t see them.

Donnie protested with a slurred string of clicks, saying he should be in front of Mikey because he was the bigger one, but Mikey shoved him into the space anyways. Mikey was the stronger one right now, so he would be in front. He took Donnie’s sharp cutting tool and held the not-sharp end, ready to strike out at their attackers.

Mikey heard their voices getting closer and closer, until the footsteps and voices came into their sleeping room. He tensed, one hand holding the sharp tool, and the other braced on the floor. Donnie tried to keep still, even as his limbs were failing to listen. Mikey heard the voices lower themselves, before going back out of the room. He relaxed ever so slightly, before starting at the sound of metal hitting the stone outside.

Then, a single pair of footsteps came back into the room, heading for their hiding place. As the bulkier turtle stepped into his sight line, Mikey hissed loudly; rumbling a threat deep in his chest. The turtle raised his hands, talking in a slow and calming tone. He got down onto the ground, and lowered his head, showing submission.

Mikey turned his head, eyeing at the turtle suspiciously. Why would a bigger stronger turtle show submission to him, when he had only a small cutting tool and an injured companion?

The wrong sounding human speak coming from the turtle was garbled sounding to Mikey, but the turtle kept repeating the same words over and over. Mikey listened to them, slowly puzzling out what they meant.

He lowered the cutting tool slightly, considering what the turtle was saying. He trilled a question, what did he want?

The turtle said the same thing again, and Mikey finally caught a couple sounds that made sense.

You help Donnie cure wound help beloved? Mikey asked, tilting his head at the turtle. When the turtle said nothing, Mikey shortened it to, You help Donnie?

The turtle must have understood somewhat, nodding and making human words that sounded like agreement. Mikey leveled the sharp tool at him again, thinking the offer over. Donnie was hurt really, really badly, and Mikey had no idea what to do. And the turtle with two sharp-cutting tools had only attacked when they’d jumped the human, so maybe they hadn’t meant to hurt him and had just been startled.

Maybe the human was their companion, maybe they’d hurt someone they cared about. Mikey wondered how anyone could care for a human, they were loud and smelly and scary.

But they were desperate, and Mikey could hear Donnie making a repeating hurt hurt hurt help it hurting trill behind him. Mikey looked at the unfamiliar turtle’s sides, looking for the small but
dangerous sharp-cutting tools from earlier. They weren’t there. Maybe he could trust the turtle.

Mikey lowered his sharp tool, and stood up on his back legs only. He gestured for the turtle to step away from the hiding place, and he did, to Mikey’s surprise; he wasn’t used to having someone submit to him. Mikey kept on hand free to hold the tool, but used the other to help Donnie stand up. With his brother leaning heavily on him, Mikey couldn’t move very quickly at all. He hoped very, very hard that trusting the turtles would be the right thing to do.

Donnie hissed at the bulky turtle, who backed further away from the two. The new turtle went out of the sleeping room, into the large area filled with many burning sticks and Donnie’s built things and Mikey’s bottles. Mikey kept a steady hand on Donnie, creeping slowly out of the doorway, and expecting an attack from the two-sharp-cutting tools turtle.

No attack came, and the maybe attacker was too far to try; all the way back at the beginning of the raised stone that dropped down to where the metal ran by on gravel. The bulky turtle still didn’t have his sharp tools, and was talking again in calm human words.

Mikey got the gist of it, which was to follow the human talking turtles. He took a step forwards, trying to take Donnie with him, but his brother slumped hard against him. Mikey cried out, trying to lower his brother carefully; Donnie was passed out from blood loss. Mikey shook his shoulders, saying, *Up up get up wake up brother beloved please Donnie wake up.*

The bulky turtle with a red fabric strip across his face approached, making concerned sounds at Mikey. Mikey stood over his brother, hissing for the turtle to stay away. He didn’t though, coming closer still. Mikey hissed louder, adding a shrieked warning of *No! Mine! Away away away!*

The red-fabric bulky turtle knelt too close for comfort, making slow gestures and still talking human words. Mikey hissed, he didn’t know what the turtle was saying; he was too panicked to translate.

The turtle made picking up gestures, pointing at Donnie and repeating the movements. Mikey lowered himself closer to Donnie, wary of what the turtle wanted. The turtle said again the string of words, and Mikey got the last bit of the sentence. He wanted to help carry Donnie.

Mikey slowly stepped back from over top of Donnie, watching the red turtle’s movements. He didn’t do anything other than shuffle forwards to be beside Donnie and Mikey, and get one strong arm underneath Donnie’s shell. He put the other one under Donnie’s legs, and then lifted Mikey’s brother upwards in one smooth movement.

Mikey looked him right in the eye, showing he still had the sharp tool and was watching. The red turtle nodded, and waited for Mikey to nod back. Then he started carrying Donnie away, with Mikey following very close. The two-sharp-cutting tools turtle, the one with a blue strip across his face, was holding his tools still; along with the red turtle’s. But they were tucked away in thick brown belts across his shell, and the turtle made no moves to reach for them.

Mikey didn’t start walking again until the blue turtle that’d sliced his brother started down the tunnel that led away from his home.

Mikey looked once over his shoulder, at his and closest friend companion brother Donnie’s nest, before waking into the tunnel; right behind the turtle holding his brother and the turtle who’d hurt his brother.

He hoped they’d return to it soon, and that Donnie would be walking on his own then.
Whoa there were a lot of you for a single posting. Thanks for all the support! Sorry if there was any confusion about the multiple chapters thing, I posted this in the dead of night and forgot to click that option. Whoops. \( \gamma (\,'~`;\,) \gamma \)

I don't know how coherent this chapter was, I did my best, but I've had alcohol tonight and I might've messed something up. Hopefully I didn't, that's always embarrassing af.

If you want to ask about the feral brothers, or literally anything, drop by my writing tumblr at onthespectrumwriting; it's all turtles, all the time, except for rare moments where it's not.

...it's like five AM here rn and I'm going to go collapse now.

comment if you enjoyed. (¬‿¬) \(/

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Confrontations.

Chapter Notes

Woo there’s a lot of you guys, considering I’ve only posted two (now three) chapters. That’s a lot of support for my super self-indulgent fic!

Thank you, all of you, and please enjoy this chapter; posted in the dead of night as usual.

Leo found that getting out of their feral brothers’ tunnel territory was easier than it had been getting in. They went as far as reaching the actual sewer tunnels, before climbing out into the evening air. The tall mutant, still unconscious in Raph’s arms, was still losing blood even if it was starting to slow. They needed to get him back to the lair for proper care and stitches, before infection got in or worse.

Lucky for them, a late night delivery van was left unattended with the keys in the ignition; the driver talking with the store owner in the open delivery bay. Leo hopped inside the driver’s seat, and started the engine. The angry shouting of the driver were left behind quickly, and Leo drove the white and red van to where Raph and the two other mutants waited.

Raph would have been the one driving if it weren’t for the fact that the small feral wouldn’t let him anywhere near his taller brother. Understandable, Leo had been the one to cause the injuries.

The back of the van had enough space for Raph and the others to get inside, most of the boxes already been unloaded back at the store. Raph carefully cradled his unconscious charge, while the small turtle’s eyes flickered between Leo and Raph both; clearly uneasy about being inside the vehicle.

The turtle shrieked when Leo started driving, clutching the bench where Raph was sitting. Leo could hear Raph repeating “It’s alright, it’s just a car, your fine” while he bound the arm of the tall feral. There had been two coats abandoned in the front seat, and Raph had cut them up and used them as another layer of bandages. There had been a moment when Leo handed Raph one of his sais, the small turtle freaking out at the sight of the weapon, but Raph had gotten him to calm back down.

Leo had never seen his brother being so patient, or level-headed, about anything before. Maybe Spike his pet tortoise, but even then; it was an abrupt change from the Raph Leo was used to.

The ride back to the lair was tense for two reasons. One was that there was an unconscious and
bleeding turtle, and another turtle that was likely to panic whenever the car swerved too sharply. Reason two was that Leo didn’t drive because he was terrible at it. They left a string of honks and angry shouting as he drove around the city, cutting other cars off or running red lights accidentally.

Leo prayed to every old Japanese god he could think of that they wouldn’t be pulled over before they reach their neighborhood, and that they get there in one piece.

An eternity later, with a lot of traffic rules broken and bent in the process, Leo put the van in park and sighed deeply; they were back in their patrol area and not far from the lair. Leo hoped April had beaten them back and explained what had happened.

He also hoped their father wouldn’t take it too hard that his missing sons were out of their minds, and probably wouldn’t be looking forwards to a reunion.

This was going to be a very long night.

They abandoned the van in the alley, dropping into the sewers. The small turtle refused to move though, until Leo was in front again like last time they did this. Leo felt uncomfortable that he had a knife pointed at his back, the hand holding it being trigger-happy. He tried to keep his gait slow and unthreatening, not wanting to provoke the feral.

“How’s he doing?” Leo asked Raph, not turning around to look as he led the way.

“He’s not dying right now, but we should hurry.” Raph replied, and Leo could hear him readjusting the unconscious turtle in his arms. “He’s still lost a lot of blood. He needs stitches pretty badly and a lot of sleep.”

“Sensei will take care of him, he’s done it enough times with us,” Leo said, remembering the multiple times he and Raph cut themselves while sparring.

“We’ll have to convince the little guy first though,” Raph said. Leo nodded, knowing Raph would see his agreement. They’d only gotten this far because the smaller feral trusted Raph enough to let them, but after the car ride and taking him from his home, he was probably on thin ice with tolerance.

“…how d’you think Master Splinter’s gonna take this?” Raph asked after a moment, a hint of abnormal unease in his voice.

Leo thought about that, how the next events would play out. Their father had thought the two sons lost in the flood were dead, but now there was a chance they could be all together again. Their lack of human communication, and general skittishness would present a problem though, a big problem.

And even if they got it across that they were family, who knew if they’d stay. They seemed curious enough earlier, when Raph and he had told them they were brothers. But after the sword wound…

“I don’t know, we’ll just have to hope for the best,” Leo settled on that answer, since he wasn’t his father, and couldn’t predict how their feral siblings would react later.

Raph sighed behind him, and Leo could agree; this wasn’t how they’d thought this would go at all.
Donnie was between awake and asleep, and that probably meant he’d fallen asleep building things again. The weight on his chest and the questioning trills meant that Mikey had found him and was trying to get him into their sleeping-place, rather than just on the stone. Donnie raised his arm to push Mikey off, but seized up when pain shot through his limb.

He jerked upright, clutching the arm that hurt, and almost knocking heads with Mikey. Donnie had all of a second before Mikey was all over him, purring and crying against his elder brother.

*Scared scared me afraid you hurt hurt better now relief happiness love you love you love you,* Mikey said, all in a rush of sounds, rubbing his cheeks against Donnie’s and hugging him tightly.

Donnie hugged back, saying *Yes I’m okay we’re okay doesn’t hurt badly love you love you,* in a comforting croon. He wiped away Mikey’s tears with the hand that didn’t hurt, his small precious beloved brother shouldn’t cry because he’d gotten hurt.

Donnie kept rubbing soothing circles on Mikey’s shell, observing their surroundings. He remembered most what had happened now, the fight, the chase, and then nothing. He didn’t know where they were now, and that made him uneasy. It didn’t smell anything like their territory, and that was a bad thing. It meant they could be hunted and hurt and might not have a clever way to escape. Plus the fact that he felt woozy, his head light and swaying when he moved it too quickly.

But he was laying on something large and soft, with big bunches of fabric on him and Mikey, and the small dark room they were in held only them and them and what Donnie was lying on. His arm was hurting, but it did not scream with pain like it had when he was last awake. There were no pretending-to-be human turtles anywhere, though their lingering scents meant they’d been there when Donnie was asleep.

There was another scent, like the rats of their home, but bigger smelling. That was another worry, because rats were trouble enough when little, Donnie did not want to meet a big one.

*Where are we what is happening,* Donnie asked, humming in tune with Mikey. *Danger? We safe where we are?*

*New place new not-ours nest but safe for-the-now,* Mikey chirped, pressing closer to Donnie to let their hum vibrate together. *Help you help us heal your wound bandage and bed for sleeping*

Donnie frowned, why would enemies help them after hurting them? That made no sense, even less sense than the presence of the human girl with the not-right-acting-wrong turtles had made. Donnie let Mikey push him back down into the bed and fabrics to lie on their sides, pressing his forehead against his brother’s.

*Why help why heal why smell of rat that-is-big?*

Donnie clicked in annoyance; he didn’t like not knowing what had happened to him. He needed to confront the other turtles and maybe the rat that-is-big; maybe if he talked slowly enough they’d understand. *Where pretending-to-be-humans turtles? Blue two sharp-cutting tools turtle, need to fight to confront angry angry hurt me why*

*You hurt human-companion theirs, she is theirs,* Mikey explained. *He scared like you scared for me, red big-but-kind turtle is sorry for the hurting, didn’t mean it they sorry sorry sorry*
Donnie huffed, an irritated chitter briefly entering his hum. Sorry they might be, but hurt he still was. He could not run or jump properly with a hurt limb, this meant they would be vulnerable to humans when *hunting-gathering* food and supplies. The blue *two-sharp-tools* turtle would have to be very good at apologizing if he wanted forgiveness.

They could start by feeding him and his brother, Donnie stomach was demanding food and he hadn’t had anything that day beyond some sweet fruits stolen from a human’s home; they were just sitting outside in a big container, waiting to be taken. Humans wasted so much food and left it everywhere, which was good for them.

*Hungry,* Donnie said, trying to push himself back up; even as Mikey clung stubbornly to Donnie. *Hungry food where we ask get up Mikey stop being dumb*

*You hurt you sleep,* Mikey clicked petulantly, tugging Donnie down again. *Already slept want food want to explore let go let go, Donnie grumbled, knocking his forehead against stupid-but-beloved Mikey’s own. Have to see have to know let go let me up*

Mikey tried to convince him one more time to stay in the bed, but Donnie insisted they go and meet the other turtles. He needed to know what was happening, where they were, and if he could have food.

It was annoying to depend only on his back legs, but Donnie walked to the door with Mikey keeping close to his injured arm’s side, his smaller brother also walking upright. The door wasn’t closed all the way, and allowed them to pull the handle inwards without needing to turn it. Dim light lit the outside stone hallway, and right across from their room was the red fabric strip turtle; without a doubt keeping guard on them.

He didn’t make any movements other than raising a hand in greeting, remaining sat against the wall. Donnie checked quickly if he had weapons; he did not. Mikey chattered a happy *Hello* to the turtle, who said something back in human language; probably a hello as well.

Donnie stepped forwards, fully into the hall and leaving their room, to stand in front of the turtle. He was shorter than Donnie, but he had more bulk to his muscles. Dangerous then, even if Donnie was technically bigger.

*Hello thank you who are you?* Donnie asked the turtle, then sighed because the turtle shook his head, not understanding what Donnie said. Donnie tried again. *Hello. Who you?*

The turtle understood that time, replying with the sound of *Raf-i-ell.* His name then. Donnie repeated the name back to him, trying to pronounce the name correctly. It took a couple times, but eventually the turtle nodded that he’d gotten it correct. Good, now they could move onto important things.

*Food where please food,* Donnie asked hopefully, looking down the stone hall at the larger cavern at its end. *Hungry sore hungry.*

*Raf-i-ell* shook his head, holding up his hands to show he didn’t know what Donnie said, yet again. Donnie put his uninjured hand against his face and sighed, this was frustratingly slow; why couldn’t these turtles talk like turtles and not like humans?

Mikey came to the rescue by mimicking the motions for eating and making pleased trills, which is when understanding bloomed upon *Raf-i-ell’s* face. He stood up, motioning for them to follow him, and started leading towards the big space ahead.

The cavern was enormous, much bigger than their *safe-home-nesting* place. High ceilings and wide
floors, dark and smelling damp. The only light came from a few human burning-but-no-fire lights, three all together and settled in corners of the large space. A dip in the floor had one of the strange flickering boxes humans had sometimes in their homes, and many soft feathers-inside-pouches along the edges of the pit.

Not a bad nest, but there were no bright colorful bottles like Mikey collected or curious-clever built things like Donnie made. A little boring, and not very comfortable seeming. The blue fabric strip turtle, the one with two sharp-cutting tools, sat on one of the soft feather pouches; watching them enter the room.

Donnie hissed at him, clicking that he was still mad and had not forgiven him in the least. The blue turtle frowned at him, and Donnie scowled back. He had no right to be frustrated with Donnie; he was not the one down a limb and shaky on his feet.

Be nice be nice, Mikey scolded, gently bumping his head against Donnie’s shoulder. Or no food so be nice to two-sharp-cuttings turtle

He is wrong he is dangerous, Donnie countered. I am right I am correct he hurt me he’s wrong

Maybe maybe but they helped you me us, Mikey said, looking at the bandaged arm again. They fixed they sewed the rat that-is-big did yes be thankful even if your right

Only because you say, small-beloved-brother, Donnie conceded, touching his mouth to Mikey’s top-of-skull. But if he hurts you I hurt him worse

And I hurt him if he hurts you again, Mikey promised, stretching up to return the nuzzle. But worse so much worse

“What are they doing?” Raph whispered to Leo, edging closer to his brother while the two feral turtles essentially gave each other butterfly kisses while chattering.

“I don’t know…” Leo replied, not able to take his eyes off the affectionate turtles.

Raph shook his head, honestly, he and Leo were right here; didn’t they have any shame? He and Leo had never been that affectionate of each other, not since they were really, really little. And even then, hugs and sometimes sharing a bed were it. If these two had stayed, maybe they’d have been closer…

“…alright, break it up you two,” Raph said, finally done with their cuddling in public. The smaller one, who they’d figured out was Mikey after some careful conversations with him, looked at him with a small pout; looking annoyed at being interrupted. Whatever, they could do that later when no one else had to watch. Fucking ferals. “You said food, right? We have food this way.”

They understood that enough, thank god, and followed him around the pit and towards the kitchen. He caught Donnie hissing again at Leo, who was looking vaguely annoyed even if it served him
right. They followed him into the only brightly lit room in the lair besides the dojo, and he gestured for them to sit on the stools.

They did as told, but somehow made sitting look like perching. Raph took a moment to rub his eyes, tired from the fight and the drive and then the stress of getting Mikey to fucking understand at least half of what they told him.

It’d taken two minutes to just get their current names for each other out of the weird way he talked, matching them to the original syllables of their names. Somehow, Raph hadn’t been surprised they’d shortened their names. They’d only been three when they disappeared, and they admittedly had complicated names to remember.

Raph opened the fridge, an old and sometimes malfunctioning thing, and dug around for something they’d eat. Anything he and Leo ate, right? They were all turtles after all. He grabbed two apples from the bunch April bought them; their payment for helping find her father was help with machines in their lair and fresh produce. And because she was sorta their friend, and felt bad that they had to live in the sewers; even if she never said.

Raph could practically smell her pity sometimes, it was annoying as fuck.

On a whim he grabbed some sandwich supplies to make something resembling an actual meal, they needed more than just apples and his cooking skills were only marginally better than Leo’s.

Mikey made and extremely happy sounding string of sounds when Raph handed him and Donnie the apples, his whole face lighting up. Donnie was still watching him carefully with calculating red eyes; feral his brothers might be, but dumb they were not. Mikey pieced together well enough what Raph said to him, and never took his eyes off all three of the people in the room.

There were four at the start of that, but April had had to leave; not only was it late, but Mikey was still really uneasy about having her near him. They’d have to work on that.

Raph listened to the two turtles talk between each other while he made sandwiches, picking up on hums and purrs that he could feel in his plastron. It sounded like nonsense to him, but they communicated rapidly in whatever language they’d created together.

One of them hummed extra loud as he finished putting bread on top of the meals, and Raph responded with his own; before cutting it off in shock. He turned around; feeling embarrassed because that never happened these days, and found Donnie staring at him in surprise and Mikey looking absolutely ecstatic. Their apple cores abandoned in favor of focusing on him Mikey sat up all the ways from his hunch, bracing himself on the table and leaning over it at Raph; trilling and humming at him. He was saying something again that Raph couldn’t understand, though he caught his full name being sounded out a couple times.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to do that,” He said gruffly, ignoring Mikey’s continued hums. Raph took the two plates of sandwiches and shoved them across the table at them. Mikey didn’t touch his sandwich, continuing to trill the same sound again; like he was saying, ‘c’mon do it again do it again!’.

“Shut up, I don’t do that stuff, okay? That’s not a thing we do around here,” Raph said, crossing his arms. “I don’t make… weird turtle sounds, not since I was a kid. So don’t bother tryin’ to get me to.”

Mikey stuck out is tongue at Raph, chattering something that was probably rude, before grabbing his sandwich and biting into it with guts. Donnie was still picking at his, dissecting it layer by layer.
“I didn’t poison it, if that’s what you’re wondering,” Raph said, taking a seat across from them. Donnie glared at him, annoyed even if he didn’t get what Raph said. Raph laid his head on the table, exasperated and tired out; the cool surface soothing on his scales. This whole reuniting-the-family thing was going to be long and enduring.

And they hadn’t even tried explaining the ‘lost brothers’ thing yet.

Raph looked back up from his slump, and saw that Mikey had eaten his entire sandwich already. Donnie’s was on its last legs, just couple more bites left. Alright, so they weren’t slow eaters; like him and Leo then, they didn’t tend to spend time tasting their food, not when it was either from garbage or whatever they found in the sewers.

He propped himself up on his elbows, watching Donnie pop the last of his crust into his mouth. “So… you guys ready to talk to master Splinter?”

Mikey tilted his head sideways, absentmindedly licking crumbs from his lips. Donnie just stared at him blankly.

Okay then, no full names or titles for now. Raph closed his eyes briefly to pray that he had the will to not lose it in frustration before they got things sorted out. He probably did.

Probably.

“The rat guy? You know, the tall one in the robe?” Raph said, gesturing his (their) father’s height. Donnie looked down at Mikey, mouthing the word rat at him. Mikey nodded at Donnie, then at Raph. Well, at least they knew what rats were, and the English word for it. “Can I take you to talk with him?”

Donnie seemed to consider for a moment, or was trying to translate still, but then nodded. Once he’d been given the okay, Mikey was chattering again, nodding enthusiastically.

“Great, this way,” Raph got off his stool, Donnie and Mikey following in suit.

Their father was still in the dojo, where they’d sewn up Donnie’s sword wound. He was kneeling in front of the odd tree that grew in there, back to the door.

“Sensei?” Raph said as they came into the room. “They’re ready to talk.”

“Bring them here, Raphael,” Splinter said, turning his head slightly to look at them all. Raph ushered them all into the room, leaving the sliding door open in case it made the feral brothers feel too trapped. Last thing they needed was them panicking and ripping the screen doors, it took forever to find replacement paper.

Raph shot Leo one last look, his elder brother sitting in the pit still; making sure that if the other two mutants ran, or attacked anyone, he’d be right there and ready. Paranoid prick.

Leo locked gazes with him, nodding once and flashing his concealed kunai. Raph nodded back, because even if he wanted to believe their siblings wouldn’t run off, Leo’s plan was a good back up.

He went to join the other three people in the dojo, Splinter facing them now and the two feral mutants crouching a bit away from him. Raph sighed once, and then went to sit too; properly kneeling unlike his brothers. Mikey looked at him weirdly, confused by Raph’s position. Donnie hadn’t taken his eyes off Splinter, eerily focused on the rat man.

Not that Raph blamed him, not if all he’d seen up to that point were small rats. Splinter was
surprising to everyone, seeing as he was a rat over six feet tall.

“My sons,” Splinter began, his voice ever so slightly wavering. He must be feeling emotional, Raph guessed. “It has been many years since we were together, but I am happy you have come home at last.”

Donnie clicked twice, showing his hurt arm to Splinter; asking about it. He pointed at the bandages, adding another string of sounds to the clicks.

“Yes, that was my work,” Splinter said, nodding. “You were injured, but I’ve closed the wound so it might heal. I’m glad to see you up and about so quickly, it has only been a few hours since you came here.”

Raph watched his brothers, who were chattering quietly to each other and shooting Splinter looks. “…too many words Sensei, they can’t understand.”

His father looked saddened by that, but tried again. “My name is Splinter, and you are Donatello and Michelangelo, yes?”

Mikey frowned, rocking back and forth in his crouch, shaking his head. Donnie shrugged, indicating he hadn’t understood either.

“They’re calling themselves ‘Mikey’ and ‘Donnie’, Sensei,” Raph said, trying to add the right emphasis Mikey had put on their names. From the way they both looked at him, he figured he had got it right. “I think their names were too long to remember, an’ they got shortened over the years.”

“Hm, they were only small children then…” Splinter said, stroking his beard. He looked at Raph, contemplating something. “You seem to understand to an extent what they say, my son, and they return that understanding. Would you relay what I mean to say to them?”

“Oh,” Raph looked between his father and siblings, both of them staring. “I guess? I don’t know how well I’ll do though.”

“You have been getting things across better than I have, and that is all we can ask for right now,” Splinter folded his hands together, nodding to his son. “Go on; try to explain things to them.”

Raph clenched his fists nervously, that was a lot of pressure. Wouldn’t Leo be the better choice? He shuffled his kneel so he was facing his brothers rather than their dad, and cleared his throat; Mikey perked up, Donnie as well. “So, uh, you know what ‘brother’ means, right? You did earlier. You get that? Bruh-ther?”

Mikey pursed his lips, squinting, before carefully saying, “Bruh’er, righ’??”

Yeah, that’s right. And do you know what that means? What a brother is?” Raph almost groaned when Mikey shook his head, but Donnie poked his smaller brother in the side. He looked at Raph and said the word as well, pointing at himself and Mikey. Raph nodded, they were making headway.

“Great, that’s great. My brother is Leo, you know him,” Raph pointed out the door where Leo sat on the couch. “He’s mine, but… your both also mine.”

They both looked at him blankly, until Raph pointed to himself and then them, saying, “Brothers.” Donnie narrowed his eyes, shaking his head. “Nuh, no’ bruh’er.”
“We are though, we all are,” Raph insisted. He pointed at Splinter, gesturing along with his words. “And that’s our father; he raised us and you when you were really small.”

“Nuh!” Mikey said, following it with trilling sounds again; looking confused. He put a hand on Donnie’s, leaning closer to his brother. “Don’ee bruh’er. Nuh yu.”

Two steps forwards, three steps back. Raph lifted his right hand, spreading his three fingers. “Look, we’re all turtles. You’ve never seen anyone else like us, right? That’s because we’re brothers. Please understand, we really are.”

Mikey was closest to him, and lifted his own hand up to compare against Raph’s; not touching, but looking between the two. His scales were a lighter shade than Raph’s, nails long and untrimmed, but his hand was almost the same size. Mikey turned his head and said something to Donnie, who shook his head in denial. Mikey pushed his hand right up to Raph’s making the first willing contact he’d had all night, making insisting sounds at Donnie.

Donnie let out a short hiss at Mikey, shaking his head still. Mikey drew his hand away from Raph and turned back to face his brother. They traded clicking vowels and trilling sentences, sometimes a vaguely English word working its way in. Eventually Donnie snapped a loud shriek at Mikey, jabbing a finger at his injured arm. Raph put two and two together, Donnie didn’t believe them because Leo had hurt him when they’d first met; whatever brother meant to these two, it definitely didn’t mean you hurt each other.

“Leo’s sorry for that,” Raph said, breaking into the conversation; both turtles snapping their wild looking eyes back to him. Raph pointed at a four inch white scar on his thigh. “He’s still learning how to fight, and he’ll make mistakes sometimes. When we were little, he cut me by accident too. I don’t know if you can understand that story, but Leo. Is. Sorry. He’d never hurt you on purpose, not if we’re brothers.”

That was a bit of a lie, sometimes Leo would fight with Raph and there’d be words exchanged that cut a lot deeper than katanas did. But they didn’t need to know that.

Besides, Leo almost always said sorry, and he’d said sorry for this. Slicing up Donnie wasn’t his intention, and he’d genuinely felt bad for it; for all his suspicion of the feral brothers.

Donnie was looking over his shoulder, at the door where he knew Leo was, visibly weighing things. Mikey was glancing between the both of them, hope dancing in his blue eyes. Finally, Donnie looked back at Raph, and shrugged.

“Is that a ‘maybe’?” Raph asked, a slight grin creeping onto his face.

Donnie rolled his eyes, and then pointed at Raph and in Leo’s general direction. “Bruh’ers, may-bee.”

“I’ll take that,” Raph replied, grinning like Mikey was. Raph’s eyes darted to master Splinter, silently asking for approval. His father was smiling, and looked proud. Raph’s grin got even wider.
Leo fidgeted his feet, listening in on the conversations happening in the dojo.

It *sounded* like it was going well, but he wouldn’t know until someone told him. Which annoyed him, since usually he was the one who told people what was happening; or he told Raph what was happening at least. But he’d been sidelined this time, all because Donnie and Mikey didn’t want him near them.

Okay, maybe he deserved that a little bit. But he hadn’t meant to cut Donnie so badly, he’d just seen April in trouble and panicked; too used to going straight for the kill with Kraang droids. Maybe if he apologized really sincerely they’d stop avoiding him.

The looks they’d given him earlier unsettled Leo, like they’d been talking about something dangerous. He’d have to watch his back, or shell, until things settled down and their brothers learned English.

He hoped they’d stay, it would be better if there were more people in the lair; Raph was insufferable sometimes, and master Splinter wasn’t exactly someone he could watch *Space Heroes* with. Had those two ever watched it? Probably not, maybe they’d want to once their English lessons were under way…

Leo dropped his thought trail as he heard footsteps coming out of the dojo. Raph came out first, leading Donnie and Mikey while he talked in quiet short sentences. Mikey was still very close to Donnie, but his body language was otherwise open towards Raph. Donnie seemed alright with just observing the two shorter turtles trading words.

He however, looked away from them to stare directly at Leo. Donnie’s red eyes stood out in the gloom of the lair, big and luminous. He said something to Mikey, before releasing his brother’s hand and walking towards Leo.

As the taller turtle stepped down into the pit, Leo stood up; careful to keep his kunai concealed inside his belt, and taking two steps forwards to meet Donnie. Both he and Donnie ignored their brothers, standing right in front of one another in the media pit.

Donnie pointed at his bandage arm. “Yu di’ thisss.”

Leo nodded, surprised how close Donnie got to English already. “Yes, and I’m sorry.”

Donnie tilted his chin upwards, looking down on Leo even further. Then, with startling speed, he whipped his uninjured arm around in a punch that knocked Leo off balance enough to stumble. Leo was so shocked; he barely resisted grabbing his kunai. Donnie was in his space again, shoving him back into the couch cushions and hissing low in his throat. Leo could feel the thrum of angry vibrations coming from Donnie’s plastron, his own instincts almost responding.

Donnie pushed down on his plastron, hand close to his throat, and got right in Leo’s face. He *growled*, how did a turtle growl that well, and bared his teeth.


Leo’s hands itched to throw him off, grab the kunai and hold him down, but he didn’t. Doing that would just escalate things and then Donnie might actually fight with him; instead of just threatening.

It irked him, but Leo leaned his head back to show his throat; not knowing he was showing the submissive behaviour Donnie was looking for. “Alright. I’m sorry, I won’t do it again. Promise.”

Donnie growled one more time, and then stepped away, letting Leo sit up. Leo regarded Donnie,
rubbing his neck; his brother was fast, much faster than he’d expected considering his lack of training. But he supposed it ran in the family.

“Jesus Christ, you alright Leo?” Raph asked, finally getting the chance to get between him and Donnie. Mikey was with his older brother, making croons and frowning up at Donnie. Raph checked Leo’s neck over, looking for bruises. “I didn’t know he’d do that, otherwise I would’a stopped him.”

“I’m fine, Raph. I think he just wanted to tell me that he won’t be so forgiving next time,” Leo said, pushing Raph’s hands away. He shook his head at Raph’s concerned/frustrated look. “It’s nothing, just a bit of evening the playing field. He owed it to me.”

“Yeah, well, no more fighting okay? We’re trying to get them to stick around here,” Raph groused, looking at the other two mutants. “They said they’ll stay and heal up, then it’s back to their ‘nest’. They’ve only agreed to stick around ‘cause I promised we’d given ‘em food and the spare bedroom.”

Leo nodded in understanding. “I get it, I wouldn’t want to be away from the lair too long if I were injured.”

“…you’ve got a lot of apologizing in the future, fearless. Donnie’s holding a grudge against you somethin’ fierce, and Mikey’s backin’ him up,” Raph looked at his brother, raising an eye ridge. “If we want this to work, your gonna have to get off that pedestal of yours and get on their level. Otherwise, they’ll fuck back off into the tunnels an’ never come back.”

Leo rolled his eyes. “I’m not on a pedestal, and it’ll work out. We’re their family; won’t they stay because of that?”

“As far as their concerned? We’re maybe related,” Raph said, tone serious. “This is a shaky situation Leo, we can’t fuck it up. They’re not gonna recognize us as brothers until we prove it, and means not tryin’ to push your ideas onto them. Just let them set the pace, alright?”

Leo glanced at their feral brothers, Mikey chattering happily at Donnie who looked very put upon, but was listening regardless, and nodded once. He could give them space to figure things out, but if Donnie tried something like that again, he wasn’t backing down.

You were not nice not nice why I told you told you to, Mikey scolded his brother when they’d retreated to their room. Raf had said they could go sleep again, no more difficult talking for the night. No fighting not with Lee-oh not good bad plan, he has sharp-cutting-long tools

Donnie huffed stubbornly, poking Mikey’s forehead with one finger. Needed to wanted to he had to submit say sorry his fault his fault not mine he owed me

Mikey frowned up at his clever-but-stubborn brother. Challenging Lee-oh was a bad plan, since he was more likely to fight than Raf was. Mikey was glad that Raf-i-ell had given them permission to just say Raf, it was much easier.

Still no no more fighting they’re ours maybe maybe brothers, Mikey said, poking his brother back on
his chin.

Donnie tsked, clicking a sound that meant Annoyance, with his tongue. Not ours not kin dangerous strange-wrong-human-like

But they’re like me like you turtles too, tall strong good-talking-sorta, Mikey protested. He wanted them to be brothers to him, Raf and Lee-oh, because then there’d be four of them not just two and they’d be so much less lonely. If they are if they could be maybe maybe missing-feeling-someone’s-missing will stop

Maybe maybe not, Donnie hummed. He sat down on their bed, kicking the big fabric away so they could sit without it in the way. Do not trust Raf and Lee-oh, strange-wrong and human caring-for

Human girl yes strange yes weird but not scary she submissive, Mikey said, remembering how the girl had said a bunch of human words at him and then left. Raf said she was theirs, so Mikey supposed they’d have to get used to her for however long it took for Donnie run right again. Smells weird talks human but not bad probably

Donnie hummed again, picking at the bandages on his arm. Donnie was always the most suspicious of humans, because long-time-ago he was almost taken by accident. Too adventurous, they’d climbed inside an empty hull of a large-loud-scary-moving-thing and it had started with Donnie still in it, and started running away. That was very scary, when Donnie had disappeared for a whole half day; coming back finally to their nest missing a tooth and lots of bloody scrapes.

Mikey had not liked being in the large-loud-scary-moving-thing earlier, that was awful and terrible; but he’d done it cause they moved much faster than turtles and Lee-oh had been controlling it, not a human.

Mikey crawled over to sit beside Donnie, leaning against the wall and his brother’s side. He bit his lip, thinking about another thing Raf had said. Rat that-is-big, fah-ther? What is that I know not

...somone who cares-for-small-young, Donnie said, placing his hand in Mikey’s. We had not that just us always us, but rat that-is-big is called Splin-ter and is Raf and Lee-oh’s cares-for-small-young, Donnie leaned his head onto Mikey’s, starting to hum their song of belonging-safe-happy-love they’d known since forever. Not turtle but he is theirs they are his

Mikey hummed back the song, sinking into a familiar flow of tune. That sounds nice, to have a fah-ther. One who would play with Mikey and teach Donnie new neat things, keeping them warm and happy during storms and cold seasons.

Lucky lucky they’re so lucky, Mikey trilled, thinking of their maybe brothers. Wish we had a cares-for-small-young

Donnie trilled back, nuzzling Mikey’s forehead. Sometimes I wish too wish for more kin more persons-to-love

I love you, Mikey said, pressing closer to Donnie.

I love you too, Donnie replied, humming their song louder.

They tugged the large soft fabric back onto the bed, and curled up in it. Mikey did not like the new smell, too different from the dusty dirty metal smell of their home, but the bed was soft and he’d gotten tasty strange food and Donnie was here. Those were all very good things and they made the not-home-not-nest smell okay for now.
And he maybe, maybe had two more brothers and a father, that would make things perfect, because then the missing feeling would definitely go away and they would be together.

Mikey fell asleep, his head against clever-kind-beloved Donnie’s chest, and dreamt of a home filled with precious people and warmth.

Chapter End Notes

I spent like half of this writing piece pacing and debating how it should go. I'm a very descriptive person with my words, I love to use excessively long ones even when I don't need to. Writing how simplistic the feral kids talk is interesting, and really making me exercise my creative ability.

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, I'm terribly embarrassed how quickly Donnie and Mikey's interactions got away from me; those lines sure are blurry, yup, yup. ( /// • • ///)

Someone should really drag my computer from my hands, I can't stop.

Thanks again for reading, all of you!
Raph took the second shift of watch, after Leo’s reached his limit and actually has to go to bed. It took a lot of pushing, but he finally got his brother to stop pacing around the main area and go to his room. Leo was still tense about having their two feral siblings in the lair, and didn’t want to let down his guard dog act.

Raph took a nap before forcing Leo to sleep, so he had enough energy to stay awake until both Mikey and Donnie woke up or Leo did. Their dad had said he needed rest as well, feeling the stress of their family’s situation.

Master Splinter might have tried to hide it, but when they’d first come into the lair with Mikey there’d been a flash of deep sadness on his face. Raph’d never seen his dad like that; he was always completely composed and unflappable. Though, your sons coming back from the dead would shock anyone; especially if you’d never looked for them.

Raph pushed off the floor in another push up; yeah, their dad probably wasn’t feeling his best at the moment.

Raph had been switching from watching the TV and doing exercises on and off for the last couple hours. Nothing else to do, besides what he always did when there were no Kraang bots to destroy or dojo training to complete. If he really felt like it, he could try using the ancient gaming system they had; but playing twenty year old games for the millionth time didn’t appeal to him tonight/today. It was edging towards normal waking hours again, around the time humans started their day.

He’d kept his head earlier, but Raph was still really keyed up. The whole situation with his long lost brothers was going to take forever to sort out, and that started with convincing them to stay. For good, not just until Donnie could move properly again; or at least how he and Mikey defined ‘moving properly’.

The sheer amount of animalistic behavior his siblings had unsettled him; because they were everything humans probably thought Raph and Leo were whenever they patrolled their area. Wild, inhuman… monstrous.
It was an uncomfortable reminder of just how different Raph and his brothers were from humans. Without Splinter to raise Leo and him, that’s how they would have ended up.

Enough thinking, Raph wasn’t the type to think on things too deeply; rolling with the punches and punching back was what he did. He’d try to apply the same thing here.


Raph let himself lie down on the cool stone of the lair, sighing. Yeah, that trusting thing could be difficult. Emotions weren’t his thing, not the mushy feely type ones. They weren’t Leo’s either. Or their dad’s.

How the fuck were they going to do this, when the completely sane part of their family couldn’t even use their touchy-feely emotions amongst themselves, let alone with the two new comers?

“Uuuugh, fuck literally everything,” Raph said to the concrete.

Laughter made him start, lifting his head off the floor.

Mikey was crouching on the couch, grinning and giggling at Raph’s frustrations. Mikey looked a lot more relaxed than he had a few hours ago, rested and no longer worried about Donnie.

“What’s so funny?” Raph asked, annoyed by the feral turtle. “When’d you get there? You’re not a ninja; how the fuck did you get out here without me seeing you?”

Mikey didn’t answer, instead dropping onto the floor to crawl over to Raph on all fours. Mikey tucked his legs and arms underneath himself five feet from Raph and looked at him questioningly, tittering something Raph didn’t understand.

“What, what do you want?” Raph asked. Mikey frowned, thinking about something, and then assumed the same position Raph had been in for his push ups and did a single pump. “Oh, you mean that? I’m just working out; it’s to make me stronger. You get it?”

Mikey wrinkled his snout, shaking his head.

“I like doing it, it’s fun for me. Don’t you do stuff for fun?” Raph asked, trying a different approach. “Like… I don’t know, play games or something. Do you do that?”

Mikey mouthed the words a couple times, then lit up and nodded. He started running off clicks and mangled words again, but Raph raised his hand to stop him. “Slow down, and English please. I don’t know what the hell you’re saying when you talk like that.”

Mikey stuck his tongue out at Raph, saying something that probably was Why don’t you speak my language? but started sounding out slowly, “I… Don-ee… play… k-kreek … ‘way?”

Raph took a turn wrinkling his snout in confusion. “What’s ‘Kreek ‘way’?”

Mikey untucked his limbs, standing back up on all of them, and reached out and bopped Raph on the snout. He darted backwards and out of the pit before Raph was even completely upright again, but didn’t go farther than that. Mikey crept closer again, down onto the cushions, and then jumped back away.

“Oh! You mean keep away!” Raph exclaimed. “I do that with Leo sometimes, but with more sharp things involved.”
“Yes!” Mikey said, almost perfect English, looking very proud of himself. He chittered something, jumping down to stand at full height near Raph, and looking upwards at him with pleading eyes. “Please ‘lease ‘lease? Play kreep ‘way?”

Raph leaned away from the jittering turtle, unused to such an enthusiastic person talking to him. Play with Mikey, and have the game be tag no less?

…Why not. It wasn’t like he was doing anything else.

Raph looked at the knife hanging on Mikey’s side, slipped into a loop in the filthy fabric belt, and pointed at it. “I’ll play, but only if you leave that on the couch.” Mikey pulled his knife out, looking at Raph with a raised eye ridge. “Yes that one, put it over there and leave it, then we can… play keep away.”

Mikey looked doubtfully at him, running a finger over the knife’s hilt. He made a soft whine, but went and put the knife down on a cushion. Before he went back over to Raph, Mikey jabbed a finger at himself, then his knife, and then back to himself. He pointed at Raph, then the knife, and crossed his arms and glared.

“Okay, message received, not mine, it’s yours. Got it,” Raph said. He wasn’t going to touch it at all then, since it’d probably break what trust Mikey had in him.

Mikey grinned, and dropped onto the ground again, twitching his tail back and forth. Raph set his feet apart, tensing his muscles to run. Mikey growled playfully, and then bolted away; Raph in close pursuit.

For someone who wasn’t trained in ninjutsu, Mikey could sure move. He dodged and avoided like a pro, just like he had when Raph had first been chasing him. And Raph had to admit, there was probably something to running on all fours that two legs didn’t provide.

For one, Mikey didn’t rely on just his legs to maneuver; using his arms to switch directions without stopping and hurdling over obstacles easily. He could also climb the walls faster than Raph, shimmying up some of the rough stone structures near the turnstiles like he was a squirrel, not a turtle.

“Oh come on, you’re supposed to be aquatic!” Raph complained, his hand missing Mikey by inches as he leapt over Raph’s head from his higher position. “Stop acting like a god damn flying squirrel!”

Mikey laughed, racing across the lair again towards; loose ribbon ends on his arms streaming with his speed. Raph jumped down from the pillar, trying to catch up again. He was supposed to be a ninja, how was one untrained mutant beating him?

Raph caught up to Mikey quick enough, pushing himself to be more serious about the game, and got his brother backed up against the pool’s edge in front of the dojo. Mikey tried to dart to the side, but Raph cut him off, pushing him back again.

“Gotcha, I win,” Raph said, smirking as he reached forwards to tag Mikey.

He missed the glint in Mikey’s eyes, and wasn’t expecting his feral brother to hop up and on top of his shell. Mikey hopped forwards off Raph and pushed him right into the water below with an enormous splash, Raph shouting an oath just before he met the water.

He came back up, spluttering and grabbing for the edge. He wiped water off his face as Mikey collapsed on the ground laughing. Raph spat some water out of his mouth, glaring at his brother. “Yeah, ha, ha. Laugh it up asshole. So you got one on me, happy?”
Mikey rolled back onto his feet, took two galloping steps, and threw himself into the pool; drenching Raph again. Raph’s mask stuck to his scales as he watched Mikey do a victory lap in the water; laughing a long string of chatter the whole time. He swam back to Raph, grinning a very smug grin as his chuckles died off.

Raph reached out and shoved him back away, still annoyed by his loss. “Is this what having a younger brother is like? ‘Cause I’m having second thoughts.”

Mikey giggled, splashing Raph again before diving underwater. Raph was considering getting out when Mikey pulled his leg downwards. The water went over his head and he instinctively shut his second eyelids, holding onto his breath as Mikey dragged him down.

The pool wasn’t deep, just enough that you had to actually swim and not just stand, so they were on the bottom quickly. Raph crossed his arms once Mikey had released him, unimpressed with his brother. Mikey only crooned at him though, clicking mixed with the long deep sound; it reverberated better underwater than it had above it and Raph could feel it in his plastron.

Raph started to swim back upwards, but Mikey pulled him down again by his arm. Raph turned to glare at him, pulling his hand free, but Mikey’s croon changed tune and formed into an actual song. One Raph recognized very well.

It was the lullaby their dad had sung to them when they were all small, him and Leo and at one time Mikey and Donnie too. He’d sang it to Leo and Raph every night until after they got their own rooms in the lair, gentle and soothing in his deep voice.

Raph hadn’t heard it in years, and here was Mikey singing it to him after long since forgetting he’d ever had a dad.

Mikey took Raph’s hands back into his, humming the tune louder, like he was… asking Raph to sing too.

Raph’s first reaction was to pull away, because he didn’t sing, didn’t hum, didn’t do that sort of shit. But he also didn’t actually remove his hands from Mikey’s, floating motionless in the water as his brother’s humming filled it.

His acid green eyes met Mikey’s baby-blue ones, unmasked and bare unlike Raph’s, and he gradually started humming along. His own tune lower like his voice, and harmonizing with Mikey’s own; mixing together like they were always one sound.

Mikey’s eyes widened, sparkling in the dim light of the water, and he smiled like Raph had just given him the greatest gift he’d ever gotten.

Leo woke up after a restless sleep, dreams filled with shadows in the tunnels he swore he knew almost better than his own katana, and immediately jumped right back to what he’d thinking on before sleep.

His brothers.
His feral, completely inhuman brothers.

Who were still in his home and unpredictable in every way.

Leo sat up in his bed, reaching for his analogue alarm clock. Eleven thirty AM, he’d only slept five hours then. Good enough, he couldn’t stand not knowing every movement that his new brothers were making; too likely they’d either leave or suddenly snap like in the tunnels.

He got out of bed, pausing only to pick up his mask, and went to brush his teeth quickly in the washroom before he went out to check on his family. The single mirrored cupboard had its usual layer of dust, which he wiped off, and his tooth brush inside neatly arranged with his tooth paste.

Their sink had a crack on its rim, but its reach didn’t interfere with the water flow. The slightly rusted taps squeaked as Leo turned them on, washing his face after spitting and rinsing. He closed the mirror door, and smiled at his reflection, checking for plaque. Satisfied, Leo wrapped his mask over his face; knotting it firmly in the back.

He was feeling hungry, having last eaten hours ago prior to finding his feral younger brothers. Food was in order then, he couldn’t be in peak condition if his stomach was rumbling.

He left the bathroom, shutting the door behind him, and walking silently down the stone hall. The door to the spare room where Donnie and Mikey were sleeping was still shut, so that meant he didn’t have to worry about them just yet.

He wanted to retrieve his swords from his room, but Leo carrying them around would almost certainly trigger an attack from his brothers. Leo had to be content with keeping shurikan and kunai hidden in his wide belt, but he felt exposed without the usual weight on his shell.

As he entered the main area, a loud shriek cut through the air, coming from the kitchen. Leo was already running when something clattered onto the table, Raph’s loud voice following. Leo burst into the room; hand on the hilt of a kunai in his belt, ready to draw without hesitation.

Raph and Mikey stopped where they were, looking at Leo. Mikey had a hand in his mouth, pulling on his tongue, and Raph was holding onto his shell from behind and halfway through a comforting pat. They both had towels hanging off their shoulders and other ones tossed carelessly around the room.

There were two bowls on the table, two spoons, and spilt ice cream melting from both overturned bowls.

“…Mikey got brain freeze,” Raph explained, drawing away from Mikey. Mikey shot Leo a tearful look, pointing at the inside of his mouth while mournfully whining.

Leo eased his hand away from his hidden weapon, switching to a neutral stance. He looked at the melting ice cream, from the carefully rationed stash in the freezer that Raph had already had his share from, and frowned at both of them. “I don’t suppose you were planning on sharing?”

“Mikey wanted to save some for Donnie, yeah,” Raph said, starting to scoop the ice cream back into the bowls with a spoon. “He really liked it until the brain freeze part.”

“I meant for me Raph, and Sensei,” Leo went and opened the freezer door, checking how much of the desert was left. Barely enough for one person, great. He shut the door and turned an unimpressed look on his brothers. “There’s not nearly enough for three people Raph, what were you thinking?”

“Uh, that our younger brother should enjoy something sugary and not tunnel shit for the first time in
his life?” Raph said, flicking his spoon’s tip at Leo. “Duh.”

Leo looked at Raph’s generous portions, both of them. “And yourself?”

“That I deserved a treat, after finally convincing numb nuts here that we are actually brothers,” Raph said, jerking a thumb at Mikey, who was already back to showing ice cream into his mouth.

Leo’s eyes widened. “Really? How’d you do that?”

Raph shoved a spoon of cream into his mouth, mumbling something and looking away. Leo walked closer to the table, leaning onto it. “Sorry, what did you say?”

“I said I…” Raph trailed off into mumbles again. Leo tapped his fingers on the table, waiting for Raph to cave and tell him. It was Mikey who told him though, piping up from his eating.

“Song!” Mikey chirped, adding an odd pronunciation to the word. He hummed a couple quick notes, smiling at both of his elder brothers. “Raf’an’ me, sang!”

Leo looked back at Raph, who looked like he wanted to climb back into his shell and never come out. “You… sang together, and that convinced him?”

“It was the lullaby Sensei used to sing us, okay? He started it; I just got dragged into it!”

“You can’t drag someone into singing, they have to do it themselves,” Leo said matter of factly. His neutral mask slipped, and he started snickering. “I can’t believe you convinced Mikey by singing of all things. I wish I could have seen it.”

“Shut up!” Raph barked, clenching his hand around his spoon and bending it slightly. “You would have too if it’d been you in that situation!”

“And what situation was that?”

Raph opened his mouth to say something, then shut it; looking deeply embarrassed. Leo rolled his eyes, Raph’s way with words never ceased to amaze him. “Right. So. Mikey knows we’re related, now what?”

Raph exchanged a look with Mikey, who shrugged. “Uh… just keep doing shit as normal, just with these guys around. Or something like that. Mikey seems chill to hang out, dunno how Don feels though.”

Mikey tittered something in agreement, and then going back to his ice cream.

Well, that was one less thing for Leo to worry about; if Mikey trusted them enough to be so relaxed with Raph, it wouldn’t be long be for Donnie fell into line too. Leo watched his brothers eat ice cream a moment longer, and then went to make himself a meal.

One salad and boiled hot dog later, Leo left his two siblings trading insults in two separate languages. Honestly, Leo didn’t understand a lick of it, but Raph seemed to grasp the meaning behind Mikey’s trilling sentences well enough he could return his own in English.

It was odd seeing Raph so open, trading conversation with someone he’d met only a few hours earlier like they’d done it the last fifteen years prior. It was different, and different things bothered Leo. You couldn’t tell what something new would do, and Leo liked being able to plan around every situation he was presented with.
So far, none of his plans had actually worked out with his feral brothers. That irked him, because Leo was the leader, he always had a plan for things. Plans don’t work though, if the pieces don’t move like you think they will.

At least Raph was consistent with his outbursts and AWOL moments; the strangeness of his new siblings was practically chaos, and you can’t chart chaos.

Leo left his dishes unwashed in the sink; he’d do them when everyone had left the area. For now, he was going to get some training in. Even with the events the night before, Leo’s body still asked for more exertion. Or maybe he was just twitchy from all the changes in his home.

Regardless, he went to get his swords and make a hasty retreat into the dojo; where he knew exactly what was going to happen and he was the one who controlled it.

As he climbed the steps to the hall of rooms, the door to Mikey and Donnie’s room flew open and Donnie dashed out. Donnie looked at Leo, poised in a sprinting position, and Leo looked at Donnie; hands inching for his belt.

Donnie shrieked off five sharp sounds, only one making sense to Leo, which was Mikey.

Leo stood the side, and pointed back towards the kitchen. Donnie ran past him, on two legs unlike the first time Leo saw him run, and made for the kitchen quick like. Leo watched his taller, but younger, brother disappear into the kitchen, and a chorus of shrieking erupt from inside.

Leo took a moment to pinch between his eyes, now he had not one, but three unruly younger siblings.

He was going to be spending a lot of time in the dojo from now on, wasn’t he?

Mikey didn’t get what Donnie’s problem was; it wasn’t like he’d gone all that far; just to other side of the cavern! And besides, he’d been with Raf, who was safe and fun and family!

Mikey tried to explain this to Donnie, who wasn’t listening to him, over the sweet and tasty treat Raf had given him. I-sss- creem was the best thing Mikey had ever eaten, sweeter than even the jars filled with squishy wet sticky berry mush he’d found a couple times over his life. It was his new favorite thing, almost as much as Raf was his new favorite person.

Beside Donnie, who was elder-beloved-clever-dear-brother, he was always Mikey’s most favorite person of all.

But his favorite person, was also Not Listening.

Family yes Raf brother yes good great mine yours ours!! Mikey exclaimed, trying to convince his brother. We sang belonging-safe-happy-love song! He is ours! Mine! Yours!

No not mine not yours not possible, Donnie said, licking at his scoop of I-sss- creem gingerly; suspicious but enjoying it. Our song not his not theirs just ours

But he did we did! Sing with me Raf sing and prove! Mikey told his new found brother, who was
watching Mikey and Donnie silently. Mikey hummed the starting tune of the song, prompting Raf to as well. Raf listened for a moment, shooting Donnie a look, before quietly starting to hum along too. Mikey dropped off his seat and got right next to Raf, singing loud and happy. Raf was looking embarrassed for some reason, but sang louder too; letting Mikey throw an arm around his shoulders.

Donnie dropped his scoop into his bowl, completely focused on Mikey and their brother. He trilled the quick questions of Really? Real? True? And Mikey nodded, squeezing Raf’s shoulders and letting their sounds flow together.

Donnie stood up from his seat, coming around to be near Raf and Mikey. Raf was still sitting, so Donnie loomed over him, listening to the song he was singing. Mikey smiled at his brother as Donnie started to sing too, adding his own voice to the song’s tune. It fit perfectly, just like when it was only Mikey and him, or how it had been with Raf in the water. It was right-perfect-correct in every way, and the song felt so much better with three voices rather than just two. Stronger, louder, almost whole.

Maybe they could convince Lee-oh to sing too, then it really would be a perfect song.

Mikey moved away from Raf so Donnie could have him all to himself. Their song faded off as Donnie sat down on the seat near Raf’s, which Mikey had sat on before. Donnie was staring at Raf, his eyes darting up and down Raf’s whole body.

Raf said something in human, grumbling it in an annoyed tone. His body language was guarded, and he seemed displeased that Donnie was examining him so much.

Don’t remember can’t remember why can’t I? If Raf is kin is brother is ours, why no memories? Donnie asked, looking at Raf with confused eyes. I always remember I have best memory I’m the clever-curious-smart one, where’s the remembering?

Mikey reached out, placing a hand on Donnie’s shoulder, crooning that it was fine, he didn’t remember either and it was long, long, long time ago. Raf and Lee-oh didn’t know either, until they found them yesterday, they were family; no one blamed Donnie for not remembering.

Donnie muttered, wrong still should have, and reached out to take Raf’s hand. Raf let him, but was still looking guarded; like he expected an attack from Donnie. But that was silly, now that they knew; they’d never do that again. Family is the most important thing always, and you never hurt family.

Donnie held Raf’s hand, stroking a thin scar along his thumb and up the wrist; a long since healed hurt, probably from using sharp-cutting tools all day like he seemed to do. Donnie started humming their song again, looking at Raf for his reaction. It took a moment, Raf was always hesitant it seemed, but he started singing again too.

Then, Donnie smiled his small nervous-but-happy smile, and held Raf’s hand between both of his. Donnie’s singing stopped and turned into, Hello missed you welcome welcome kin-that-is-mine, brother Raf mine am I yours?

Raf looked at Mikey, saying something in human, but sounded like a question. Mikey put his own hands on top of Donnie’s, and tried to turn Donnie’s flowing words into clunky human speech. “Yu… ow-errs. Uss… yu-errs. Bruh’ers?”

Raf made an “Oh!” sound, and looked down at their hands. He added his bandaged wrapped one to the cluster, and nodded twice. “Yes. Brothers.” He said, adding pressure to his grip on Mikey’s hand.
Mikey couldn’t hold back anymore, and tore free of his brother’s grips and wrapped himself around Raf, telling his brother how absolutely joyously happy he was! Now they were four, not just two! Didn’t he see how wonderful that was, to have so many people to love and care for and be with?

Mikey practically sang, Yes! Wondrous! Your mine I’m yours donnie’s mine he’s yours Lee-oh’s mine and he’s yours and we’re all together and each other’s yes good perfect! Together together together!

Raf made grumbling noises, but let Mikey keep hugging him. Mikey purred, this was the best thing ever, better than any sweet treat ever could be. Raf pushed him away when Mikey started rubbing against his cheeks with his own, but Mikey was okay with that. This was new they were new and it was going to take some time to get to know each other.

Raf seemed to have reached his limit, and got up to walk out of the kitchen, making frustrated words in human. Mikey chased after him, laughing because Raf was so embarrassed about everything honestly; didn’t he and Lee-oh do that? Mikey and Donnie did it all the time, it was nice.

Raf kept making angry noises, but Mikey could tell he didn’t mean them, Donnie did that sometimes too when something went wrong with his clever built things and was upset they hadn’t worked. Mikey trotted up beside Raf, asking very carefully in human, if he was mad at them.

Raf’s angry face faded almost right away, just like Mikey knew it would, and he shook his head. Mikey shot Donnie a look, which Donnie rolled his eyes at because he knew exactly what Mikey was doing. Mikey’s please-please-I’m-sorry-promise-see-I’m-sweet-and-good looks only worked sometimes on Donnie, but Raf was new and didn’t know that yet.

That meant Mikey could get Raf to be nice and not angry again easy, then they could go back to being friendly and getting to know each other.

Hungry, Donnie said from the food room. Sweet treat not enough more plants-and-strange-meat-fluffy-food-together again

Mikey turned Raf around, and pushed him back towards the food room, asking for more of the… “Saan’wich-ss ‘lease?”

Raf snorted, and shook Mikey off, but went back into the food room like Mikey asked. Yes, good, more food time! More food was always good, especially with brothers!

Donnie smiled knowingly at Mikey as Mikey went by to help with Saan’wich-ss, because Mikey was very good at being sweet and nice until someone did what he wanted; and now they got food again!

This was the best day of Mikey’s life, two new brothers, sweet treats, and maybe a cares-for-small-young!

Now if Donnie’s arm wasn’t hurt and Lee-oh would stop smelling like fight-me-challenge-me, then it would perfect.

April wasn’t sure what she expected coming into the lair the day after it got new inhabitants, but
three turtles playing video games loudly was probably the thing she should have.

She approached the media pit quietly, watching as the two new turtles chattered at Raph who was trying to focus on playing an ancient version of Mario cart. Raph had to keep shooing the taller turtle away from the duct taped game system, curious fingers poking at its aging parts, and shrug the smaller one off his shell. It was all quite humorous, the three turtles acting like siblings when they’d barely known each other a day.

April’s shoe scuffed against a loose stone on the floor, and the two feral mutant’s heads whipped around to look at her. Honestly, she was surprised she got this close without being noticed.

Mikey started poking Raph in the side, chattering loudly and probably about her. Donnie meanwhile… did this unwavering stare thing. Raph finally paused his game, shouting at Mikey, “WHAT?!”

“Uh, hey Raph?” April said, adjusting her grip on the wide flat box she was holding nervously; Donnie’s eyes following her every movement. “Can you tell your brother to stop staring at me like that?”

“Oh, hi April,” Raph said, waving quickly. He took that raised hand and smacked Donnie’s shoulder, eliciting a louder hiss from him. “Chill out, April’s here to hang out, not… do whatever humans do when they find us.”

Mikey seemed to have gotten over his wariness for the most part, and trotted over on all fours; stopping on the stairs and just a few feet from April. Donnie growled behind Mikey, still sitting in the pit, and she couldn’t tell if it was at her or his brother. April gulped as Mikey stood up to walk over, clutching the box of pizza closer to her chest. “H-hey, Mikey, we met earlier, remember?”

Mikey ignored her, interested in the flat box in her hands instead. He reached out and poked a corner of the white cardboard, chirring a question to her. April looked at Raph for help. “What is he saying?”

“I think he wants the food,” Raph said, getting up from his position in front of the clunky TV set; Donnie following in one smooth motion despite the injured arm. “That for all of us?”

“Yeah, thought you could use a pick me up after last night’s mess,” April opened the box, letting the smell of the still warm pizza out into the air. Mikey made a shrill sound, darting over to tug on Donnie’s arm and point at the pizza; an excited grin on his face. Donnie was still staring at April, jeeze that was unnerving, but he let Mikey drag him over to her.

April swallowed again, finding her courage even as Donnie stood in front of her; easily a full head over her height. She held out the pie, smiling despite her nervousness. “Pizza?”

Donnie looked over at Raph, who nodded, then picked up a single slice. April watched him take a nibble off the end, testing the food, then take a larger one. After swallowing, he said something to Mikey, who’d been trying hard to stay still the whole exchange. Mikey was on the pizza so fast April almost jumped, he grabbed two pieces for his two hands, and stuffed one slice entirely in his mouth.

Raph came over and took a slice for himself, standing by her side as the two feral turtles ate pizza probably for the first time.

“So… how goes the family bonding?” April asked, vaguely horrified that Mikey could shove an entire slice of pizza into his mouth and not choke.

“Eh, it’s going. Fearless is still in the dojo avoiding us, and Sensei’s gone out for a walk; said he
needed time to clear his head,” Raph explained, munching on his first slice still. “But me… I don’t know. I got them to understand we’re family, but I still can’t tell what the heck they’re on about like eighty percent of the time.”

“Well, I did some research on humans found feral in the wild and reintroduced into society at home today; I printed some stuff that could help,” April handed Raph the box of pizza, and started digging in her messenger bag for the folder. She switched the box out for the folders when she had them. “It’s for humans technically, but you guys all have human DNA and similar brain patterns so I’m hoping it’ll do something.”

Raph flicked open the file, checking the twenty some pages inside, and shut it again. “Thanks, I’ll show it to Sensei and Leo whenever they stop being chicken shits about being around them.”

The ‘them’ in question were eyeing the pizza in April’s hands again, their pieces gone completely. April held out the pizza box, offering the other slices up. Raph put the file under his arm and took it from her though, and walked over to his brothers himself. No hesitation there, Mikey and Donnie grabbed another few slices without waiting.

Ah, the human thing. Right, that’s why she was so nervous in the first place; their first encounter involved tackling and general threats. No thanks, not again.

But then Mikey was right in front of her, swallowing his bite of pizza, and he threw his arms around her; making her shriek a little. April stood frozen; arms pined by Mikey’s, and tried to figure out what to do. Okay, first, what was that noise/vibration?

Oh.

Mikey was purring. Okay, that was happening.

He released her, chiring a long string of syllables lost on April’s English speaking brain, and then ran back to be with Raph and Donnie. April put her hands over her heart, feeling like she’d just sprinted. Her eyes drifted back to Donnie, who was still staring, and April felt like she had two choices; shy away and hope he left her alone, or…

April stood up straight and glared at Donnie, she wasn’t going to be cowed by this mutant, not after everything she’d been through the last month.

Donnie raised an eye ridge, scrutinizing her, and then nodded once. He turned to Mikey, who hadn’t stopped talking the entire exchange of glances, and started focusing only on his brother.

April breathed out her tension, feeling relieved.

Raph sidled over to her, an almost empty box in hand. “Soooo, yeah, they do that. Or Donnie does. Sorry, he really doesn’t like humans. We had a moment with one of our VHS tapes earlier… Leo didn’t rewind it all the way, and it started right in the middle of a serious fight scene. Donnie didn’t like it much.”

April dropped her hands from her chest and took a moment to close her eyes, *mutants*, she swore to god, it got weirder every time she came down here. “I think… I think he just accepted me, or something. Is it because I brought pizza? Is that it?”

“Nnnno, no I think its ‘cause you let Mikey hug you and didn’t. Freak out. Or anything. I think Donnie’ll only do that if you’ve made Mikey happy,” Raph huffed, pulling out the last slice of pizza and handing it her. “He did that with me, er, sorta, but only after I got on Mikey’s good side.”
April took the slice, mostly cold but good enough, and bit into its tip. “Protective older brother shtick?”

“Yeah, basically.”

“Well great, glad that’s out of the way then. Anything else I should watch out for?”

“… Mikey has zero personal space if he likes you and Donnie will probably take apart anything you leave near him.”

“Fantastic,” April said dryly, stuffing another bite into her mouth. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

That truce lasted until a few days later, when a fight got out of hand, and the two feral turtles disappeared back into the sewers like they’d never been in the lair.

In Leo’s defense, he’d been having a bad night. Donnie was just one too many things gone wrong.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone’s interested, I’ve been thinking about writing up complete character descriptions for the feral brothers. If it’s something people would like to see, just a quick thing, I’ll stick it in the notes next chapter.

(i’d be more enthusiastic in this right now if my stomach wasn’t trying to eat itself and my head feeling someone blended it. urgh, human bodies suuuuck)

Thank you everyone who’s commented thus far, and read my AU; it’s become my favorite fic out of all my already posted and unposted fics.

i’m going to go pass out now.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Strife.

Chapter Notes

I return, with a new chapter no less!
Get ready everyone, I spared nothing in the process of creating this chapter.

Have fun reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Raph could not be with his younger brothers all the time, he had patrol and training. Splinter stepped up though, to watch them while his trained sons keep their borders clear of criminal activity.

It was difficult for Splinter, interacting with his lost children. His pressing guilt, of leaving them, abandoning them; it weighed on his conscience every time he heard them talk in their strange primal language, when he saw them move like wild animals.

He could have prevented this, could have given them at least slivers of humanity, if only he’d looked for them after that storm.

But past regrets do not fix the present, so Splinter attempts to connect with his children as they are; not as how they might have been.

They were intuitive, and curious about everything. Michelangelo especially, he got into everything he had not been told not to touch yet. His youngest son picked up English easily as their time in the lair went on, speaking clearer and clearer. Donatello was less so, disinclined to make much talk at all unless prompted. But he understood what his family said to him, even if he does not respond often.

Splinter started there, teaching them words. It was not his first language, Japanese, but it was something; in the country they lived in, they would need it.

Their unusual behaviour and reactions made the teaching process interesting.

The best method Splinter found was having them mimic sentences back to him, though that still had mixed results. Michelangelo’s tendency to skip vowels or whole words in the middle of a reply was trying, since the meaning was garbled if he removes one too important. Donatello’s refusal to respond at all happened when he grew tired of listening, or too moody to continue. Donatello did not fully trust Splinter, he could tell from how his son watched him, but he respected Splinter for his position as Leonardo and Raphael’s father. A wise disposition, if a painful one for Splinter.

Splinter also found that his children though they might be feral, have not lost any intelligence for it.
Along with their increasing verbal skills, they show knowledge in other areas; such as electronics. Michelangelo learned to use the TV and it’s game set almost overnight, Donatello not far behind. Splinter was convinced to play a round of “Mario Cart” with them, through pleading blue eyes, and lost to both of them. Their glee is enough to soothe his minutely wounded pride.

Donatello’s skills did not stop there, as Splinter and his elder sons find out one night making dinner; their carefully hoarded and repaired mixer and toaster gone from their storage. Raphael’s tool box, for the fridge and a motorbike he hadn’t yet finished, was also discovered both missing and found along with the appliances.

Donatello, it would seem, enjoyed taking machines apart and playing with their insides. They found him inside the spare room, surrounded by disassembled gears and wires, and grease on his fingers.

He was made to put them back together.

The machines work better than they did before.

Donatello was allowed free reign on their appliances, excluding the game system and television; on the condition they are put back together once he is done. And not put back together in the literal sense of combining one machine with another, they do not need a hair dryer that also shaves you; Splinter’s fur stays on his body, thank you.

Splinter was quietly amazed, that despite their upbringing, his lost sons are every bit as smart as his other children. What they lack in ordinary societal standards, they make up for with ingenuity and adaption.

He was grateful for this chance to know them, even with the emotional distance and language barrier. He had missed them for a long twelve years, grieved for them every night, and now he might try again to be their father.

He would be patient, as they warm up to their found family, for the day he was allowed to truly call them his sons.

Following the first two days of Donnie and Mikey living in the lair, Leo was happy to have his routine returned to normal; excluding whenever his feral siblings butt in.

Wake up around twelve, prepare for the day, beginning of the day exercises, breakfast, mediation and then training with his Sensei alongside Raph; evening lunch for them, first evening patrol, return home for relaxation and free time, second patrol towards the morning hours, warm down exercises, sleep.

Disputes with Raph and uncomfortable interactions with his feral brothers are mixed into that routine, annoying but kept to a minimum.

Leo promised himself that he’ll get to know them better when they all speak the same language. Until then, he’s more comfortable keeping distance.
Donnie and Mikey’s progress is promising, only five days after their first night with their family and they’d already begun to speak properly; longer, clearer words, actual sentences at times. Leo thanks his father when no one else is around for teaching them while he and Raph patrol, they’ll be assimilated into the lair better when their lessons are complete.

Leo noted that his, relatively, sane brother spent all his free time with Donnie and Mikey; Leo using his time to perfect a move or watch television, and Raph doing whatever their younger brothers are interested in that evening.

His three younger brothers are already getting close, Mikey had no sense of personal space and would climb all over Raph if the older turtle doesn’t stop him, and Donatello almost relaxed completely as he interacted with Raph. Raph for whatever reason was actually patient with their stuttering sentences and weird quirks. Raph had never been patient with anyone before.

Leo felt a spark of anger about that, and didn’t recognize it for jealousy.

But other than those anomalies, Leo’s world rightened itself and he once more could predict how things will play out each day. He felt calmer now that order has been restored, and was feeling hopeful for a win when April’s came to them with a Kraang hide out to take down.

They win, him and Raph, and take the small base of operations from the Kraang. Destroying all the weapons stored there, and setting mutagen shipments afame with the dispatched droids; a good night, an excellent fight, and Leo feels like he’s soaring when they head home. Fresh from battle and still buzzing with victory, Leo let them play a bit across the New York roof tops. They found no readable info about April’s father, the computers there had limited English notes and no photos that resembled anything helpful; but wrecking another Kraang base was good enough for now.

The victory sours though, when the two of them were attacked by ninjas.

The enemy ninjas are skilled, and Leo and Raph were only used to fighting two types of enemies; robots that go down with little effort, and their father who holds back. The ninjas do neither of those things.

“Why are there ninjas in New York?! I thought we were the only ones!” Raph shouted as he vaulted over Leo, slamming into an attacking ninja foot first. “Who the hell are these guys?”

“I don’t know, just focus!” Leo yelled back, narrowly ducking a strike that would have decapitated him.

Their Sensei trained them for this, fighting together as a united force, but the sheer numbers almost overwhelm them. Leo can only block so many strikes at once, and a couple get past his defenses that leave sliced scales behind. Nothing deep, not yet at least. Raph had similar wounds, around his hands from failed blocks and one down his thigh from a mistimed kick.

The battle turned completely against them when two more humans join the fray. One tall and hulking, the other thin and fast anything; both experts in hand to hand combat. The thickly muscled one Leo briefly recognizes as Chris Bradford from the recent string of billboard advertisements, the smaller man was an unknown, but had a thick accent Leo couldn’t place.

Those two, plus the army of ninja soldiers, backed Leo and Raph into a corner; they’re pinned against the edge of a tall building and left with no more moves to make.

Leo was panting, and his grip shaking slightly from adrenaline; they’re losing, and losing badly. And they don’t even know who they’re losing to.
“Who are you?” Leo demanded, aiming the tip of katanas at the two leaders. “Why are you attacking us?”

“We’re here on orders from our master, to bring one of you in for questioning,” Chris Bradford replied, smirking as he tilted his head condescendingly. “The other doesn’t have to make it; we only need one of you. If you surrender now, maybe we’ll let the lucky freak live to limp home. But one of you is coming back with us, one way or another.”

“Who’s your master?” Leo said, narrowing his whitened eyes and silently promising that no one was being taken tonight; not while he still breathed.

“You should know him well,” The dark skinned man said, flipping his knife between his fingers. “Your own master should have told you stories about his humiliating defeat at the hands of the Shredder.”

Leo’s grip wavered, making his sword dip. He knew that name, just like the man said he would; their father had told them that story many times over. As a lesson and a warning.

Their enemies took Leo and Raph’s moment of shock as an opportunity to attack again. The thin, accented man’s knife skimmed the air near his eyes too close for comfort, and Leo decided it was time to leave. They’re out numbered and already tired from their earlier battle; it’s either retreat or death, as much as he hated the former option.

Leo stepped back over the edge of the building, Raph following his example. They dropped from the high story apartment’s roof down to the ground, saving themselves by grabbing a balcony’s railing. Leo winced, feeling a muscle twinge in his shoulder, but he and Raph get to the ground safely.

Their rapid oncoming enemies forced them to move right away, no time to catch their breath.

They couldn’t go back to the lair yet, they had to shake their tail first; otherwise they’d lead the Shredder’s forces right into the heart of their turf.

Good thing Leo and Raph knew the sewers better than their own names.

They set traps as they ran, trip wires and loose pipes set to fall when someone touched it. Back in their most well-known environment, Leo and Raph evened the playing field again. Until it’s just the two leaders, the humans back to back and starting to panic. They’ve either knocked out or confused the ninjas so badly that they’ve become separated. It’s just the two turtles versus the bosses.

They’ve got Bradford and his partner in a large tunnel connection, the high ceiling and shadows gave the brothers perfect cover until they chose to step out into the weak light.

Leo readied his two swords, staring down Bradford. “Let’s try this again, what does you master want with us?”

Bradford scowled at him, clenching his fists in an equally ready position. “Information of course, about your base and numbers. And to send a message, to Hamato Yoshi, that vengeance is coming for him, through the corpse of his own soldier.”

Raph laughed humorlessly, spinning his sais in both hands. “Like to see you try, asshole.”

“I’ll gladly take that challenge,” The accented man replied, smirking at Raph.
“Bring it!” Raph yelled, charging him.

Leo engaged with Bradford, his swords clanging against the man’s wrist guards. Raph fought with angry intensity, his sais aimed for vital spots, as the thin human dodged and struck back with the same intenseness.

They danced around the space, striking and blocking over and over, and Leo felt like he was missing something; why weren’t the humans actually going for the kill, what were they waiting for-

His answer came in the form of tens of ninjas, streaming into the area with weapons raised.

They’d been stalling, waiting for reinforcements.

Leo grit his teeth, angry with himself for his failed judgement, and dove back into the fight; Raph’s enraged bellowing echoed his movements beside Leo.

With the amount of assailing weapons aimed at him, Leo couldn’t pull his punches anymore, sinking his blades into arms and legs as he fought. Leo spotted for a moment, Raph with his sais buried in a man’s arm, before the mob swallowed them again.

Another nick caught the edge of his shell, sending painful vibrations through it, same time as a blunt staff knocked his bad shoulder. Leo’s vision was swarmed with black and red cloth, Bradford and his minions bearing down on him.

His shell knocked against Raph’s, fighting back to back.

Leo gasped in pain, a slice going through the top of his scales near his wrist.

Raph was shouting something, but Leo’s ears were full of his own roaring blood.

They had to escape, and they had to do it now.

“Raph, we have to go!” Leo yelled, blocking another strike.

“I said that already!” Raph yelled back.

They jumped together, using nearby ninjas as a spring board. An overhanging pipe was what they grasped, climbed on top of, and started running. It led into the wall sight beside one of the open ended tunnels just under the surface, the opening big enough for them both to disappear into.

The sound of Bradford, the thin knife wielding man, and their minions weren’t far behind them.

Two choices, head back up to the surface, and head for a direct man hole near the lair. Or follow the tunnel they were in, to its connection to the deeper tunnels, and use that as a roundabout way back to the lair.

Leo flicked his hand, indicating the deeper tunnel track, and Raph followed his command; both of them dissolving into the maze of sewer tunnels.

They wove through familiar dark corridors, the sounds of pursuit dying off further with each turn.

Eventually, there was nothing but the faint sounds of their feet against the damp concrete.

They made it back to the lair; both in one piece, and Leo finally had a moment to think.

He took a deep breath, his bloodied katanas dripping still, and felt all of his anger come flooding
back outside of the battle calm he’d held till then.

He walked straight into the dojo, ignoring whatever Raph was saying behind him, and set his weapons down.

Leo was angry.

Leo was furious.

They’d lost, they’d lost completely and utterly. They never lost a fight, not once since going above ground. It could have been prevented, they could have won easily Leo was sure of that, if he’d just thought faster, been better-

Leo was filled with anger, right to the brim.

And it was aimed at himself, and his in-field judgement, and-and-and-

And Raph. Raph had been there, he hadn’t seen the signs of a trap either. They’d lost because neither of them had been aware of enough of the situation.

It wasn’t completely Leo’s fault.

Raph shared it too.

“You okay, Leo?” His brother said behind him. Leo turned around, his shoulder complaining from the movement, to face his younger siblings clustered in the doorway. Raph had cuts along his arms, and one dark errant bruise forming on his knee. Leo’s own injuries were starting to burn worse the longer he stood still.

Raph stepped into the dojo; his sais holstered and clean, with Donnie and Mikey following. Leo could see his feral siblings watching him, with both concern and wariness. Donnie’s eyes kept darting to Leo’s katanas, laid out near him.

“We should get to the bathroom, Leo, take care of those cuts,” Raph said, pointing at Leo’s wounds. “Mine are stinging like a bitch, and I’m guessing yours do too-”

“How are you so calm, we just lost a completely winnable fight,” Leo said, his anger leaking into his tone. Why wasn’t Raph foaming at the mouth, he was always angry about losing anything.

Raph shrugged. “I am, I’m just choosing to prioritize right now. Like cleaning up. And speaking of, you should get to cleaning your swords Leo, Splinter told us both that blood rusts like nothing else-”

“We lost, Raph! To our Sensei’s mortal enemy no less!” Leo exploded, his brother’s nonchalant attitude driving him to his breaking point. “We don’t do losses, we always win! How are you not angry about this too?”

“Hey! I said I was angry, I’m just keepin’ a better hold on it than you, Leo,” Raph shot back, narrowing his eyes and taking a step towards his brother. “We ain’t gonna always win, master Splinter taught us that. You taught me that, every single time you beat my ass in training!”

“Exactly! I. Don’t. Lose.” Leo said, taking an echoing step towards Raph.

“Well maybe it’s time you learned, that sometimes you gotta,” Raph said, glaring and clenching his fists.

Leo sneered at Raph; his brother and scape goat. “If you’d paid more attention in the fight, we could
have beaten Braford and his lackey before the reinforcements showed up. But no, you got caught up in the fight like always; charging in with no awareness of what’s happening.”

“Aren’t you the leader, Leo? Isn’t it your job to make sure we ain’t walkin’ into a fucking trap?” Raph spat. “Because, it sure looks like you led us straight into one.”

Leo threw the first punch.

Raph threw a returning one.

In the back of his head, Leo considered stopping the fight, but his temper was in control and Raph seemed more than happy to hit back.

Leo’s fist connected with Raph’s snout, just as Raph’s punch got his bad shoulder. They both stepped back for a second, keeping their momentum of movement, and swung again.

Leo’s injuries stung worse as Raph’s blows connected on them, and he made sure to return the favor by slamming his fist into the series of slices on Raph’s arm.

They’re yelling, both of them.

Insults, screams, meaningless words of contempt.

Someone else was screaming.

Leo winded back another shot, aiming to catch Raph on the temple; Raph raised his own fist, mirrored rage on his face.

They struck at the same time, just as something got between them.

Mikey was hit two ways, his brother’s blows too far into their swings to change course. He goes down with a strangled yelp, landing hard on his side.

Leo and Raph both stepped back, coming out of their haze.

Leo had only a moment to realize what he’d done when Donnie was on him.

Raph couldn’t move, horrified that he’d just struck down his younger brother.

Donnie slammed into Leo the instant after Mikey was on the ground, screaming something furious and primal.

Raph was panicking, he knew that much, as he knelt beside Mikey on the dojo’s mats. His brother was biting down on cries, clutching the side of his head where Leo had caught him full force. Raph’s own punch was lucky, cuffing just the shell.

“Mikey… Mikey, are you okay?” Raph asked, placing a shaking hand on Mikey’s shoulder.
Mikey rolled away from him, onto all fours, and hissed. He looked woozy, and in shock.

Mikey wouldn’t let Raph get near him, so he turned his attention back to Leo and Donnie.

He needed to get them apart, this wasn’t helping anyone. But he couldn’t move, stuck watching his older and younger brother go for each other’s throats.

Donnie screamed again at Lee-oh, because he’d known this would happen, that the turtle would turn on them again.

*You YOU HURT HIM you promised you LIED HURT HIM YOU HURT HIM,* Donnie yelled, blocking Lee-oh’s punch. Donnie used his longer arms to twist Lee-oh’s arm and throw him away, chasing after him with hands curled into fists. *You were KIN you were OURS, BETRAYER, now I HURT YOU like you hurt MIKEY*

Donnie should have taken them from here, back when he’d realized his arm was almost better.

He should have listened to the lesson he’d learned when they were both very small.

Never trust humans.

*Wrong-talking-pretending-human* turtles weren’t to be trusted either it seemed.

Donnie tackled Lee-oh to the ground, snapping his teeth in the turtle’s face, and howled, *NO ONE HURTS HIM HE IS MINE*

*Lee-oh* would find no mercy this time, not within Donnie.

Mikey was confused, and scared, and hurt.

His head ached; it made everything wavering like and hard to stand on his feet.

Why were they fighting, why had Raf and Lee-oh been hurting each other, why did they hurt him-

Raf was saying something to him, but Mikey was too upset to try translating his weird human speech. His attention was on Donnie fighting with Lee-oh.

His brother, who fast and strong and clever, had been thrown off *Lee-oh* and was being attacked over and over by the other turtle.

*Lee-oh* was saying something to Donnie, but it sounded threatening and angry, unlike Raf’s shaky,
but calm tone.

Mikey had just wanted everyone to stop fighting, not this never this.

But *Lee-oh* was hurting Donnie, using the strange fighting moves the rat named *Splin-ter* had taught him.

And Mikey had a promise to keep, about *Lee-oh* doing that.

Leo shoved Donnie back, his sibling hissing angrily.

“Back off, Donnie! This isn’t your fight, I didn’t mean to hit Mikey, he got in the way—” Leo cut off, Donnie’s fist hitting his wrenched shoulder. Leo snapped, hitting Donnie in the center of his plastron with all his strength; forcing the other turtle back again. “If you’d just listen, we wouldn’t be having this problem!”

Donnie yelled something at him, completely inhuman sounds.

“And that! Why won’t you speak English, why won’t you stop talking like an animal?!” Leo slammed another punch into Donnie, his anger rising again. “You have a home now; we’re teaching you how to be normal, you’re supposed to have learned how to be a part of this family already!”

Donnie knocked his fist away, but Leo had training on his side, and came back twice as hard.

Leo hit Donnie again and again, punctuating each hit with his words. “You. Should. Be. Normal! What’s wrong with you?!”

Donnie fell backward onto his shell, glaring up at Leo; who loomed over him panting with exertion. His feral brother hissed something again, loud and furious.

“Why are you like this,” Leo said, the words filled with his rage. “Why are you this freak who can’t even understand what I’m saying?!”

Donnie didn’t answer, only hissing spitefully.

Leo raised his fists again. “Why aren’t you *normal*?!”

Mikey was suddenly in front of Leo’s strike, shoving him off balance, and slamming his forehead into Leo’s snout.

Leo reeled backwards, stumbling and holding his smarting face. Mikey didn’t relent, striking at Leo’s exposed side. Leo was off kilter enough that Mikey’s blows landed, and he fell onto the ground. Mikey’s fist collided with his shoulder, making Leo seize up in pain.

His smallest brother was on top of him, knee crushing his plastron, and a steely grip on Leo’s shoulder.

Mikey raised his hand, nails that doubled as claws spread wide, and slashed downwards.
Leo felt the scales under his eye part, fresh blood leaking. Two cuts bled from his cheek, just beneath his eye socket and close enough that the claws had caught his mask; twin slashes in the edge of the old blue fabric.

Mikey held his position, crouching over Leo and glaring with blank eyes. Leo stilled his breath, shocked by the violence from the usually kind turtle.

Mikey leaned in close, his white eyelids blinking away to expose icy blue anger. His chest was vibrating angrily, communicating his physical fury at Leo. Mikey curled his lips away from his teeth, flashing them just like a wild animal.

“N’oh. M’ore.” He said, English words heavily accented. “Stay ‘way, f-from me, from Don-ee.”

He released his grip on Leo’s shoulder, stepping carefully away. Leo sat up slowly, watching his younger brothers.

Donnie was upright again on two legs, curled defensively in on himself. Mikey and he moved together as one, towards the door, not taking their eyes off Raph and Leo. When they reached the threshold, they dropped to the ground and sprinted away.

Raph chased after them, yelling for them to wait. Leo didn’t move, what he’d just done finally catching up with his thoughts.

He pressed a hand against the cuts on his right cheek, feeling the hot blood smear.

Oh god.

He’d ruined everything.

“Wait, wait please, Mikey, Donnie!” Raph yelled, chasing his brothers across the concrete of the lair.

Donnie turned on him, hissing angrily and using his upright size to make Raph stall his run. Raph was paralyzed, watching his brothers climb the steps to the exit.

They couldn’t leave, they’d just found each other, and it was one stupid fight that didn’t even mean anything-

Mikey turned back to look at him, eyes uncovered unlike Donnie’s angry white.

“C’mon Mikey, please,” Raph begged. “He didn’t mean it, I swear! We’re sorry!”

Mikey’s hiss, and look of betrayal cut Raph a lot deeper than he ever thought it could.

His brothers disappeared over the turnstiles, leaping into the gloom of the subway tunnels.

“FUCK!” Raph shouted, dragging a hand over his skull and tugging his mask’s knot so it slipped down. “Fuck, fuck, FUCK!”
His arms stung, crusting cuts reopening as he punched at nothing. He lowered his head, leaning onto his knees, and took angry gulps of air. His mask hung limply around his neck, same color as the fluids leaking out of his arms.

This was Leo’s fucking fault. Too god damn prideful and self-absorbed to see what the hell he was doing.

Raph stood up, whirling to face the dojo’s direction, and marched back across the lair into the large room. Leo was still there, holding his undone mask in hand and staring at its new rips. Leo looked like all the life had gone out of him, listlessly fingering the blue fabric. He looked up at Raph’s entrance, blue eyes uncharacteristically vulnerable.

“I hope you’re happy Leo,” Raph said, feeling the ghost of his earlier anger come back. “I hope that you’re fucking happy that you just drove our little brothers away, probably for good.”

Leo blinked, looking devastated. “I… I didn’t mean to. I was just-”

“-angry? Yeah, I’ve been there a million times. Doesn’t fucking excuse anything, just like when I do it,” Raph sat down across from Leo, his anger fading. His stupid, prideful older brother; he didn’t know how to lose. What a fucking joke. “You fucked up Leo, big time. Win or lose, the fight doesn’t matter, we just lost our little brothers back into the sewers; and I doubt they’re ever gonna come back. Not after that show.”

Leo’s face crumbled, and he ducked his gaze back to his mask. Raph watched Leo steadily shrink in on himself, blood from his cheek still dripping onto his crossed legs.

“I’m sorry,” Leo said in a whisper.

“Aren’t we both,” Raph replied, his quiet voice echoing in the silent training hall.

“Sorry for what, might I ask?” Their father’s voice said, cutting through the silence. Raph looked up; master Splinter was standing in the door way of the dojo, his walking stick in one hand and the other stroking his beard. “I was gone for only a short walk, but I’ve come home to find my eldest sons injured and my youngest missing. Tell me, what has happened?”

Leo was still mutely staring at his shredded mask, so Raph sighed, and took it upon himself to explain what happened.

Leo listened numbly as his father and brother talked, focusing on the feeling of Mikey’s nails against his flesh.

He’d done that, pushed his brothers so far they retaliated with actual force.

Donnie was already beaten, down on the ground and not getting up, why had Leo gotten ready to keep going?

Their expressions; fear, anger, betrayal, they ran through Leo’s mind over and over.
He felt sick.

His father’s gentle hand brought Leo back to the present, looking up into the kind brown eyes of his Sensei.

“Leonardo, Raphael tells me there was a fight between you and your brothers,” Splinter said, kneeling down in front of Leo. “And, that they have gone. Is this true?”

“Yeah, yeah it is, dad,” Leo said, the sick feeling climbing up his throat. “I’m so sorry; I don’t know why I did that. I just—just got so angry, and they weren’t speaking English and I just snapped—”

“Hush, Leonardo,” His father said, laying a hand on Leo’s clenching hands. “It is true, this is something of your own making, but I do not place the blame entirely on your shoulders. I have failed in my teachings, if I haven’t taught you enough humility in battle. We cannot win every fight, even when they are important.”

Leo looked down again, only for his father to bring his eyes back up with a light hand. Splinter’s eyes were sad, maybe for Leo, maybe for his other children. “My son, you are young, and we all make mistakes at such an age. You might have made a grave error, but a fight with your siblings is normal. All brothers’ fight with each other, it is just par the course of growing up.”

“Not like this, dad. I-I hurt them, both of them,” Leo said miserably.

“I know, but you are sorry for that, and that in itself is the first step to reconciling,” Splinter wiped a crusting drop of blood from Leo’s cheek, making him wince slightly. “I am sorry, sorry that I failed to teach you the ability to lose as well as win.”

“It’s not your fault,” Leo said, shaking his head. “It’s mine; I’m the one who fought with them.”

“Regardless, it is the nature of a parent to regret not catching such things before they become a problem,” His father stroked the uninjured side of Leo’s face, soft pads trailing the raised scales there. “Let us get you patched up, and then we will discuss what comes next.”

“Hai, Sensei,” Leo replied, allowing his father to pull him from the dojo floor.

Leo passed Raph on the way out, his brother looking contemplative and… something. It wasn’t anger, but it wasn’t calmness; an emotion between the two. Raph’s acidic green eyes met Leo’s own navy blue ones, translating the look into a number of meanings.

I blame you.

I don’t blame you.

Your fault, but also mine.

I’m sorry.

You should be sorry.

Leo took comfort in the fact that at least his brothers blamed him, as they should, even when their father tried to console him of that blame.

This was his mess, and it was up to him to fix it.

Leo just wasn’t sure if he could.
Donnie panted, resting for a moment against a huge metal structure within the tunnels. They’d been running for a long time, and his arm hurt a lot. They couldn’t stop though; their betraying-false-kin could be upon them before they even noticed.

Their power was something to be feared, how fast and deadly they could be.

Donnie had always had a healthy amount of fear, because death was always hiding behind each corner. If he didn’t fear that creeping death, they would never have gotten so far into life.

Donnie’s musings were disrupted though, by sniffling hiccups beside him.

Mikey was crying, because of course he was; Donnie’s sweet-small-kind-beloved little brother had just had his heart pulled apart, of course he’s going to cry. Mikey was sensitive to emotions, and his were stronger than any that Donnie had ever mustered.

It must have hurt him deeply, to have to attack someone they had tentatively considered a brother.

Mikey was crying softly, thick tears coming out of his watery eyes and dripping onto the ground. He’s heart broken, and Donnie can understand; even if it had turned out like this, for the last few days they’ve had more than just the two of them to love.

Donnie might not feel as intensely as Mikey, but he too, was feeling heart break.

*Shush shush we’re safe we’re together shush,* Donnie said, pulling his smaller brother close. *I’m sorry you hurt that I hurt that they hurt us, love you shush love you love you love you*

*Love you love you love you,* Mikey cried, burying his face against Donnie’s chest. *Why this why the hurt how could they why would they why why why*

*I know not I’m sorry sorry sorry, for this for them for hurt,* Donnie said, stroking Mikey’s trembling shell.

*They were ours we were theirs how could they?!* Mikey sobbed, sorrow lacing every trill.

*I don’t know, so sorry, love you love you,* Donnie crooned softly, holding his small gentle brother close.

Mikey sniffled again, wiping at the wetness of his eyes. He bumped his cheek against Donnie’s, humming a sad, but hopeful question. *Home-safe-place-nest?*

*Yes, home-safe-place-nest,* Donnie replied, adding his comforting hum to Mikey’s. They were still far from it, and they’d been away for so long, but he could smell water that smelt like a man-made flow that ran through their territory.

They would get home that way, following that flow until they returned to their proper place. Where they had food and warmth and are secret. No more false brothers, no more noisy humans and rats-that-are-big, just the two of them again.
Donnie encouraged Mikey back to his feet, and then they start off again; journeying through the dark tunnels beneath the human dwellings above.

It took them all night, and a little bit into the day, to reach their home. Having to venture above ground multiple times to jump tunnels through the metal covered holes humans make, and back track when they met a dead end. But eventually, the familiar smelling flow of water led them right to the edge of their territory, and they know the way from there.

Their nest was dark, all the burning sticks long since burned away, but it smelled like home and welcomed them after many days away.

There were rats in their sleeping place, but they scare away easy enough, and with a little shaking out their bed was ready again.

Donnie hurt everywhere, his arm strained again and bruises from where Lee-oh hit him, but he can take care of those after sleep. Mikey has a dark bruise on his temple, and it’s tender enough that when Donnie brushed against it his small brother winced away.

Donnie pressed a soft nudge to that spot, whispering, *Sorry sorry love you small-dear-precious-brother*

Mikey purred that it was fine, that it didn’t hurt that bad, that Donnie didn’t even need to be forgiven.

Donnie pulled the thick fabrics over both of them, curling protectively around his brother. With the smell of home around them, and Mikey pressed against his chest safe and purring, Donnie could almost pretend the false brothers never found them or hurt them.

They might come again, try to hurt them again.

Donnie feared they may have to leave their nest, their home since forever.

Mikey touched his snout to Donnie’s, trilling a, *No more thinking just sleeping sleep now clever-curious-Donnie*

Donnie nuzzled his brother’s head, and agreed. Thinking was for when they next woke. For now, it was sleeping, resting, and healing their bodies.

Donnie would figure out what to do next when his body and head did not hurt.

So he let himself slip into sleep, taking true relaxation for the first time since they met their false brothers; tucked against his truly loved, and only, brother.

Chapter End Notes

To anyone who expected fluff of any kind, I apologize; this chapter is all conflict and angry things.
I’ll never be satisfied until I’ve completely torn their foundations as a group apart and put it back together completely different.
I promise we'll start with the actual show's plot soon, I'm almost done with the ground work here.

Okay so to those who wanted to know more about the descriptions of the feral kids, here we go.

(edit, the day following the first posting of this chapter, i made some mistakes with these and fixed them, i'm sorry for that)

Physical differences:

They've got long nails, as I might have mentioned in the fic, that get close to actual claws. I hc that the canon kids do have them, but trim them bc martial arts. Long nails are handy for getting shit done, let me tell you, and the two of them probably use them for literally everything.

I also believe that mutagen affects are dictated partially by the person's emotional and physical distress during the mutation process; see all the horribly disfigured villains turned during a fight. So, the two feral bros got a bit spinier looking bc of their harsher upbringing, and have slight ridges on their shells where as Leo and Raph's are smooth. (Ikara added that this also comes from imbalanced diets, which they definitely had seeing as they fended for themselves.)

They've also got some more noticeable markings on their skin, like Mikey's canon freckles but on their arms/legs and back of neck. From more consistent exposure to sunlight, and a throw back to markings irl turtles have.

Donnie and Mikey's arms are longer than in canon, because they use them for running and needed them to be closer in size with their legs. It's not very noticeable unless you put them beside civilized versions of themselves.

They also have tails, which I've mentioned once before. See my other fic, Anatomy Sure Is Strange, for an explanation fully about my headcanons surrounding that bit of anatomy. Leo and Raph also have them, but keep theirs hidden away.

Accessories:

Mikey likes colors and shiny things, and figured out how to make bracelets pretty early on in life. His arms have multiple woven bracelets made from string and ribbons, at least five to seven on each arm. He makes more all the time, and switches them off whenever one gets too dirty for his taste. His ankles are too wide for anklets, but he's got two on his left leg higher up and made with smooth brown twine and have glass beads woven in. They're his favorites.

Donnie is still very efficient with how he does things, and only wears a couple bracelets that Mikey has made for him. They're plainer than Mikey's own, but are appealing with their intricate weave patterns. Donnie has the one necklace around his neck, that has purple glass beads Mikey gifted to him one day that felt particularly special to him. Donnie hasn't taken it off since.

They've both typically got satchels across their chests or shells, made from stitched or knotted fabrics from bastardized human clothes. They're shaped like pea pods, the ones for their fronts being the size to carry a chihuahua in, and the ones for their backs large enough to carry a human baby in.
That's really all the difference they've got outwards speaking; however their brain patterns differ from Leo's and Raph's because of their upbringing. I did some research about that, specifically feral human children, and found out that without proper societal interactions; the human brain tends to lose pieces of itself in order to adapt to the new life style.

So there's going to be areas they won't ever grasp properly, at least when it comes to human standards. They'll manage fine for mutants though, and eventually communicate easily with the rest of the fam.

Can't wait for that, so much fluff opportunity!

I'm done rambling now, thanks for reading, and I'll see ya'll next update.

Lemme know if the descriptions were informative/interesting enough.

Adios~
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Reconciliation.

Chapter Notes

Hi, hello, I would’ve gotten this done sooner if not for a (stressful) family outing to a baseball game last night for Canada Day. (Happy birthday Canada, congrats on not being as shitty as some countries.) (I overestimated my ability to handle extremely large rowdy crowds and paid for it in the form of a mini-anxiety attack afterwards. Thank you Cowboy Bebop for being so soothing.))

But yeah, I got it done, so here’s a new chapter for all you folks.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leo stood outside of his brother’s former room, the dim light of the hallway illuminating the messy bed and scattered possessions they’d claimed over the few days they’d been in the lair.

An empty glass water bottle, deep emerald with a fancy label; a number of old alarm clocks and broken machines from Raph’s discard pile for parts, reflective wrappers from hard candies April had brought…

Leo’s guilt felt like a thick, wet blanket, getting heavier around his mind every time he thought of them.

His cheek, arms, and legs had been treated and the residual hurt of those wounds had faded almost to a faint buzz. Unless Leo actively poked at one, he couldn’t feel a thing beyond the tightness of the bandages.

Too bad he couldn’t stop poking at them, picking steadily at the ones around his wrists.

It wasn’t a conscious decision; he just needed something for his hands to do. Leo was too wrapped up in his own thoughts to notice that red splotches were appearing faintly in the white bandage; around the spot he’d been rubbing and scratching.

“You shouldn’t do that,” Raph said, breaking into Leo’s cycle of thoughts. Leo turned his head, glancing at his brother. Raph was leaning on the frame of his own doorway, Spike cradled in his bandaged arms. He was looking at Leo’s picking fingers. “Whatever you’re thinking right now, stop it. It’s not helping anyone, and definitely not yourself.”

Leo took his hand away from the bandage, and sighed, letting his head knock against the frame. “I
can’t stop thinking about them Raph, not until I fix this.”

“Poking your band aids until they’re red and playing the self-blame game isn’t going to fix things, so don’t bother,” Raph gently scratched Spike’s head, the small tortoise blinking slowly at Leo. “Getting stuck in that thinking solves literally nothing.”

“…I don’t know what to do Raph,” Leo said, looking at the empty bed their brothers had slept in. “How do I make this up to them? We told them this was their home… and then I drove them out of it. Why would they forgive me?”

“To be honest? They never considered the lair home, not once the whole time. Mikey told me so,” Raph walked over to Leo, leaning on the wall beside him. “Their home is that weird train station, Leo. This was just a place they slept in.”

“It was supposed to be their home, our home together.”

“You can’t expect someone to leave their home just because someone said so,” Raph said, elbowing Leo’s arm. “C’mon Leo, how would you react to someone telling you the lair wasn’t your home anymore, an’ you had to live in some townhouse?”

Leo sighed, knowing Raph was right. “Okay, I see your point there. Still though, wouldn’t you rather live here than that place?”

“Me? Yeah. But them? Nah, that place is their home; they’ve probably been living there since they got washed away,” Raph said, letting Spike climb up his shoulder. “I’m actually curious about what it’s like there; we didn’t get a chance to look around last time.”

“I doubt they’d let us in it now,” Leo said, starting to pick at his bandage again.

Raph reached out and brushed his hand away, pushing it back to Leo’s side. “I said stop that. Seriously Leo, if you’re struggling that bad go see Sensei. He’ll have mystic whatever advice.”

“Ah, you’re probably right. I’m just… I don’t feel like…” Leo wrestled with himself, trying to his turmoil of guilt and frustration into words. “I know he said it’s just a mistake, but I… I attacked the two kids he’s been grieving for the last twelve years. How am I supposed to go ask advice about this when I did that?”

Raph cuffed Leo’s shoulder, making sure his hand didn’t hit any of the white gauze. “Again with the pity-party. Leo, c’mon, d’you think Sensei doesn’t get how sorry you are? I mean, it’s your fault an’ all, but that doesn’t mean he’s gonna turn you away for advice. Just go talk with him already; it’s been a whole day since things went down, you need to get your shell in gear.”

“I know, I just can’t figure out a plan. How do I get them to understand that I just want to talk?” Leo asked, feeling unusually lost about what he was supposed to do next. “They’ve only really listened to you, sometimes Sensei. Why would they listen to me?”

“Dunno, that’s something you gotta figure out on your own. I’m just the guy that punches things around here, touchy feely junk is a little outside my range of expertise,” Raph replied.

“You seemed to be doing fine when Mikey was climbing all over you,” Leo said, a teasing smirk inching onto his face.

“Shut up! He started that, not me.”

“But you didn't stop it either.”
“It's just how he communicates, alright? I’m not gonna force him to be different than he is, even if he's fuckin' weird,” Raph grumbled.

Leo thought that over. *Forcing them to be different...*, and made a small sound of surprise. He had it, an idea to fix things. “I think I have an idea, how I’ll get them to listen. But I need to consult Sensei first.”

“Yeah? What's the idea?” Raph asked, interest creeping into his voice.

Leo smiled, a *I know something you don't* sort of expression. “I'll tell you after I talk with Sensei, promise.”

“Feh, whatever asshole,” Raph sniffed, leaving his easy slouch and walking for the main area. “Don't tell me, tell me, doesn't matter. Just let me know if you're gonna do something stupider than you already have.”

“Will do,” Leo said to his brother's retreating shell.

Splinter heard his eldest son approaching, even with his well-trained silent footsteps. A man he might have been once, but now he was a rat and had all the senses that came with that mutation. His sensitive ears twitched slightly as Leonardo knelt behind him, knees scratching quietly against the mats.

“Sensei, may I talk with you? I've thought of a plan to fix things.”

Splinter opened his eyes, the calming sight of his carefully tended tree before him. “What is this plan you've come up with?”

“I think... I think maybe I should try doing the opposite of what we've tried.”

Splinter nodded slowly, he could see where this was going and he was proud of Leo for reaching the answer on his own; just like Splinter had hoped he would. “And what would that opposite be, my son?”

“All we've done is try to teach them how to understand us, and be like us, but haven't returned the gesture,” Leonardo sighed softly, making Splinter's ears flicker twice. “I asking you in case it's a bad idea, but I was thinking... maybe I could try to learn how to understand them instead. If I learned how to talk to them instead of making them learn to talk to me, maybe they'd forgive me enough to give us another chance.”

Splinter nodded, a pleased smile gracing his features. “That is a wise plan, Leonardo. How is it that you will accomplish this?”

“I... I hadn't thought that far.”

Splinter turned his head, eyeing his kneeling son. Leonardo's head was bowed, and he was focusing intently on the floor. Ah well, Splinter supposed his son needed a bit of advice still; regardless of
how well he'd done figuring things out. “How about, you go to them, and begin by apologizing. If they let you stay, perhaps you can start to learn from them as they have learned from us.”

Leonardo's head popped up, the dark leaving his blue eyes for the first time since the fight, and something in Splinter's chest loosened; good, his son was not holding too closely the shadows within his heart that they could not dissipate. He did not wish that on his eldest, not when such a fate had torn Splinter's first family apart.

“I'll get ready right away, Sensei; I've already wasted too much time,” Leonardo started getting to his feet, but Splinter placed his tail gently on his son's shoulder to still him.

“Remember, for this plan your greatest virtue must be patience. You cannot rush the events that may follow tonight,” Splinter said, trying to communicate how grave this advice was. “Their forgiveness will not come easily, you must keep that in mind.”

“I know,” Leonardo said, some of the shadows entering his expression again. “I don't expect it to.”

Splinter curled his tail around his son's shell, pulling him closer and into a hug. “I trust this to you, my son. I hope you succeed in the task you've set for yourself.”

“Me too dad, thanks for trusting me,” Leonardo said, pressing his forehead briefly against Splinter's chest. “I promise, I’ll fix this.”

Splinter ran a hand across his son's scaled head, gently scratching claws trailing. “Go then, prepare yourself and inform Raphael of this plan. “

Leonardo pulled away, nodding silently. Splinter allowed his son to extricate himself from his arms, and leave the dojo. Alone once more, Splinter turned back to continue meditating.

One crisis had the beginnings of solution, but there was another just as pressing one ongoing.

Oroku Saki, his brother turned enemy, was in New York. Splinter had thought himself safe, finally free of the past, and yet it had found him once again. Was his brother determined to take everything from him again, even after all the death that had fallen around them?

The Shredder, fitting for a man who sought to only destroy, never build.

Splinter adjusted his kneel, settling his tail around his body and straightening his back. He had much to consider, the safety of his family and their future; Leonardo would have to be left alone in his effort to reunite their clan again.

His son could do it, he had the raw ability to lead and guide, but lacked any true experience. Raphael was too close in age, and temperament, to be a follower. If Leonardo could convince his brothers to come home again, then perhaps he'd learn what it truly meant to be a leader.

Splinter closed his eyes, and took a slow deep breath. Hopefully, within the next day or so, his sons would be a complete set of four once more.

Until then, he would wait, just as he always did.
At first, Raph had wanted to go with Leo; Mikey and Donnie were his brothers too, and he didn’t like being left out of the loop. But Leo convinced him that this was something he had to do alone, just for now. Raph agreed to wait in the lair, but he didn’t like it.

Leo left not long after his talk with Splinter, melting into the dark tunnels with only his swords on his back. Leo hadn’t taken any of his normal gear, keeping only his pads, sword, and mask. His collection of shurikan and kunai remained in their storage places in the dojo.

A big step for Raph’s brother; Leo never went anywhere without being prepared for anything and everything.

So it was just Raph, alone on the couch with a sketch book in his lap and Spike dozing on a cushion beside him. He didn’t sketch often, only when his family was too occupied to notice. It didn’t fit in with any of his other activities, and he felt awkward when someone would call him on it.

But when your only brother is an obsessive perfectionist who can’t take a break and your father someone who didn’t quite get teenagers no matter how hard he tried, you gotta find some way to pass the time.

Raph knew he wasn’t the best at drawing, three fingers made it hard, but he thought himself pretty good all things considering. And sketching… it was nice; an okay change from his other stuff, nice and calm. Sort of like meditation, but less boring.

Raph had a lot of time to kill, who knew when Leo would come back or even check in, so doodling for a few hours was appealing. Just him, his sketch pad, and the sound of graphite on paper; no one around to interrupt him for a long while yet.

Raph drew another line, adding to the rough sketch of Donnie crouching over one of his projects. Raph hadn’t had a moment since they’d arrived to try drawing them, hadn’t had much room for those sort of thoughts either, but it felt good to put them down on paper. Like a confirmation that they existed, that he had real life younger siblings.

Maybe if they came back, Raph could ask April to take some pictures and print them. He, Leo, and their dad had one family portrait hanging in the dojo; it was near the shrine Splinter had constructed for his deceased wife and daughter. The photo was old, from their first year in the lair, but the glass and frame had kept it in good condition.

If Mikey and Donnie would allow it, Raph wanted to take a new one with their whole family, not just pieces.

“I’m getting sentimental, what the heck,” Raph mumbled to himself, adding shading to sketch Donnie’s shell. He looked over at Spike, who’d stirred slightly at Raph’s voice. “They’ve only been around for like a week and I’m already getting soft, what’s up with that?”

Spike yawned, the motion slow and drawn out. Raph switched his pencil to the opposite hand and pet Spike’s shell gently. “I don’t know how I feel about having little brothers if they’re gonna do that to me; I have a reputation to uphold you know.”

Spike settled back down, closing his eyes happily under Raph’s soothing pets. Raph shook his head at himself, a sappy smile appearing on his face. “Okay, that’s a lie. I like having little bros, feels… right. Like I was missing out on something all my life, and suddenly everything clicked into place. Dunno if Leo feels the same, definitely not about me, but it feels good to have younger siblings. You get that?”
Spike opened his eyes briefly, blinking twice, before shutting them again.

Raph smiled, going back to his drawing. “I knew you’d understand, thanks, Spike.”

Leo shifted nervously, running a finger along the sheath of his katanas. He was already feeling exposed without his usual arsenal of weaponry, now he had to take off his swords too. And his knee pads, and his elbow pads, and his belt, and his mask.

Leo might not wear actual clothing, but without those things, he felt positively naked.

Leo took a deep breath, setting his swords down in a crevice he’d found; the spot where stone and concrete had crumbled enough to make a good dent in the wall. It was just big enough for him to store his things in it, but not too deep that he couldn’t grab his things on the fly.

Leo unwound the straps for his knee guards, folding them carefully to place beside the swords. His elbow pads followed, as well as his belt, until it was just his mask.

Leo undid the knot, letting the fabric slip into his hands. Before he placed it with the rest of his things, Leo rubbed a finger over the newly mended tears from Mikey’s claws. They were small, but noticeable if you looked. His father had offered to stitch it himself, but Leo had declined. He wanted the stitching to be noticeable, unlike how Sensei’s stitches would have made them invisible. It was important to Leo, to see it every time he looked in a mirror.

The scars from Mikey’s slash would fade with time, not deep enough to really leave a mark what with their quick healing. This way, Leo would have to remember his mistake every time he put on his mask.

Hopefully, it would keep him from ever making it again.

Leo tied his mask around the hilt of one of his swords, and stood up. He’d taken a long trip to get here, navigating the subway system and avoiding humans all across the city; he’d delayed long enough.

“No time like the present,” Leo muttered, a note of misery in his voice. He wasn’t as ready as he’d thought for this; the whole way to Mikey and Donnie’s territory his resolve had chipped itself on his doubts. Now he stood alone in a tunnel and couldn’t bring himself to either confirm or deny his fears.

Taking a single deep breath, Leo turned his shell on his equipment, walking steadily into the tunnel he’d followed the first time down here.

He could do this, all he had to do was apologize sincerely and hope to god his brothers didn’t decide to maul him for entering their turf again.

Okay, that wasn’t realistic, they probably wouldn’t maul him per say, but they’d likely try to force him from their home. And after the display of speed and accuracy Mikey demonstrated, the strength behind Donnie’s punches, Leo didn’t think he’d have an easy time subduing them without his weapons.
Not that he was going to, this was a peaceful mission. No fighting allowed; which was why he’d taken all of his gear off, to make himself as small a threat as possible. Maybe if he looked more like them, they’d be more receptive to what he had to say.

The cool tunnel air brushed against his scales, the areas that he usually had covered especially sensitive. Leo pushed on, letting his feet make soft steps to let his brothers know he was getting close.

He’d left his things only one length of tunnel away, so the remaining walk was short. In no time, Leo could see light coming from around the bend; it split across the old tracks and gravel, giving Leo more than enough light to see now.

His feet grit against the rocks, the soft crunch announcing his presence. So far no response of noise, or appearance of his brothers; they must still be hiding.

Leo walked the last length slowly, waiting for someone to jump out at him. But no attack came, and he arrived at the platform of the station. He climbed over the lip of it, hoisting his body up onto the wide stones that made up the floor. Alone still, Leo took a moment to survey the home of his feral siblings.

It was lit by a combination of candles burning in bottles and battery powered lamps, making the space look warm in the soft light. Carpets of varying size and type littered the floor, their patterns and thickness contrasting horribly. Leo stepped onto a soft shag carpet, dusty but not too much so. He sat down on it, crossing his legs and leaning on his knees. He didn’t go any further in, not wanting to encroach too much without permission.

Evidence of both of his brothers’ favorite things was everywhere, scattered across the whole platform. Machines and piles of what looked like junk to Leo were no doubt Donnie’s, as well as a neatly kept bookshelf with thick, water damaged books near a huge pile of cushions.

Mikey’s stuff was probably everything else. The endless collection of bottles glinting in the candle light, and the dirty children’s toys tossed about, all of them looking well-worn but cared for. There was a box of broken crayons left open on a pile of printing paper near Leo, wonky figures of green things scribbled on the pages. It was too far away to see clearly, but Leo guessed it might be Mikey or perhaps Donnie in the pictures; portraits of the two most important people in their world.

Movement caught Leo’s eye, and he turned to look at his own reflection; a broken mirror propped against the wall on the far side of the room. Leo’s own self looked back at him, white bandages and missing equipment making it almost like it was another turtle and not himself.

Leo softly touched the bandage on his cheek, a sting of pain coming from it. A small reassurance to himself of why he was here, sitting open and vulnerable somewhere he was unfamiliar with.

Still no sign of his brothers, not even a sound despite how loud Mikey could be. Leo sighed quietly, patient, he needed to be patient. No harm in telling them he was here though, maybe they’d come out if he clarified why he was in their home.

“Donnie? Mikey? You guys in here?” Leo asked, raising his voice slightly. Only silence in the station still, but Leo kept talking anyways. “I’m here to say I’m sorry, and, uh, hopefully tell you that I didn’t mean it; the things I said and did. I know that’s not enough, to just be sorry and not have meant the fight, but I wanted to talk anyways. With you. And not-not like how I’ve been talking to you.

“I haven’t been fair to you, I thought of you like how I think of Raph, but that was wrong. You’re
not like Raph or me, you’re not going to understand the same things or even react the same way. You’re both completely different from us, and I made things hard on all of us for thinking you’d fall into line like that.” Leo cleared his throat, feeling awkward talking to the still air of the station. “We tried to make you into us, but I realize now that that’s not possible. At least not the way I imagined it to be. You’re not ninjas, and you haven’t had the same experiences with humanity that we’ve had. Everything that makes me and Raph the way we are, you guys don’t have that. Not the same way. And I’m sorry I ever thought it’d be as simple as teaching you to talk in English, when this is going to be so, so much more complicated than that.

“I just wanted to tell you, I’m sorry for everything. The way I treated you, and how I’ve thought of you up till now. I never spoke to you two like brothers, or spent any real effort getting to know you. It was wrong of me, to think I just had to wait until you became more like us. Raph had the right idea, and Sensei too, since they treated you like you and not like who we thought you should be. You’re not… not ever going to be exactly like us, and I didn’t understand that.

Leo took a deep breath, feeling the nervous fluttering in his chest rise upwards. “I want to try it the other way around. Instead of making you understand what I’m saying, I want to understand what you’re saying. You’ve tried to learn from us, now it’s my turn to learn from you.”

Leo pulled his legs underneath himself, kneeling forwards in a bow with his hands flat on the floor. “I don’t want this family to be in pieces anymore, and that means I have to try things a different way than my own. Please, I’m begging you both, Mikey, Donnie, let me apologize and try again. Try being a better brother.”

Leo stopped talking, listening for any sort of response, but got nothing. He sighed, moving his hands to lie on top of his lowered head, pressing against the rug beneath him. If they were here, they weren’t willing to talk back yet.

With his eyes squeezed shut, Leo felt prickling behind his eyelids that slowly leaked out. He was sorry, so, so sorry. Even if his brothers didn’t want to forgive him, he needed them to know that.

“Lee-oh?” Mikey said in a quiet voice.

Leo’s head shot up, looking for his brother. Mikey was crouched on the ground, peering around the corner into the office they’d hid inside during the first encounter. Donnie’s arm shot out, pulling his smaller brother back out of sight. Leo wiped at his eyes, sitting back up and hoping for them to re-emerge.

Donnie stepped out slowly on two feet, no weapon in sight, but his hands curled in loose fists. Donnie glanced around the whole room, looking for any threats, before walking towards Leo. He stopped in the middle of the platform, still a good twenty feet from Leo.

Leo didn’t twitch; keeping his posture slouched and hands in plain sight, as Donnie looked him over. Mikey drew Leo’s attention again by poking his head out of the office, trilling a question at Donnie. Donnie clicked something back, shooing Mikey to go back inside.

Leo sat up a bit straighter. “Donnie, I-”

“Shh,” Donnie hissed, turning his full attention back to Leo. Leo kept his mouth shut, waiting for Donnie to make the next move. Was he going to throw Leo out? Leo wouldn’t blame him, not after their fight.

“Why,” Donnie asked, pointing at Leo. “Why… why are you here.”
Leo noted how well his brother spoke, despite rarely talking in English. “You heard me earlier; I’m here to say sorry.”

Donnie snorted, crossing his arms and looking down at Leo. “You. You attacked us. Me. Mi-key. No reasons.”

“No, there wasn’t any reason. I was too upset to see that,” Leo said, his shoulders drooping again. “I can’t say just how sorry I am, there’s no way I could ever put it into words. Please, I never actually meant to fight with you.”

“Always, you always smell… like fight. Like anger. Like danger,” Donnie narrowed his eyes at Leo, his lip curling into a snarl. “I… I was right. You, you are danger.”

“I don’t—I’m not dangerous. I don’t want to be dangerous to you, ever. Not to Mikey either.”

“Then why,” Donnie growled, pointing at dark bruises dotting his arms. “Hurt me, hurt Mi-key.”

Leo quavered, seeing the damage he’d done to his brother. “I’m sorry. God, I’m so sorry for that. I should never have lashed out like that, you got caught in my outburst and there’s no excuse for that. I won’t do that again, never ever. I swear.”

“So you said,” Donnie hissed, still glaring. “Again, you hurt—” Donnie said something between his and Mikey’s names, adding other trilling clicks to the word. “—again, why, why… should we ‘fff-orgeev’ you, Lee-oh.”

“Because I… I’m your brother, and I’m sorry,” Leo said, searching for a better answer than that; but found none. “Even if you don’t forgive me, at least forgive Raph. This wasn’t his fault, I started the fight. He misses you, and so does our father. Don’t deny them the chance to know you both just because I messed up. You’ll break Sensei’s heart if you don’t come back.”


“Okay, Raph might have sort of, but Sensei didn’t have anything to do with that,” Leo countered. “They did their best to get to know you, be on your level; they’ve never hurt either of you.”

“Hmph,” Donnie huffed, not budging.

“Don-eeeee,” Mikey called, scolding tone very clear in the word. The youngest turtle stepped out of the office room, also fully upright and a stubborn look on his face. Donnie glared at him, but Mikey walked over to join his brother despite Donnie obviously wanting him out of sight.

Leo listened to them talk back and forth, for the first time trying to figure out what they were saying instead of turning it into background sounds. Their made up language was fast paced, the sounds meshing together into a continuous stream. Could Leo make those sounds? They had the same anatomy, perhaps if he really tried he might be able to someday.

Mikey ended the conversation by stomping his foot once, and then walking over to Leo. Donnie hissed something long and angry, but Mikey waved him off, crouching in front of Leo.

Leo kept perfectly still, waiting for whatever Mikey was planning. Mikey’s blue eyes darted up and down Leo, noting each bandage or still exposed cut; as well as Leo’s lack of equipment.

Mikey reached out, a single claw tip brushing the injury on Leo’s cheek. Despite Leo’s training, he still flinched back from Mikey’s hand, making his brother frown and lean away again. Mikey turned his head sideways, saying something to Donnie over his shoulder.
Donnie’s eyes zeroed in on Leo’s bandage, focusing intently. He took long strides forwards, coming to crouch beside Mikey. Donnie’s fingers grasped the edge of the bandage, pulling against the sticky seam holding it to Leo’s scales. Leo let his brother pry the band-aid off, feeling a slight sting from the air on the still tender slashes.

Mikey made a soft croon, his eyes saddened by the sight of Leo’s cuts. Leo put a hand over them, not looking his brothers in the eye. “Don’t feel bad Mikey, I deserved it.”

Mikey said something again, still not in English, but directed at Leo anyways.

“Mi-key says… sorry. He did not… want to hurt you,” Donnie said, reluctantly relaying the message. He huffed, elbowing Mikey’s shell. “Soft. But. Good soft. Too… k-k-kind, fffor ‘is own good.”

“Yeah, I’ve noticed,” Leo replied softly. “So… would you give us another try? Or at least everyone else, you don’t have to forgive me if you don’t want to.”

Mikey looked at Donnie, who frowned and said something quietly. Mikey shrugged, shaking his head as he replied. Mikey pointed at Leo, gesturing around himself as he talked, and Donnie shook his head. Mikey said it again, more forcefully, and pointed again at Leo. Another minute of debate between the two of them, and Mikey was crossing his arms and scowling at Donnie. Apparently whatever was happening, Mikey wasn’t backing down on the subject.

Donnie sighed, closing his eyes for a moment, before looking back to Leo. He held up a single finger, looking Leo in the eye seriously.


“That’s fair,” Leo agreed, not believing this was happening. “Do you mean you don’t leave, or I don’t leave?”

“Both,” Donnie said firmly. He gestured to the room around them. “If… you, Lee-oh, stay here, fffor th-three sleep, to… ‘leh-ern’ us, then we… try. Again.”

“Yes, yes of course I’ll stay,” Leo said, hope rising inside him. “I’ll do whatever it takes, promise.”

“Promise?” Mikey mimicked back, shifting in his crouch restlessly. “Promise to… be nice? Be good? No… fffighting?”

“No, no more fighting, I promise,” Leo said, smiling as Mikey reached out to take his hand. Leo squeezed Mikey’s timid hand encouragingly, much to the delight of his brother.

Donnie pulled them back apart, shooting Leo a warning look, before hustling Mikey back across the room. Mikey whined, dragging all four limbs as Donnie shoved him, but Donnie insistently pushed him into the office they’d come from. Apparently satisfied with the distance between them all now, Donnie sat down beside a bright lamp at the midway point of the room and started picking at the pile of mechanical devices there.

Leo sighed, deep relief spreading through his tense body. This was good, an okay start to mending the break between the four of them. Donnie was giving him a chance and Leo swore to himself that he wouldn’t let that faith down.

With nothing else to do, Leo settled back against the wall to watch his brother work on his machine. Patience, that was the key to this. Leo would just wait until Donnie or Mikey told him to move
otherwise, and he’d make sure not muck up anything else before then.

Mikey peeked around the corner at Lee-oh again, the turtle still sitting by the far wall and not moving. Donnie was keeping a close eye on him, despite also being busy with his new clever thing. Mikey huffed, laying on the ground halfway out the door and putting his head on his arms.

How was Lee-oh supposed to learn from them if Donnie wouldn’t let him move? It’d been a long time since Lee-oh had come to the nest too, and it was getting boring with all this waiting and being careful.

Mikey flicked his tail back and forth, bored and nervous at the same time. Lee-oh said he was sorry, so, so sorry, but Raf had said that for him the first time too. Mikey really, really wanted to trust him, but that was two times that the turtle had hurt them. Two times is too many, is what Donnie had said when Mikey suggested Lee-oh try staying in their nest.

True, that was very true; Donnie was almost always right about that kind of thing, but Mikey still wanted to try this. Lee-oh had said he wanted to understand them better, and what was a better way than for him to live with them for a while?

Mikey understood Donnie was wary, Mikey was too, but Lee-oh was sorry for the fight. What he’d been saying earlier, that long bunch of human speech Mikey hadn’t been able to translate most of, but Lee-oh had smelt like sadness and regret and ‘please-hear-me-please-see-me’; that had been very understandable to Mikey.

Maybe it wasn’t enough for Donnie, but it was enough for Mikey.

And Lee-oh had even done a submitting pose, and he’d never done anything like that the whole time Mikey had been in his home. Not to Raf, not to Splin-ter. He was sorry, and that had proved it completely to Mikey.

Donnie was still mad, mostly for the dark bruise on Mikey’s side of head. Mikey’s loved his brother, his clever-beloved-strong brother, but Donnie held grudges about everything for too long. They wouldn’t get anywhere with Donnie guarding Lee-oh so closely.

Mikey raised himself stealthily off the thick soft fabric they’d lain out long time ago, and crept out of the sleeping-place room all the way. Donnie saw him, but didn’t tell Mikey to stop yet, so Mikey kept walking outwards.

Mikey picked his way across the room, not too, too close to the line Donnie had set, but close enough he and Lee-oh could be near-ish. The other turtle, who maybe, maybe could be his brother again, was watching Mikey curiously. Mikey smiled, sitting down facing Lee-oh. He reached over to one of his piles of owned things, and picked up one of the wound up balls of soft string.

He liked this one a lot, just as a ball and not a woven braid. It was colorful and bouncy, good for playing carefully with. Which was what he planned to do.

Lee-oh startled in surprise when Mikey rolled the ball across the room to him, catching it as it
bounced off his crossed legs. He held it up, asking why Mikey had thrown the toy.

“Play! With! Me!” Mikey said excitedly, gesturing for Lee-oh to roll it back. Mikey heard Donnie sigh, but didn’t try to stop them. Good, Donnie could do the hard talking stuff, Mikey could teach Lee-oh fun things to do.

His maybe-brother tossed the ball back, and it bounced twice before rolling back to Mikey. Mikey grabbed it, and threw it back right away, putting more speed into his throw this time. Lee-oh had to leave his sitting position, grabbing the soft ball only because he leaned so far on his elbows. Yes, perfect, Lee-oh had to move for this game to be lots of fun. Mikey grinned, chirping, Good good play again throw it to me me me, move run have fun!

Lee-oh threw harder this time, and Mikey had to jump a little bit to the side to catch it. Mikey laughed, forgoing the rolling entirely and throwing it hard at Lee-oh through the air. It hit Lee-oh on the head, the other turtle making a displeased sound of surprise as he rushed to catch it. His maybe-brother seemed to finally catch on how this game was played, and got up all the ways from his sitting; balancing in a crouch like Mikey was.

When he threw it, it had just as much force as Mikey’s toss had; Mikey caught the ball only because of how quick he was. Now that Lee-oh understood how to play the game right, Mikey could go all out.

They played the game for a good while, darting back and forth and trying to see who was faster. This was great, this was fun, much better than them all sitting around waiting for nothing.

Lee-oh was clever and quick, and sometimes did flips when he threw or caught the ball. Maybe Mikey would try listening to the rat more if he could learn how to do that, it seemed like lots of fun. Mikey was better at the game though, because he used all his limbs and not just his legs like Lee-oh did. When they finally stopped, Mikey slumping onto the soft square of fabric beneath him, Mikey had gotten Lee-oh to run for the ball more than Lee-oh had made Mikey. That meant Mikey had won.

Yes good game the best game, play again some time, Mikey trilled tiredly, laying on the floor and huffing breaths. Lee-oh seemed much more relaxed now, not sitting stiffly against the wall, but leaning against it with an easy smile.

Good, then Mikey had made things better.

See Donnie? Good things happened, no bad things, Mikey said to his brother, who was still pretending not to be watching.

Not yet, Donnie muttered, pulling another metal piece from his clever thing. Still could not safe not yet

Mikey groaned, shooting a glare at his brother’s shell. Lee-oh is trying, that is good a very good thing

Hmm, Donnie replied, a small hissing sound coming from his metal clever thing. Trying yes, still not safe though

Doooooonnie, Mikey complained, his tail flicking in annoyance. Can’t fix things, not without you and me and Lee-oh all together, be nice please Lee-oh said sorry and did I-submit-was-wrong-I’m-less-than-you pose

When his brother said nothing and didn’t turn around, Mikey got up to go be beside him. Mikey
knocked his shell against Donnie’s side, saying, *Lee-oh, he smelled sorry-sad-scared, please? Please try? For me clever-smart-beloved-Donnie?*

Donnie huffed a laugh, Mikey’s flattery taking his attention away from the metal clever thing for the moment. Donnie’s red eyes had dark circles under them from last time’s bad sleep, Mikey’s brother too paranoid that the other turtles would come for them. Well, now they had one right across the room who was trying to make things better and Donnie wasn’t allowed to ignore that.

*Miss them want them, brothers kin family, Mikey said. Please? Better with them with us together as one, more to have to love, please try?*

Donnie put down his *turning-small-metal* tool, and set a hand on Mikey’s head; scratching the scales over and over as he drew the hand across Mikey’s head.

*I know, but please please please? It was good, it was perfect, you know that you felt it too*

Yes, but what if? What if attacks or anger again?

*Lee-oh says no more, that he is ready to learn, to be kin*

Donnie sighed, looking very tired indeed. Mikey purred softly, sending vibrations through where his and Donnie’s shells touched. *Please?*

*...alright, but if Lee-oh-*

*I know, me too, if he hurt us we hurt him, but try first*

*Raf too, he almost hurt you*

*But didn’t, and didn’t mean to either, Mikey countered. He pushed his head against Donnie’s hand, insisting on harder scratches. So trying yes?*

Yes, *I am trying*, Donnie agreed, scratching harder as requested. Mikey sat up, still purring, and bumped his cheek against Donnie’s affectionately. Donnie bumped back, starting to purr his own purr. With that sorted, Mikey pulled away and walked over to where *Lee-oh* was. His maybe-brother had returned to his first place of sitting, but was still relaxed seeming.

Mikey stopped just a space between him and *Lee-oh*, looking back at Donnie and asking, *Can I we braid together? Safe yes please?*

Donnie bit his lip, dragging the edges of his missing tooth’s space across the skin, but nodded a yes. Mikey reached out and grabbed *Lee-oh’s* hand, pulling him off the wall. *Come with me yes good braiding now for me for you*

*Lee-oh* let himself be pulled across the room to the soft pile of *feathers-in-pouches*, and sat obediently on one of the larger ones. Mikey left him there briefly to go get his basket of supplies, returning with it cradled close.

Mikey got *Lee-oh* to hold out his hand, and hold the end of five fabric strings. Mikey steadily started braiding them all together, focusing on making a nice present for *Lee-oh*. If Mikey gave him a special gift, maybe *Lee-oh* would be even nicer than he was already being.

Mikey heard Donnie moving behind them, and the click of their sound box starting up. That was
Mikey’s absolute favorite present from Donnie, the metal and something he didn’t know box that played human singing on shiny round discs. It was very old, but Donnie had put it back together better after he found it and replaced the heavy little power things so it sang again.

Now, it made good, sweet songs for them to listen to in the quiet of their nest. Humans didn’t sound so awful when they sang like that, almost sounding like how Mikey and Donnie spoke to each other.

As the melody started up to Mikey’s favorite song, Donnie was the *best* brother for picking that one, Mikey started to sing along; still looping the strings over one another as he did.

Leo looked up in surprise when guitar strumming echoed across the platform. So far, it had just been the two of his brother’s making conversation now and again; but the music flowing out of a dented CD player now filled the whole area.

Donnie sat back down in front of his dissected… thing. Leo couldn’t tell what it had been, but Donnie seemed to know what he was doing. A woman’s voice sang sweetly in the station, Mikey starting to sing along with it.

> “*If I could see the world, through the eyes of a child, what a wonderful world this would be…*”

Mikey sang, his English almost perfect and carrying the tune in time with the music. “*There’d be no trouble and no strife, just a big happy life, with a blue bird in every tree…*”

How many times had they listened to this one song, for Mikey to know the words so well? How many days or nights had his brothers sat together and sang this song?

Leo couldn’t remember doing something like this with Raph, the closest activity like it being patrol or training.

When did they last relax together, just the two of them, without fighting or ignoring each other?

Donnie was humming along with Mikey now, bobbing his head gently in time with the beat. Mikey was still singing, his voice melding with the woman’s voice. “*-I could see good, no bad, I could see all the good things, In life I’ve never had-*”

> “*If I could see the world, through the eyes of a child-*”  Donnie sang softly, adding his own voice to the final lyrics.

> “*-What a wonderful world this would be,*” Mikey finished, the last notes of the song fading off. Mikey looped another knot into the impressive braid he was making from the string Leo held. As the song changed, the same woman but a different track, Mikey tied the last bits together.

Leo released his hold on the braid, letting Mikey take both ends. Mikey fussed with it, sorting out the end that Leo had held, before gesturing for Leo to put out his hand again.

Leo did, and Mikey started wrapping the braid around his upper arm; near the single bruise on his bicep. Mikey knotted the two ends, and sat back with a proud smile. Leo looked at the gift, which was made from three blue strings of different shades and two other shades of red. It was a very
complicated braid, better than any that Leo could ever attempt.

“Thanks Mikey, I like it a lot,” Leo said, touching the soft ribbon string with his other hand. Mikey grinned, tittering happily as he reached for another length of string.

Leo adjusted his legs, getting comfortable. It seemed like he was going to be here for a long while, which was just fine by him.

Much later that night, Leo was made to sleep out on the pile of pillows while Donnie and Mikey went back to their bedroom.

All the candles were blown out, and only a single lamp was left on for Leo to use. Mikey had said an affectionate goodnight, pulling Leo into a surprise hug much to Donnie’s annoyance.

Then, it was just Leo alone in the semi darkness, a single blanket to keep any chill away. The pile of pillows was very comfortable, more than his bed back in the lair was. Maybe there was something to how Donnie and Mikey made up their bed; a pile was more comfortable than sleeping on a bed for turtles apparently. The pillows curved so his shell was properly supported, something Leo’s mattress couldn’t do no matter how deep the indent he’d put in its springs over the years.

Leo pulled large brown blanket over his whole body, settling down into the slightly musty pillows. It had been a good night, no fights or misunderstandings at all. Well, there was a moment when Mikey tried to have Leo eat a dead frog, but that was solved easily enough.

Leo set a mental reminder to call April for better food the next… whenever he got above ground tomorrow. He thought it was early, early morning now, but being without any sort of clock made it hard to tell.

That was okay though, he had three days to fix this properly and things were going well. With any luck, he’d have his younger brothers convinced of his apology by the end of it; and maybe even set up a visit from Raph and Sensei.

Leo chided himself, he was getting ahead of his current progress again; one thing at a time, patience was the key.

He could be patient, he’d waited fifteen years to be allowed to travel freely above ground on his own, and he could wait a couple days for his siblings to come around.

Hopefully his father wouldn’t worry too deeply if Leo took a bit longer to check in, Leo didn’t want to leave yet in case it undid the progress they’d made over the last few hours.

Leo turned the dial on the lamp, turning it off and setting the area in pitch black. He waited for his eyes to adjust, and was rewarded with a fuzzy grey scene. So he could see just barely here, and that was good enough; he felt assured of their safety since he could see enough that he could fight if someone came looking.

Unlikely yes, but Leo was too wary of the Shredder’s men at the moment to tone down the paranoia.
He relaxed fully into the bed he’d been given, and closed his eyes. Tomorrow, he’d work harder on understanding what Mikey and Donnie were actually like, how they lived, and how they worked as people.

Leo was a leader, and it was his goal to lead his family back together again.

With his eyes shut, Leo felt almost like he was back in the lair; the cool silence of stone just like home. He fell asleep, tired from playing with Mikey and constantly being tense earlier in the day.

Leo would keep at his mission tomorrow, for a time though, he slept.

Chapter End Notes

God that was a long chapter, and this arc isn't even done yet. One more chapter and I swear, actual plot from the show will begin.

Took me a whole day to write this, gimme some congrats on that; my shoulders ache something hella from slouching over my damn keyboard.

So in other news, I made a mix to go with this AU; because I'm not satisfied with just writing something, I have to add a soundtrack to it too. It's a compilation that follows a (very) rough outline that this fic will take. Take a listen, I've been told its good; http://8tracks.com/incorrectgardening/division-difference.

You've all been really great thus far, thanks for sticking around to read my really weird AU.

G'night ya'll, thanks again for stopping by!
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Endeavor.

Chapter Notes

I apologize for how long it took to get this out, and it's not even as long as I'd hoped. I wanted this arc to be over already, but NO, I have to draw it out MORE. \( \left( ^{-D} \right) \)

You're all probably enjoying this, but my sleep deprived brain does not. \( (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_) \)

This would have been done sooner if I hadn't had a bunch of adult things to do, gross I know, all this week. And then my family said "Well time to go camping!" on Thursday right after a job interview of mine. I had about two hours to get ready for that and then get shoved into the van for a three day trip. \( (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_) \)

Ugh, I do not like camping. Way too much sensory input, and no where for me to chill out alone.

Glad it's over, and now I can sleep too, since this darn thing is completed.

Enjoy! \( (J^*-*\) /

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Donnie woke up all at once, his mind whirring away before his body was fully functional. He blinked blearily into the comforting dark of his and Mikey's sleeping place, licking his tongue across his grimy feeling teeth. Mikey shifted against his side, a soft sigh escaping his still lax mouth. Donnie nuzzled his brother's head, humming a single note of morning, before shuffling out from under the fabric of their bed.

Donnie stretched languidly, making sure all of his limbs popped satisfyingly, and then headed for the door. His short necklace swung silently from his neck as he peered out into the dark of his home, scenting the air for Lee-oh. The other turtle was still there, and there was nothing hinting that he'd moved from the sometimes-for-sleeping-mostly-for-relaxing bed once the whole sleeping period.

Good, Donnie didn't want the first thing he did that day to be hunting down his wayward maybe-kin.

Mikey grumbled quietly as he turned over in bed behind Donnie, and he glanced over his shoulder. His small-precious-brother, he'd been so excited to have someone to play with last night. Donnie would play often with Mikey yes, but not enough that Mikey wasn't bored sometimes. Donnie just didn't enjoy playing endless moving and running and throwing games as much as Mikey; he preferred carefully working with his found things to make them new instead of dashing about for
hours. *Lee-oh* might be suspicious and possibly dangerous... but he'd made Mikey happy, and that was something very important to Donnie.

*Lee-oh* still had to prove himself fully to Donnie, but making Mikey happy was a good start.

The other turtle was still silent as Donnie made his way across the room, heading for the place they kept the fire starting packages. Donnie hoped *Lee-oh* would stay asleep for a while yet, he wanted some alone time to prepare himself for having another person around him and in their home.

It was dark in the room still, but Donnie could see just fine; unlike Mikey, who still had trouble seeing without the fire and lights despite them both growing up. Donnie supposed it was because he was the elder one of them, bigger and stronger and there for having better eye sight. Maybe when Mikey was older he'd be able to see as well as Donnie did.

He opened the very small doors of the wooden box with tiny planks across its inside, and picked up one of their fire starting packages. Donnie plucked a single stick from the contents and flicked it across the rough backside of the package. Bright light sputtered to life, a small flame appearing on the tip. Donnie lit one of the burning sticks beside the small box, brightening the room around him.

He blew out the stick's flame and dropped it onto the pile of the other discarded sticks; it's final stream of smoke dissipating into the air. Donnie put the fire starters back into their box, shutting the doors again. He opened his mouth and took a deep breath, enjoying the tang of smoke in the air. He liked the taste of burning sticks; it stayed in the back of his throat just long enough for it to be pleasant.

Donnie could have turned on one of their small lights, but he preferred having just a burning stick for when he'd woken up; he didn't need as much light as Mikey did to see, so the one source of it was more than enough for him. He liked the time to adjust before Mikey woke up and started running around again, since Donnie was slower to be ready for activities after sleeping.

Donnie checked *Lee-oh* once more; he was still asleep that was good, before going to the row of water filled jars. Their plant foods kept longer when they stayed in water, he'd figured that out after seeing a human keep flowers in a jar of water in his nest's *too-small-to-use-but-good-for-looking-out-of* opening. Now, whenever Donnie and Mikey brought green foods back, they put them in water to keep. It saved them trips every single day to the food place or the big containers behind human homes.

Donnie rumbled *annoyance* as he counted the amount of green leaves to eat, not enough for three turtles, not after last night's small meal. They would have to finish what was left and then go to the pond for more.

He and Mikey needed to replace the water anyways, since dirt was swirling around inside of most of the glasses that was too much to be okay.

Donnie ate a couple leaves that came from the yellow flower plants, the crunchy parts not as crunchy as they would have been if they were fresher. Just as well, they'd been away for many days and were lucky their fresh foods had survived so long. He and Mikey could have gone for more food the day after they'd come home, but Donnie had been too afraid the other turtles would be waiting when they came back. Mikey had said he shouldn't worry so much, a short run would be fine, but Donnie had begged that they stay in the nest. Mikey had said yes, and let Donnie keep them inside.

Donnie loved his brother for that, for staying inside even when he wanted to run and swim. Donnie would have to make that up to him by taking them to the pond today, even if it meant bringing *Lee-oh* along.
A sound drew his attention from the clear jars in front of him, and he looked over to see the turtle he’d been thinking about looking back.

*Lee-oh* was rubbing at his eyes, waking up still and getting used to the flame’s light. Donnie watched him, waiting for *Lee-oh* to do anything else, but the other turtle just lay back down in his bed and stopped looking at Donnie.

Well, okay then. Donnie liked that better than talking with him yet, since Donnie was still eating and not ready to face the day. Donnie selected another few leaves, leaving enough for Mikey and *Lee-oh*, and then grabbed a box of dry human food to add to his meal. They needed more of those, as well as metal containers with sometimes nice things sometimes gross things. A food run would need to be soon, maybe even that day.

He took the box with him, walking on his back legs over to his most recent clever thing and sitting down to eat while he looked over his own progress. It was mostly in pieces, since this clever thing was for figuring out and not for actually using, but Donnie had an idea of what it was supposed to do now thanks to *Raf*.

The metal and glass and man-made materials box the turtle had shown them was incredible; it spoke like a human and showed smaller, *not-there-but-also-there* humans inside itself. It made music sometimes, which Donnie liked better than humans talking to each other, but also made dangerous sounding noises; like humans fighting each other or huge metal things roaring across stone. It was amazing, something Donnie had never seen or even imagined.

It had another metal thing attached to it with cords that contained lightening, and it had made the glass light up with new scenes of humans when it had manmade boxes put inside. That clever thing was what lay out in front of Donnie, its insides carefully taken apart piece by piece.

Perhaps if Donnie put it back together, and got a heavy *Tee-vee* like *Raf* had, he and Mikey could make *Moo-vees* happen as well in their nest. Once Donnie had had time to get used to the noise it made, he'd warmed up to it and gotten curious. Why did it do that? How did the small humans appear inside it, and why did it only happen when the hollow boxes were inside the *Vee-see-arr*?

It was like with the shiny reflective disc that made music, how did the humans make those? Why did they make them? Was it for fun and spending time with kin, like what Mikey and Donnie did?

Donnie wanted to know so badly. He didn't like new people, as he'd discovered when he and Mikey were staying in the *Lay-err*, but he loved new things. New things meant something new to learn, to understand, and if he was lucky, maybe something new to build.

“Donnie?” *Lee-oh* said, pronouncing Donnie's name slightly wrong. Donnie tore his attention away from his clever thing, remembering not only was he supposed to be eating still, but the other turtle was there too.

“Morn---so--wha-----pening---wa-----ime-------food?” Was what Donnie could catch from *Lee-oh*, everything between that too difficult to understand.

Donnie didn't like not understanding things; it made him annoyed and anxious. Even if he hated humans, he’d master their language anyways, if only so he understood what *Lee-oh* and *Raf* and *Splin-ter* were saying all the time and not just *some* of the time.

Donnie picked up the box of dry food and took out a handful for himself, some of the little dried out flakes escaping his grip and falling to the floor. He closed the box again with one hand, and threw it at *Lee-oh*, who caught it with a swift snatching grab.
Donnie leaned his head back and dribbled the human food into his mouth, careful not to drop anymore. It wasn't the tastiest, but settled in his stomach and kept him from feeling hungry for a while if he ate enough.

*Lee-oh* was eating some as well, his crunching echoing Donnie's. At least Donnie didn't have to walk him through that, like he'd had to last night with where they were supposed to defecate. Honestly, *Lee-oh* was completely backwards with how he used his senses; he should have been able to find the spot himself. The scent trail to and from the spot was strong because of how long they'd been using it, very obvious to Donnie and Mikey.

Maybe it was because *Lee-oh* and his kin used that weird cold water drain that came out of the floor, and not an open hole into a water way like Donnie and Mikey did. Another human like thing no doubt, and yet another difference between them.

Donnie huffed to himself, taking his mind off the other turtle by beginning to put the *Vee-see-arr* back together. *Lee-oh* was staying in his bed still, and wasn't trying to talk to Donnie either, so he had a bit more time to work before he actually had to start the day.

His stomach growled quietly after a bit, the few leaves and handful of dry food not enough to satisfy him, but Donnie ignored it. He could eat more when they went to the food place later, and he was making progress with connecting the cords that carried lightening back to where they'd been before.

Deliberately shuffled footsteps shook his concentration though, and Donnie whipped his head up to meet *Lee-oh*s blue eyes.

The other turtle wasn't too close to him, enough space between them that Donnie didn't react by lashing out. Donnie waited for *Lee-oh* to explain why he was there, and *Lee-oh* did; by sticking out a hand that held the box of dry food.

Donnie blinked; processing the situation, then tentatively took the box back from *Lee-oh*. The other turtle said, “------your----stom---want some still?” before stepping backwards a bit with his hands behind his shell.

Donnie licked his lips, a little thrown by the interaction, before nodding and saying, *Yes food hungry yes thank you Lee-oh*

*Lee-oh* smiled, and then went back to his bed without another word. Donnie opened the box, checking the contents just in case, and found that the other turtle had only eaten a little bit of the food. Respectful to Donnie and Mikey because it was theirs and not his, or disrespectful because he'd snubbed their offering of food?

Donnie reached in and took some of the flakes out, dropping more of them into his mouth. Whichever it was, he'd deal with it after his meal.

Leo sat on the sofa cushions he'd slept on, rubbing his left fingers along the bracelet looped around his right bicep while he waited for Mikey to get up. That was probably why Donnie hadn't told him to go anywhere yet; that, and the taller turtle seemed to be very focused on the disassembled machine in front of him.
Leo rubbed the tassel where the two ends of the braid met, feeling the silken ribbons between his thin palm scales. He stopped though, when the fabric started to catch on callouses he had. Leo didn't want to fray the gift so soon after getting it, even if Mikey would probably just make him another.

Though, now that Mikey had given him something, Leo felt like he had to return the gesture. What did you get for your mostly feral, mutant turtle, estranged sibling anyways? Leo looked around the dimly lit station, the candle light from Donnie's single burning wick only giving enough for Leo to see the middle area.

Maybe toys for human kids? Mikey had a number of those already though. More ribbons? No, there was enough in multiple plastic bowls and wicker baskets scattered around the edges of the room to make hundreds of bracelets.

Pizza? Leo liked pizza, and so had his siblings when they'd tried it. They could use some more filling food, almost definitely. The longer Leo spent watching his younger brothers, the skinnier they looked. He hadn't noticed it, with Donnie's natural lankiness and Mikey's residual baby fat, but both of them were under fed looking.

The few plants and handfuls of bran cereal Donnie had eaten for breakfast gave him an idea of why. The more Leo thought of that, the more implications he realized.

Splinter had always made sure Leo and Raph had their fill to eat, even in winter. Leo's father had made them eat balanced diets, making sure they grew up strong and healthy. Donnie and Mikey hadn't had anyone to do that for them.

Leo realized, with a slow drawn out feeling of horror, that he might not have ever met his siblings again if they'd starved to death.

He was calling April as soon as he was able, and telling her to bring at least two pizza pies.

Leo glanced at Donnie again, watching his too-lean-to-be-healthy brother reached forwards to grab another one of his screw drivers. Leo caught whitened scales glinting along Donnie's outstretched arm, and felt his guilt rise up again. Donnie's arm was almost healed now, and it left only a settling scar as evidence. It was an obvious scar though, the width of it only tempered by the stitches that had been in it; Splinter had removed them not long before their fight.

Leo could have killed Donnie, if not for their rapid healing. If his brother hadn't been able to replace the blood lost so quickly, if they hadn't known to stop the bleeding as soon as possible, if Leo had angled his sword just an inch deeper...

Leo shuddered, gripping tightly on his arm's bandages and feeling pain sting underneath. The slashes on his cheek gave a phantom throb, reminding him of why they were there.

Simultaneously, Mikey emerged from his and Donnie's shared bedroom.

Seeing Mikey brought those moments back even stronger, (blurring limbs and claws and so much anger and then blood and pain-), and Leo sucked in a harsh breath.

One two three, breath out, one two three, breath in, one two three...

Leo kept the exercise up until he was steady again, forcing his lungs to revert to the normal rate of intake. His Sensei had taught him this, to keep adrenaline under control during a fight so Leo didn't become blinded by survival instincts. Now he applied it to smoothing out his thoughts and mild panic.
He was fine, Donnie and Mikey were both fine, and no one was attacking each other.

Leo released his vice grip on his newly agitated cuts, and noticed Mikey was sitting not far from him, glancing worried like up and down Leo's tense posture.

“I'm fine Mikey, I was just having a, uh, moment,” Leo said, trying to smile convincingly. Mikey's expression crinkled, turning into a disbelieving grimace, and he crawled onto the cushions beside Leo.

Leo let Mikey take the arm that he'd been gripping, and his younger brother examined the white bandages. Leo hadn't had the mind to change them before he left, so the rust splotches from before then were still there. A single new one had joined them, and stood out bright red among the other tiny spots of brown.

Mikey frowned at Leo, poking a long nail against Leo's plastron. “No!”

“No what?” Leo asked, only to be poked again with more force.

“No,” Mikey said with intent, lifting up Leo's arm to Leo's eye level. “No!”

“Oh,” Leo said, translating Mikey's body language. He chuckled. “You and Raph, you guys are more alike than he thinks.”

“What??” Mikey asked, finally letting Leo have his arm back.

“Nothing, it's fine. Just something funny,” Leo laughed again, the pressure in his chest lifting. Mikey stuck his tongue out at Leo, but let the subject drop regardless.

“Mikey,” Donnie called from across the room, holding up a bunch of the leaves he'd been eating earlier. They both stopped talking in English as Mikey trotted over for his meal, and Leo was left out of the loop again. Leo sighed, rubbing a hand across his eyes. He felt like he'd only slept a couple hours, but had no way to check.

How did his brothers stand not having a steady schedule for anything? They seemed to have routines for certain activities yes, but everything else looked like it happened on whims. It felt off putting and chaotic for Leo to think about living like that, he liked his planned out days and nights; easy and comfortable.

He could put up with not knowing what was going to happen every day though, just for a little while. For his brothers, and for their family.

“Lee-oh! Lee-oh, Lee-oh, Leeeeee-oh!” Mikey called out as he dashed over, this time on just two legs and carrying a bunch of leaves in his hands. He sat down and shoved half of the plants into Leo's hands, and started eating his share.

Leo held up one of the leaves, finally identifying them as dandelion leaves. Mikey finished all of his leaves before Leo had even touched the first one to his tongue. The leaf was... soft, and not in a pleasant way. It felt like all the crunch had disappeared and instead left just a bitter tasting leaf.

Leo ate a couple, before handing the rest off to Mikey. He tried to like the food they'd been giving him, he really did, but he drew the line at old bitter leaves. Maybe if they were fresh he could do it, but however long they'd been plucked was too long for him.

He caught Donnie sending a scrutinizing look at him, and Leo shrugged with an apologetic smile. He’d tried the leaves alright? And the stale bran flakes. And the probably expired tuna Donnie had
served last night from three cans.

He really hoped Donnie wasn’t taking offence from this, Leo didn’t mean any, he just couldn’t make himself finish the leaves or eat much of the cereal.

Mikey didn’t seem to mind, happily devouring the food Leo hadn’t.

From there, Donnie said something to Mikey, who’d scurried off and come back with the satchels Leo had seen Mikey wearing the first time they’d met. After his two brothers had tied the bags to their bodies, Donnie signaled for Leo to follow them out of the station and into the tunnels.

Leo did, walking behind his brothers as they led him through the cold and dusty tunnels; he was here to observe and learn, and that meant going along with whatever they wanted to do even when they didn’t explain what was happening.

Donnie and Mikey didn’t seem to be in any hurry, so their chosen method of walking was on two legs like Leo. Other than the occasional chirped sentence from Mikey, they walked in silence.

As they passed where Leo had left his gear, Donnie spotted the carefully placed swords and stiffened his shoulders ever so slightly. He shot a glance at Leo, expression tight and controlled, and Leo made sure to duck his head and walk with loud foot falls. Donnie didn’t un-tense until Leo was walking slightly in front of him, and they were a full length of tunnel away from Leo’s equipment.

Leo’s cheek stung, and he put a hand over it for moment; brushing the feeling away. He could do this; he’d make it up to them both no matter what.

He felt Donnie’s eyes on the back of his neck for the rest of the trip.

Mikey took them into one last tunnel, and then clambered up a ladder that connected with the wall and the ceiling. With one shove, Mikey had it opened and poked his head out before disappearing into the open air above. Leo looked back at Donnie, who gestured for him to go up, and then followed Mikey out of the tunnel.

The early day sun hung still low in the sky, so Leo guessed it was morning. There were only a few clouds on the horizon, so the sunlight was unrestricted. Leo looked around at where he’d emerged, and found that they’d arrived in a lush looking wood.

Well, not really, he saw the edge of the field a ways away in all directions, but they were still in the city. It was a lot more green things than Leo had ever seen though, big trees and thick foliage everywhere. Donnie popped out of the hole behind him, and Leo had to move away so his brother could stand up.

“Where are we?” Leo asked Donnie.

Donnie huffed, and pointed into the woods where Mikey was rapidly vanishing from sight. “Food, f-follow me.”

Leo did, picking his way through the bushes with minor frustration while his brothers seemed to breeze right through the thicket. More than once, Leo stumbled on a hidden root or smacked himself with a low hanging branch. Donnie’s huffs of laughter didn’t help with the frustration.

Finally, after the fifth time he’d almost run directly into a thorn bush, Leo got free of the woods and out onto to open ground. The grass was a welcome change, especially to his stubbed toes. The clearing he’d been led to was the edge around a huge marsh, Mikey already pulling off his bags by the water. Donnie wandered off a different direction, heading for less marshy ground that had many
patches of dandelions growing, and Leo was left standing alone.

Leo watched Mikey to see if his youngest brother would give him anything to do, but Mikey just waved at him as he started walking into the water. Around knee deep level, Mikey lowered himself completely into the water and disappeared into the depths.

Well, okay then. Leo, for lack of anything better to do, went over to the rim of the pond and started walking along it. The water wasn’t too murky, so Mikey would probably be able to see as long as he didn’t kick up too much silt. Leo saw Mikey closer to the surface one more time before he submerged too deep to see well; Leo’s brother was swimming so smoothly that the surface of the pond wasn’t disturbed at all.

Leo checked on Donnie, who was picking handfuls of weeds from the ground still. Donnie wasn’t acknowledging Leo at all, focused solely on the task in front of him.

That was a fair; Leo wasn’t one to multitask himself.

Unless Donnie was ignoring him on purpose and this was the cold shoulder over the weapons back in the tunnels.

Leo sighed; there was still so much of a barrier between them. It was going to take a long while to fix that.

“Patience Leo, gotta be patient,” He said to himself, resuming his amble. The pond was big, a combination of wide mostly clear water and swampy shores. The diameter Leo guessed was about seventy feet, more than big enough for mutant turtles to swim comfortably.

Speaking of, Mikey surfaced near Leo, trilling something excitedly. He swam close enough to shore that he could stand up again, the mud squelching as he rushed up to Leo with something cupped in his hands. Mikey shoved his hands out at Leo, holding up a large frog in his muddied hands.

“Oh, wow, nice frog Mikey,” Leo said, noting the frog was seeming a little squished in Mikey’s hands. Mikey stepped forwards again, saying something in a lilting trill. Leo backed away from his dirty brother, avoiding the drips of pond water and the frog. “Uh, no thanks, you keep the frog Mikey, you found it.”

Mikey pouted, but stopped holding the frog out to Leo. Leo waited for Mikey to put down the frog or maybe just let it hop away, but instead-

-Mikey snapped his jaws around the frog’s head and bit it clean off.

Leo jolted in shock, hand going to his mouth as Mikey took another bite of the frog; this time one of its back legs. Blood speckled the side of Mikey’s mouth, which he licked away with a quick dart of his tongue as Leo continued to watch with horror. He noticed Leo staring, and held out the frog again in offering and oh god Leo thought he saw the legs still twitching-

“Nope! I’m good!” Leo said hurriedly, pushing Mikey’s hand away. “Really! It’s your frog, just, uh, enjoy it!”

Mikey gave him a weird look, because yes not eating raw frog guts was what was weird here, but shrugged and turned away to go back into the pond. Leo let out a whoosh of air, his stomach rebelling at the sight of his little brother eating a live frog. He’d thought Mikey was just joking last night, since his feral brother hadn’t actually eaten the half decayed frog then.

Well, apparently that had been a prank, and this was the actual thing.
Leo was most definitely calling April for pizza as soon as possible.

Leo didn’t notice someone creeping up behind him, lost in his replaying images of Mikey eating the frog, until Donnie’s arms grabbed him around the waist and he was hoisted into the air. Leo only had a moment to yell in surprise before he was tossed through the air and into the pond.

He came up spluttering, pond water invading his mouth as he coughed. It was only two feet deep, but Leo was soaked and already covered in mud. Leo swiped a hand across his eyes, only succeeding in smearing mud on his face. His rising temper was cut short though by the sound of Donnie’s laughter.

Up to that point, Donnie was nearly silent unless he was fighting. Even his conversations with Mikey were subdued on his end, raising his voice rarely. Now though, Donnie was loudly laughing, his whole body shaking with his glee.

He looked… happy and carefree; and everything Leo had seen from him till that moment had been tenseness and calculating looks, even when it was with Raph and Mikey both.

Leo chuckled once, and then again, and then he was laughing along with Donnie. It relieving and kind of amazing to hear that sound from his reserved sibling, and Leo couldn’t help but get caught up in it.

“Okay, I deserved that,” Leo laughed breathlessly, resigning himself to soggy bandages and sinking into the cool water; he’d clean them later and call for new ones. Something bumped into him, and then Mikey was throwing his sopping arms around Leo and pulling him further into the pond.

Donnie dropped his satchels onto the drier ground away from the pond, still chuckling, and waded in after them as Leo let Mikey drag him outwards.

Both Donnie and Mikey dove under the surface, but Leo stayed above and treading water. He checked their surroundings one last time in case on the off chance, there was a human nearby, and was just about to dive down when someone grabbed his leg and did it for him.

Mikey shoved him deeper under the water, grinning at Leo as they descended to the bottom. Mud swirled around Leo as he touched down, creating smoke like trails in the faint light filtering down from above.

Donnie and Mikey swam loose circles around him, trailing the pond floor with their hands. A frog darted upwards from a spot Donnie disturbed, and Donnie snapped it out of the water without bothering to grab it first with his hands; devouring the small frog in one go.

Oh, so that’s what was happening here. It was a frog hunt.

Leo floated in the water as his brothers ate fleeing frogs, torn between disgust and pity that they considered this a meal. Now more than ever, Leo appreciated his fridge back in the lair filled with sandwich meats and fresh vegetables.

Mikey settled onto the pond floor near Leo, satisfied with however many frogs he’d eaten. Donnie was still going, though he had started on some sort of root he’d pried from the mud. Leo’s stomach rumbled inaudibly, and he put a hand against it. He needed to call for food soon, and he hoped April felt particularly generous today so she’d drop by sooner than later.

His hand against his stomach picked up another vibration, but it wasn’t coming from Leo. He looked over at Mikey, who’d begun humming. It traveled through the water; reverberating against Leo’s chest cavity and making it feel like a faint buzz inside of him.
Donnie trilled answering notes, adding an occasional pip to the tune Mikey was singing. Leo didn’t recognize it, so he guessed it was probably something Mikey made up on the spot. He let himself settle on the bottom of the pond as well, enjoying the moment of peace with his siblings.

They stayed under the water until Donnie finished plucking snacks from their surroundings, both flora and fauna, and Leo’s lungs started to complain.

Surfacing again was less peaceful, since now Leo’s wrappings were soaked through and he smelled like pond water. Donnie and Mikey were unbothered by their smell, only stopping to shake off extra water before picking up their bags again.

Donnie told him in stilted English to follow them again, and ignored Leo’s questions about what he was supposed to do about being muddy and smelly. Mikey was zero help, just giving Leo mildly confused smiles and poking Leo’s arm in an attempt to leave more muddy hand prints; dancing away when Leo tried to poke back.

Donnie took them back into the railway tunnels, heading the opposite direction of the train station; the tunnels marked with a different type of scratches, these ones three lines downwards underneath a single line across.

The stone became smoother concrete, and Leo’s surroundings started to look newer than the heart of Donnie and Mikey’s territory. Leo tried to ask a couple more times where they were going, but Donnie was tight lipped and Mikey was shushed repeatedly.

Finally, the sound of rushing water could be heard, the continuous noise getting louder as Donnie led them forwards. The sound was loudest as they reached the end of their journey, emerging into another filtration area for the water ways under New York.

The sound of water pouring from a large pipe filled the air, resounding off the concrete walls. Above them, a large grate across the ceiling let light into the cavernous room.

“Wow, that’s kind of cool,” Leo remarked. The area had a slightly airy feel, despite being underground, and the water flowing in and under the thick grates that were the floor made it almost picturesque. “Why’re we here though?”

Mikey answered his question by walking underneath the thick cascade of water, and starting to scrub himself down. Donnie had already taken Mikey’s satchel, and was putting the two sets of bags filled with dandelion leaves down, away from the spray of water.

Leo took a quick whiff of the water, and found it smelt clean. So this must be where his brothers showered. At least they didn’t just bathe in the pond; they would have smelled worse than Raph sometimes did if that was their hygiene regiment.

Mikey re-emerged from under the spray, shaking himself and flinging water everywhere. Donnie put a hand on Leo’s shell and pushed him forwards, what was it with Donnie and shoving him around, and his brother said something along the lines of Leo getting under the water flow.

Leo did, not just because he was being told to, but also because his scales felt gross with mud and dried pond water on them. He was not prepared however, for how god damn cold the water was. Leo leapt back out of the spray almost immediately after coming into contact with it, a stifled shriek in his throat.

Donnie was laughing again, wow his brother was a bit of an asshole, and this time Mikey was too. Leo wrinkled his snout and glared at both of them, forcing himself back under the spray. He felt like
someone was dumping chilled buckets on his head, the pressure of the flow ten times that of his finicky shower in the lair.

As difficult to control the temperature it might have been, Leo was going to take one for as long as he could when he finally went home. A sometimes too hot shower was nothing compared to one that was heavy and cold.

Leo scrubbed the mud off himself as best he could and retreated for the relative warmth of anywhere but the water flow.

Donnie was the last one left to shower, and he did it with a lot more grace than Leo did, much to Leo’s chagrin. When everyone was finally clean, at least by Leo’s siblings’ standards, Leo followed them once again into the tunnels.

Leo noted that his brother’s tunnels were cleaner and less smelly than the one’s Leo and his side of the family traversed nightly. Lucky, his siblings didn’t have to smell sewage backup every time it rained too much or there was a big sports game on TV.

Leo shivered slightly; the cool of the tunnels wasn’t agreeing with his damp scales and lowered internal temperature. He rubbed his hands along his arms, hoping he’d be given a towel or something whenever they got back to the station.

“Are we going back now?” Leo asked, breaking the silence between the three of them.

“No!” Mikey said, grinning conspiratorially with Donnie.

“Will you tell me where we’re going?”

“No!”

Leo was betting Mikey hadn’t understood that, and was just using his new favorite word.

Now they definitely felt like younger siblings, the tendency to mess with their older brothers clearly starting to surface. First the dunking, then the shower, and now the withholding of information. Progress? Yes. Annoying? Also yes.

Patience, patience, patience, Leo reminded himself, even as he shivered again.

His patience was rewarded when the tunnel got brighter, and they arrived in ancient looking area with wide grates on the ceiling. There was evidence that this was once a water filled tunnel, but now the sides were riddled with cracks from age and moss grew rampant across the ground.

“Sit. Sssl-sleep,” Donnie said, setting his bag gently on the side of the tunnel and lowering himself to the mossy concrete. Mikey did the same, getting onto all fours and stretching like a cat before laying down to bask in the sun.

“That sounds like a great idea,” Leo said, relieved that not only he’d be warm and dry, but he could sleep a little more. He’d definitely not slept enough last night, and his little amount of food earlier wasn’t helping.

The moss was soft, and the concrete warm from the late morning sun. Leo followed his brother’s example, and let himself relax under the heat of the sun. Leo and Raph very, very rarely got to see the sun, let alone bask under it. Leo felt the urge sometimes, but he usually shoved it down and ignored it until it was gone.
But now, he had the chance to do what his genetics were always asking of him, and there was very little possibility they’d be in danger if he closed his eyes for just a little while.

He fell asleep almost immediately.

April was shutting the door to her locker, school finally done for the day, when her pocket blurted out the tune “-YOU HIT ME ONCE I HIT YOU BACK -“ and April almost dropped her school bag trying to answer it. “-YOU SMASHED A PLATE OVER MY HEAD THEN I SET FIRE TO OUR BED.-”

April fumbled the buttons, jabbing it between her shoulder and her ear as she tried to balance her things in her arms. Why had she set that ring tone anyways, it was loud and drew way too much attention. “Hello?”

“April? Hi, it’s Leo.”

“Oh, hey, what’s up?” April unzipped her backpack and started cramming her text books into it.

“Can you bring me a couple pizzas? It’s important.”

“What??”

“Please?”

“Why do you want pizzas Leo, isn’t it like the middle of the day? I thought you and Raph would still be sleeping,” April zipped up her bag finally, heaving the thing onto her back as she switched ears with her phone. “And where are you calling from, it’s still daylight out, won’t someone see you?”

“I might have broken into a car and stolen a cellphone.”

“Leo, no.”

“Too late. Anyways, pizzas?”

“Where exactly am I supposed to bring these pizzas? Because I’m getting the feeling you’re not in the lair right now.”

“You guess right.”

“Please tell me you’re not where I think you are.”

“And where would that be?”

“You’re weird siblings’ hobo home.”

“Alright, I won’t tell you then. And it’s not a hobo home, they have lights.”

“If there’s no running toilet, it’s a hobo home. Why are you there Leo, I’ve only been out of contact
with you guys for like three days,” April said with a grimace as she navigated the swamped halls of her school.

“There’ve been complications. Uh, mostly because of me. It’s fine though, I’m fixing things!”

April sighed, because this was her life and her friends were mutant turtles. She grabbed her wallet from the back of her jeans, opening it and counting how much pocket change her aunt had given her. Her aunt meant well, and was trying to make things as easy for April as possible with her dad still missing, and the amount of allowance she gave April helped somewhat.

Mostly it went into funding the turtles’ appetites and bribing people across the internet into giving her info on the Kraang, but her aunt didn’t need to know that she wasn’t putting it towards mall trips.

“You better give me an explanation on why I’m about to by yet another damn pizza for you, Leo.”

“I’m hungry and… Donnie and Mikey need to gain some weight. They’re not within a healthy range, I don’t think. I haven’t been able to check properly, but I’ve been comparing their size to Raph and me…”

April almost groaned, because that drama wasn’t something she ever expected to deal with. Feral long lost mutant siblings, what a tale. Of course, now she had to buy the pizzas, her conscience wouldn’t let her not.

“I’ll pick them up soon as I can; you want me to bring them over?”

“Actually, I was hoping you could go back to the lair and get Raph to bring them over. We’re, uh, still shaky ground because of some stuff. Raph bringing food here might give him the chance for forgiveness too. Oh, and I need new bandages, the ones I got are dirty.”

“What the heck happened? Everything was fine last time I was down there.”

Leo was silent for a long moment, almost to the point April thought he’d hung up or lost connection. She was about to ask if he was still there when he answered.

“I. Did something. Something I really shouldn’t have. And I’m trying to make it up to them. It’s… I don’t want to talk about it. Can you just ask Raph when you see him?”

April could tell how difficult it had been for Leo to say those few sentences, and decided to interrogate the red banded turtle instead. “Yeah, I’ll do that when I go down there. You alright though?”

“I’m fine.”

April might not know Leo very well yet, but ‘I’m fine’ wasn’t always a truthful thing to say; not from someone like Leo. She let it go though, and told the turtle she’d deliver the pizzas to Raph after she dropped off her books at home. No, not home, her aunt’s home. April’s real home was still locked up, cold and dark without her and her father.

She told Leo before he hung up to A) stop breaking into cars, one of these days someone would catch him, and B) he owed her for this.

“I know, thank you again April.”

“You’re welcome, Leo,” April said, ending the call as she got onto her bus.
Raph was not happy to see her, even with the two large pizzas in her arms. He was still bleary and grumpy from being woken up, his usual time for waking later in the evening.

After April explained why she was there, she got a brief and curt summary of what had happened between the brothers a few days ago. No wonder Leo had been awkward on the phone; he’d gotten himself into quite the dog house. April felt some sympathy for the mutant, since Raph was very clearly it hadn’t been Leo’s intent to hurt his younger siblings and was deeply sorry over the whole fallout.

April almost couldn’t blame Leo, integrating estranged family members that understand a quarter of what you said on a good day would be difficult even with humans. It was still a mess of Leo’s own making though, and he was lucky April was willing to help him try to rectify it.

Raph continued his complaints when she told him Leo’s requests of him, even with the cooling pizza April had with her.

“Hey, don’t shoot me, I’m just the messenger,” April said, dropping the pizzas onto the kitchen table. Raph grumbled quietly, grabbing a can of Orange Crush from behind a stack of bean cans in the cupboard.

“And you’re sure Leo said that I had to go,” He asked after a sip.

April rolled her eyes. “Yes, I’m sure.”

“Of course he did,” Raph groused, taking another swig of carbonated sugar.

“Look on the bright side; you get first dibs on the pizza.”

“Yeah, and then I gotta cart the rest of it across the damn city. How come you can’t do it? You can take the subway easily.”

“Because I’m a human, and last I checked, your brothers don’t exactly like humans,” April said in a dry tone. She was having none of Raph’s surliness today, she had to go home right after this and prepare for an algebra test; she’s never gotten lower than a ninety and she didn’t plan to start now, even with the aliens and mutants in her life.

Raph crushed the can with unnecessary show, dropping it into the recycling by the trash. “Of course my younger siblings manage to hate humans even more than I do. Pains in the ass.”

“Hmm, makes me glad I’m an only child,” April said lightly, studying her nails.

Raph huffed again, walking out of the kitchen. “Don’t stick around too long, ain’t no one gonna be here to entertain you once I’m gone.”

“Wasn’t planning on it,” April replied, picking up her bag again; it was much lighter minus the textbooks, and only carried a can of pepper spray and a novel now.

Raph said goodbye to her as she left through the turnstiles, and she returned the gesture. That was taken care of then, and no longer her problem really. Now, April had to go drag her mindset back to normalcy long enough to study mathematics and not think about mutants or aliens or her missing father for a couple hours.

Easier said than done, when that was all she thought of lately.

She really hoped Leo sorted this out soon; she was antsy to start looking into Kraang hideouts again.
April understood this would take time, but her father could be in mortal peril at that very moment and she was doing nothing to save him from it.

“No, no thoughts about that right now, just algebra,” April scolded herself as she headed back for the surface. “Math is easy, math is my friend and makes complete sense even while my life goes completely fucking pear shaped. Just focus on the math equations, April.”

She started mentally reviewing which portions of her textbooks she needed to browse, and possible google sites that could help speed things up; drowning her worried thoughts under familiar and comfortable normalcy.

Chapter End Notes

Favorite background tid bit about my AU thus far, April playing gopher for the turtles since Donnie didn't make them cellphones. That girl must have very nice legs, what with the endless amount of walking and running she's been doing.

Where is Splinter in all this? Stock piling weapons fast as he can in the mini-smithery I headcanon exists somewhere in the lair; where else would the brothers get all their projectile weaponry and blades?

I feel like I'm forgetting to say something here, but it's honestly so late over here and I've got a raging migraine; I'll come back if I think of anything else to say.

If see mistakes anywhere in the fic, lemme know; I write these chapters on no sleep like more than half the time.

Thanks for reading, I'm going to finally sleep now. (-_- )

*edit like ten minutes later: Okay now I remember. I'm actually super proud of all of my tmnt fics and how far I've come as a writer with them, and want to tell literally everyone I know bc its the one thing worth bragging about in my life, but I can't because they're god damn cartoon turtles and it's fanfiction. I will tell the whole internet this, but not my own family or friends outside my partner; bless them and their ability to put up with my obsession.

Now I actually will sleep, bye.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Experience.

Chapter Notes

So, hello and apologies for the absence. I have a reasonable excuse of course, because I love this fic and wouldn't neglect it over just anything.

My father had a major surgery recently, just five days ago in fact, and it's been a real blow to my household. For next few weeks, I'm going to have to be around the house almost every day so he doesn't strain himself. He won't be able to work for months either, so I'll have to take a job soon to cover some of our expenses.

This, plus my residing issues with being in hospitals, means I haven't been in a very positive mindset, and there for unable to write Divisions Difference. I won't write this while I'm in a bad place, because I want to make this a relatively happy story, even with my tendency to add emotional and physical duress into the plot.

I'd be grateful to you all if you would be sensitive to my plight, and continue to give me happy things to think about via your comments and kudos.

Thanks for reading this note, you can start the story now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Raph was rather proud of himself for getting across greater New York without smushing the pizzas.

It'd made things a bit more challenging yes, but Raph was all about challenges. With the mostly boring clockwork his life had been before his fifteenth birthday, Raph appreciated good challenges that came his way.

Years of monotony would make any guy twitchy for a taste of something new, even if that new came in the form of enemy ninja clans, street gangs, and feral siblings. This was the most interesting shit that'd happened since the last time Leo fell down a sewer filtration drain; no one would blame Raph for taking enjoyment out the mayhem.

Speaking of said mayhem, Raph was approaching the abandoned train station his younger siblings called home. The light coming from their nest trailed down the tunnel, a beacon leading to the platform.

Raph let his feet crunch on the gravel, making his presence known as he walked closer. No one jumped into his line of sight, ready to fight or otherwise, so he assumed they probably heard him and
didn't think he was a random human who'd wandered in. Spooking his siblings wasn't something he wanted to do, considering two were the type to aim for vital spots and the other a trained ninja.

“That you, Raph?” Leo called to him as Raph got to the lip of the platform.

“Yeah, it's me, pizza delivery turtle extraordinaire,” Raph said gruffly, tossing the pizza's over the edge and hauling himself up. “I got the med stuff you needed too. The hell did you do to your old ones?”

“Heh, I took a bit of a swim.”

“What?” Raph asked, finally taking a good look around at his siblings.

Leo was situated on what looked to be mounds of couch cushions and other sorts of pillows, missing all of his gear down to his mask. His bandages were murky beige and his facial cut was exposed. Leo raised his free hand and waved, dust and dried mud speckled up his arm and all over his body.

Beside him was Mikey, who was in the middle of tying a fifth bracelet around Leo's other arm; he was completely engrossed in getting the knot tied and hadn't turned to greet Raph yet.

Donnie was sitting a ways away, almost on the other side of the room from the cushion pile and close to Raph; he was sorting what looked like jars filled with leaves. Raph's taller brother glanced over his shoulder and blinked once at him, before going back to his task.

Raph picked back up the two pizzas, and decided to join Leo and Mikey; Donnie didn't seem open to visitors at the moment.

“So. How's life slumming it?” Raph teased, taking a closer look at the dirt that clung to his older brother. Leo hated being dirty, and took showers daily to stave off the grime that came with sewer life. Seeing his brother so filthy, by Leo's standards at least, was amusing as heck.

“About as good as I imagined it,” Leo said dryly, gesturing for Raph to hand him a box of pizza. Raph tossed him one, and sat down on a cushion loose from the pile. Leo opened the lid of his pizza, and handed a slice to the eager Mikey. “I'm not entirely sure what disturbs me more, the fact that their toilet is a hole in the ground, or the fact that I've got grit in places I really shouldn't.”

“Ha, you smell too,” Raph said, leaning back on his hands and smirking. “You must be itching for a bath; I haven't seen this dirty since the shower stopped working last year.”

“All they've got for showering is this high pressure pipe with freezing water, I can't exactly help this.”

“Well, you can at least switch out your bandages. Don't want 'em getting infected,” Raph snapped the latches on the small medi-kit off his belt and handed it to Leo, who set it down for later in favor of more pizza. “You seem hungry. What, they not feeding you here?”

“Kind of. You try eating wilted leaves and stale bran flakes, it's not exactly appetizing. By the way, Donnie's behind you.”

Raph twisted his head, and sure enough, Donnie was crouching right behind him about four feet back and looking interestedly at the remaining box of pizza.

For a guy who was all knees and elbows, Donnie moved really fucking silently.
Mikey chattered something fast and excited at Donnie, and threw the half-finished slice he'd been eating at his sibling. Donnie caught it, sniffed it three times, and then dropped the whole thing in his mouth. He held out a demanding hand while still chewing, making 'gimme' gestures at Raph.

“Go ahead, I already had some,” Raph said, passing the half a pie over. The pizza might've been long cold, but Donnie tore into it just as quickly as Mikey was; and neither of the feral brothers slowed down until the boxes were empty.

“You'd think these guys were starving from how fast that went down,” Raph remarked as Donnie wiped remains of tomato sauce from his face.

“...they sort of are, I think,” Leo said in a hushed tone. “Look at how skinny they are Raph; I really don't think it's healthy.”

Raph did, mentally comparing Donnie's lean form to his own bulk, and shit, Leo was right. Another thing to add to their list of 'to fix' regarding their siblings.

He'd noticed they were skinny, they'd spent five days living in the lair with them after all, but it just hadn't registered how underfed they looked when compared to Leo and himself. It'd just seemed normal to Raph, since in his mind, the reason behind their leanness was because they didn't do martial arts.

“Well fuck, what'a we do?” Raph asked.

“I don't know, feed them more? They've got nothing down here Raph, I've been surviving on will power all day,” Leo said, twisting a newly added bracelet around his bicep.

What the hell was with those anyways, Leo'd never worn anything beyond his gear. It was weirding Raph out to see his brother look so... so exposed.

“I don't wanna make trips across New York every few days, but I guess I could,” Raph said, not really meaning his grouchy tone.

“Mm, it's the only option since they won't come back to the lair.”

“Wait, really?” Raph asked, glancing over at their brothers. Donnie had taken Mikey away from the cushion pile and was talking to his brother in soft chirps near their bedroom. Neither of them was obviously watching Leo and him, but they probably were anyways. “You couldn't convince 'em?”

“I asked earlier this afternoon, as a theoretical suggestion, when I told them you were coming by.”

“And?”

“Donnie hissed very, very loudly at me and hasn't talked in English since.”

“Keh, figures. Donnie really doesn't like you, bro,” Raph said, still watching his younger siblings' conversation. There was that public affection thing again; Donnie scratching under Mikey's chin while Mikey purred so loud Raph could hear it. Jeeze, how were they so mushy. Raph and Leo hadn't gotten that physically close in years, excluding training exercises.

Raph kicked out at Leo's leg, making the other turtle grumble and kick back. “Hey, before they start asking us to do shit, let's change those bandages. If you lose a limb 'cause you let an untrained mutant sneak up on you and dunk your ass, I'm never letting you live it down.”

“You wouldn't let me live it down, untrained individual or not,” Leo said with mild annoyance,
starting to unwind his wrappings. “By the way, you left your sais back where I told April to tell you, right?”

“Yeah, my stuff's with your stuff, no worries,” Raph confirmed, opening the small kit to get out the fresh bandages. “Not the best hiding spot, I found it right away.”

“It's not supposed to be, it's supposed to be accessible, in case of emergencies,” Leo said haughtily.

“Yeah? And what emergencies would that be? Our younger, completely untrained brothers attacking you? Who you're here to make peace with I might add.”

“...yes.”

“Christ Leo,” Raph said, dragging Leo's now exposed arm over for a quick sanitizing. “You can't stop being a paranoid asshole for one day can you?”

“I'm not paranoid, Raphael, I'm cautious,” Leo defended, wincing slightly as Raph scrubbed a little less than gentle on his scabbed cuts. “Big difference between the two.”

“Fine line, Leo, a very fine line,” Raph replied, ignoring Leo's scowl. He set to wrapping up Leo's arm, making sure he covered all of the scales without gaps. “Just don't fuck this up for us, okay? You ain't the only one who wants 'em back.”

“I know Raph, I'm trying my best already,” Leo said, a warning tone of 'Back off' entering his voice.

Raph huffed, tying off the bandage and reaching for Leo's other hand. Leo could get annoyed all he wanted, but Raph wasn't going to let him think he could give this anything less than 100% effort. Their family's future was riding on it.

Raph finished re-bandaging Leo's arms same time as Donnie and Mikey disappeared into their bedroom, reappearing with four satchel bags and coming over to their brothers. Mikey handed one to Raph, while Donnie dropped another into Leo's hands.

“What's this for?” Raph asked, turning the roughly sewn bag over in his hands. It looked like it'd once been a shirt of some kind.

“Food,” Donnie said, because that explained things, as he went around extinguishing candles and lanterns. Mikey darted around the other half of the room, blowing out candles as he went.

When all of the lights were out, Donnie gestured for Raph and Leo to stand up, and then started striding for the exit. He had a small knife attached to his shell side bag, and it made Raph a little wary. “Follow me. Us.”

Mikey hauled Leo to his feet, and pulled him along to the train tracks, chattering brightly about something to his uncomprehending brother.

“Here we go again,” Raph heard Leo mutter as he was dragged off the platform.

If Raph had had large expressive ears like his father, they would have been twitching in annoyance. He'd been sitting down for like ten minutes, after hiking across New York for hours. He'd braved rush hour traffic for these turtles, and they didn't even have the decency to let him rest first.

At least he was the one who'd gotten warm pizza, thank you microwave at home.

For lack of better choices, Raph got back on his feet and jogged to catch up with his brothers. He
could hear Leo and Mikey making noise, Mikey trying to balance on the thin decaying rails and slipping every few steps onto Leo's shoulder, but Donnie at the back of the group was silent.

Raph evaluated Donnie behavior in few minutes past, and figured out: obvious weapon/commanding tone equaled posturing, and the separation of Raph from Mikey up front equaled Donnie continuing to see Raph as a potential threat.

Fair enough, he had almost punched the guy, and had been involved with the fight that had caused their split in the first place. Also, Raph probably looked more intimidating with his gear still on, unlike Leo's bare scales.

Raph concluded he'd have to apologize properly, as much as he hated doing that, to both of his brothers sooner than later if he wanted inclusion to the group.

The journey to wherever their younger brothers were taking them had only one falter, which was when Donnie saw Raph's sais stored with Leo's swords and growled low in his throat. Mikey spotted them too, and shrunk back to be close to Donnie, a short keen escaping his mouth.

Leo ended up walking with Raph at the back, since Mikey didn't want to play with him anymore.

“Still think we should leave them in an easy to grab spot?” Raph asked in an unimpressed tone. Leo glared at him, and Raph just rolled his eyes. That bit of undone progress was Leo's fault, not Raph's.

After taking them through a series of connecting sewer filtrations, Donnie and Mikey stopped under a man-hole cover. Leo and Raph hung back, waiting to see what was next, as Donnie clambered up the wrought iron ladder to pop the metal lid.

Donnie stuck his head out for a quick glance around, and then dropped back onto the stone floor to let Mikey up. Mikey scrambled eagerly up the ladder and disappear above, Donnie right behind him after the taller turtle said “Follow.” to his brothers again.

Raph elbowed Leo to the side, climbing up before his elder brother. Leo grumbled something about younger brothers and shoving, but followed with minimum complaints.

The streets above were dark, since it was relatively late in the evening. Raph might have left the lair late afternoon, and moved as quick as he could, but rush hour had forced him to take shelter in a dark subway alcove until it ended. Now, families were home together and the humans who were out for the night were already at their destinations; no one would be heading out again until closing time.

Raph glanced around, checking both ends of the alley they'd emerged into, and found all the businesses lining it dark for the evening. The only noise came from Mikey opening a dumpster bin behind a large brick building.

So that's what they were here for, and why Raph was carrying a bag in hand. Food run.

Donnie stood guard, glancing around like Raph had, while Mikey disappeared into the huge bin. Donnie looked at Raph, and jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the garbage bin. “In, an' hel-help.”

Leo, who'd come to stand next to Raph, exchanged a look with him. Neither of them were keen on getting into the sickly sweet smelling dumpster; it smelt like overly fermented fruits and rotting vegetables.

Raph crossed his arms, leveling a look at Leo. “You're the one who's tryin' to make things up to them.”
“You're the one who hasn't apologized yet,” Leo replied, crossing his own arms.

“You've spent more time with them; they'll feel better if it's you who gets close to Mikey.”

“But it's such a good opportunity for you to bond with our brother.”

“You're already filthy, you do it.”

“You should join me in that; make us all a complete set of filthy turtles.”

“I don't want to get into a dumpster of rotting produce, Leo.”

“Too bad you don't get a choice, Raph.”

Donnie trilled a warning note, just as Raph was raising a fist to aim at Leo's shoulder. Between his two brothers, Raph was double teamed with unimpressed stares. Raph grit his teeth, and lowered his fist.

“Fuck you,” He spat at Leo, but headed for the garbage bin anyways with his satchel slung over his shoulder. “And to think, I brought you assholes pizza. Ungrateful siblings.”

Raph grasped the edge of the bin, hopping inside with one leap, and winced as his feet met soft and squishy things. As it got between his toes Raph shuddered; the things he put up with for this family. Mikey had two bags of what seemed to be too bruised to sell apples, and chirped a quick greeting before he handed them to Raph. He took them from Mikey, wrinkling his snout when his scales were met with the sticky residue coating the bags. Great.

Mikey shuffled through the top layers of garbage, tearing open black garbage bags and sorting through their contents. There were a lot of prepackaged mixed vegetables, and most were still edible looking. Mikey chattered happily, shoving the nine best looking ones into his satchel across his shell. They weren't very big, only enough for one person per bag, so they fit with room to spare.

Raph adjusted his grip on the apples, unsure of what to do with them. He wanted to put them down, because there was juice seeping into his bandages and wrappings. While Raph hated putting extra effort into being clean, he didn't feel like infecting his healing injuries because of dumpster germs. “So, uh, what am I supposed to do with these? They won't fit in my bag.”

Mikey tilted his head, blank expression of confusion. Raph hefted the apples gently, making sure not to bruise them more, and Mikey opened his mouth in an 'O' of understanding. Mikey's expression switched to a grin as he pointed out of the bin, saying, “Donnie.”

“Hey Donnie,” Raph called as he held the apple bags over the metal sides. “Take these, Mikey said so.”

Two green hands appeared, along with the top of Donnie's head, and took the bags from Raph. There was a bit of scuffling outside the bin, and a sound of disgust from Leo. Well, he knew who had to carry the apples home then.

Raph turned to talk to Mikey again and his foot made contact with something really soft, and he decided he'd rather be standing outside with the apples.

“Fuck dammnit,” Raph cursed, shaking his foot of the reeking green mush. He'd stepped in one of the released piles of garbage from Mikey's searching.
“Fuck?” Mikey mimicked back, raising an eye ridge at Raph.

Raph considered things for a moment, and then grinned mischievously. “Yeah, Mikey. Fuck.”

“Fuck!” Mikey said in a louder voice, more confident with the pronunciation.

“Raph, what are you doing in there?” Leo asked from outside.

“Say it again,” Raph encouraged, crouching down next to Mikey. “C’mon Mikey, s’one of my favorite words. Lemme share that with you.”

“Raph stop.”

Mikey chittered something at Raph, and followed the sentence with a loud, “FUCK!”

“Fuck!” Raph said back, grinning wider than he had since his brothers had left the lair.

“Fuck!”

“I swear to god Raph, don't teach him cuss words!” Leo half yelled through the bin's walls.

“He's just learnin' to express himself in English,” Raph laughed, nudging Mikey playfully, and Mikey nudged back before going back to sorting garbage. Mikey continued repeating the word as he gathered up a bunch of bruised bananas, handing them off to Raph.

“He's gonna say them around Sensei!”

“I know, it'll be hilarious.”

“Raph!”

Raph laughed, ignoring his brother's frustrated scolding. Oh yeah, most fun he'd had in a long time.

Leo let his head thunk against the green metal of dumpster’s side, sighing deeply.

Raph was alone for Mikey for five minutes, five minutes, and he was already teaching their youngest brother to swear.

Just because Raph had brought actual food and clean wrappings and might've given Leo a chance to feel like his normal self for just a moment, did not mean his hot-head brother was entitled to corrupt Mikey's vocabulary.

“Sensei's not going to be happy,” Leo muttered to himself. Donnie's huff of laughter made him turn his head, while remaining pressed against the metal bin. Donnie had resumed his composure, but Leo could see a slight twitch to his lips. Leo half-heartedly glared at his brother. “Exactly how much do you understand when we're talking, Donnie. Because it seems like a lot.”

Donnie slid his eyes over to Leo, luminous red in the back alley lighting, and enigmatically smiled in
Leo sighed again, turning around and sliding down the bin’s side to sit on the ground. He was gross already, might as well add to it with whatever was on the asphalt. “Yeah, that's what I figured.”

Leo listened to Raph and Mikey talk inside the dumpster, their conversation mostly about swears, but their interactions flowing like they’d never been apart. Leo tightened his hold on the sticky apple bags. That wasn’t fair; why was it so easy for Raph to slip back into step with their brothers, while Leo was still floundering?

It’d been like that back in the lair too, Raph bonding right off with their estranged siblings. Leo recognized now that his isolation from the group might have been mostly because of his own choices, but still. How did Raph just… go right for it?

Raph was all instinct and Leo was all strategy, that’s just how they were and it’d worked fine for years; but how do you plan for something with no existing parameters? How do you plot a course without a map?

Leo leaned his head back on the metal behind him, sighing for the millionth time since he started this excursion. His frustration was disrupted though, by a satchel full of fruit falling on his face. Leo grabbed the bag and held it away from himself, glaring up at Mikey and Raph’s cheeky grins.

“I hate both of you,” Leo said, getting up so the other two turtles could jump down.

“You should stop leavin’ yourself open like that, we’re all getting the drop on you today,” Raph said as he leapt over the edge and landed on the concrete. Mikey scrambled out along with him, landing on his hands first and tucking into a roll.

Mikey unfurled from his ball without actually standing up, and held up the cradled satchel of food for Donnie to inspect. Donnie took it, and checked the contents briefly before letting out a pleased hum. He turned and held out a hand to take the apple bags from Leo to examine them as well.

Leo winced as he felt the sticky plastic peel away from his bandages and plastron, his injuries were almost healed but it was really gross still; and he’d just changed those wrappings. Leo really, really looked forwards to taking that shower back in the lair.

Maybe Raph would switch out with him for a day, just so he could go do that and come back.

…nah, he wouldn’t do that. And besides, if Leo left, he’d be breaking the agreement with Donnie. Leo was nothing but honorable with his word, and he’d given it to his brother. He’d stay the full three days, and convince them that their family should build ties again.

That didn’t mean he couldn’t drag Raph into it too.

When they started back into the sewers, Leo slowed his walk so he could be beside Donnie while Mikey and Raph held conversation at the front of the group. Donnie side eyed him, but didn’t lengthen his stride to leave Leo behind.

“So, I was just thinking, what if Raph stayed for the next day too?” Leo said, getting to the point right away. Beating around the bush with Donnie didn’t work, since small talk was still beyond their conversation level. “I mean, he’s got things to apologize for too, not just me. And it’d be a good chance for us all to get to know each other more.”

Donnie narrowed his eyes, a suspicious glance at Raph and Leo both. Mikey giggled particularly loud at something Raph said, Raph returning it with his own snickers, and some of Donnie’s tension
melted. He seemed to mull it over for a moment, then stated, “Why.”

Leo shrugged, careful to keep his returned burden of sticky apples still. “I think it’d be fairer if we all spent at least one day together, instead of it just being me. Plus, I think Raph enjoys being with Mikey.”

They both checked on their siblings again, and found Raph looking less than vaguely frustrated as he tried to explain that no, Mario was not real it’s just a video game seriously Mikey it’s not real, to his younger brother. Who just kept shaking his head and adding the word fuck to the end of his short, garbled replies.

“See? They’re getting along great,” Leo said.

Donnie rolled his eyes, huffing softly as he seemed prone to do. “Raf. Has to… a-apol…logizzze first.”

“So is that a yes?”

Donnie gave Leo a Look, which spoke his clear opinion of what might follow the rest of the night.

“A maybe is good too,” Leo amended, tilting a small smile at Donnie. “I’ll talk to him. He’ll do it right away, I promise.”

Donnie tittered something, accompanied by an indifferent expression, and lengthened his steps. Leo matched his pace, both of them catching up with their brothers. Apparently that conversation was done for now.

Leo kept walking until he was right behind Raph, and then he kicked his brother lightly on the back of his knee. Raph broke off his explanation about Luigi not being ‘Green Mario’ and twisted his head to glare at Leo. “What?”

“You should apologize to our brothers, since you haven’t yet,” Leo said, ignoring Raph’s surliness. “C’mon, you should really get to it. Right now.”

“The hell- Leo, what’s with the pushing? I’m gonna, alright?” Raph dodged Leo’s second leg jab, spinning around to face Leo while he walked backwards. “I didn’t bother you about that sorta thing.”

“Except you did.”

“Shut up, I’ll do it when I’m good an’ ready.”

“Which should be now.”

Raph scowled at Leo, while Leo just raised an eye ridge in return. After a moment of standoff, Raph hissed shortly and turned his shell to Leo again.

Both of them froze mid-step, realizing what Raph had just done. Mikey and Donnie kept going for a moment more, but stopped when they noticed the other two weren’t also. Both turtles tilted their heads, identical expressions of confusion and mild annoyance.

“If you don’t mention that ever again, I’ll do it right now,” Raph said, tone high and controlled.

“Deal,” Leo replied hurriedly, still feeling a mixture of surprise and unnerve from Raph’s slip up.

“Great. Bye.” Raph speed walked up to the rest of their brothers and asked Mikey to follow him a
little ways ahead. Donnie shot Leo a questioning look, but Leo shook his head and shrugged.

That was embarrassing for both of them, and it had jiggled a memory free from when Leo and Raph were younger. They’d used to hiss and chitter at each other, but stopped after they moved into the lair. It probably had to do with their new television and movie collection, since after they’d started watching humans interact on the screen, they’d ceased using that aspect of their communication.

Mikey and Donnie using it so obviously and freely was starting to rub off on Leo and Raph, and Leo wasn’t sure how he felt about it.

Mikey shot up the ladder to his favorite above ground place, besides all the others, and ignored Donnie’s warnings about letting him check for humans first.

Food was great food was important, but this, this was fun, and Mikey loved fun things.

He shoved the heavy cover upwards, glancing around quickly and making sure to sniff for fresh human scent. Finding none, he removed the metal circle all the ways away and exited the tunnels. Mikey was careful not to jostle the bags of greens and not greens against his chest too much, since bruising them worse made them squishy and less tasty. And while Mikey was not a picky eater, he preferred his food to be non-squished.

Mikey heard the rest of his kin and maybe-kin coming up the ladder, so he decided to start sorting through the huge boxes of stuff. They’d catch up soon as they got out of the tunnels.

Mikey raced on all four of his limbs up the side of the nearest box, the one with soft things in it, and jumped right in. Softness broke his fall, making a ‘whump!’ sound as he landed. Mikey liked this box the best, since it was always filled with the soft fabric things humans threw away.

Mikey took a moment to rub his face and hands all over the really soft fabric he’d fallen on, purring happily. Oh yes, he was having a fantastic night so far. Not only had Raf shown up at the lair, and they were all together then yes yes yes, but he’d also come and said sorry for the fight and the almost hitting.

Underneath the smell of his angry and embarrassed and fight-me scents, Raf had smelt genuinely apologetic and sort of sad. Raf might have a permanent set to his shoulders, one that made it look like he expected an attack at any moment and that he was ready to attack right back, but...

Raf could be gentle too, and he hadn’t done anything, excluding the fight with Leo, to make Mikey actually worry about the fight-me scents. Raf explained how his Tee-vee worked, patient and slow with his words even when Mikey forgot what something did again and again. He made sure to ask before being too close to Mikey and Donnie during their days in his nest, and respected the bubble of space Donnie asked of him.

Raf might look and sometimes smell like he just wanted to fight and nothing else, but he hadn't actually followed through on that except with Leo.

Mikey chuffed softly, blowing dust from the fabric he lay sideways on. Raf it seemed, was a lot of posturing and not nearly as much biting. It seemed silly to waste that much energy in being mad all the time, but maybe Raf felt safer that way; like how Donnie needed to understand things before he started anything, or how Mikey needed to know approximately where Donnie was at any time.
Voices outside the big box Mikey was in pulled him from his musing, and he popped over the edge to trill where he was to Donnie.

*There you are don't do that no hiding wandering running, stay here stay,* Donnie reprimanded without heat.

*Just in box no hiding only finding,* Mikey said, rubbing his bare feet against the very soft fabric as he talked. *Found very soft things yes perfect nice nice wonderful, please have keep mine?*

*Show,* Donnie said, coming over to the box to peer inside. Mikey tugged the big wide fabric from under his feet and held it up to Donnie, the dusty red fabric rustling against the metal side. Donnie felt the soft fabric, nodding as he gave an appreciative chirp. *Yes, soft warm colorful, good find good founding, you can keep yes*

Mikey trilled high and happy, because this fabric would be *perfect* for their sleeping place; it was fluffy and heavy and would keep them so warm when the cold seasons came. And! It had the same colors as tasty red fruits, which meant it was extra good for them.

*Raf,* who had a mask the same color as Mikey's find, came over to look as well; raising a hand, but stopping just before touching the fabric. Asking permission silently, same time as he said something in human.

*Yes yes touch, very nice very soft,* Mikey said, pushing the whole thing out of the box and onto *Raf.* The other turtle made a distressed noise as all the heavy fabric fell on him, and *Lee-oh* laughed at *Raf* as he came to stand with the rest of them. Mikey grinned widely as *Raf* tugged the fabric off his head and glared up at him. Oh it was very nice to have more turtles around, especially since they were so easy to bother.

Donnie rolled his eyes both of them, and wandered off to look into his favorite box; which was filled with clever things that hurt to jump onto. Mikey would know; he had before, and the scars on his feet proved it.

*Raf* freed himself of the fabric, and shoved it back at Mikey; storming off to follow Donnie. Ah, must be Donnie's turn for a sorry then. Well that was good, since Mikey wanted everyone to get along if it was possible.

It was just *Lee-oh* with Mikey then, who was standing next to the metal box and casting questioning glances at Mikey.

Mikey hung his arms over the box's edge, contemplating what to do next. He had his big soft fabric now, so there wasn't point in looking for more since the one would be very large even after folding. What else did they need...

Mikey snapped his fingers. Of course, they always needed more burning sticks! Mikey dropped the red fabric out of the box and onto *Lee-oh,* who squawked like *Raf* had. Mikey climbed back out of the box, dropping back onto all four limbs and chasing after Donnie.

*Donnie Donnie Donnie, burning sticks yes need I go with Lee-oh, get them bring them here?* Mikey asked as he dashed over, jumping to latch onto the big box Donnie was leaning into. *Raf* startled slightly when Mikey banged into the metal, making it echo loudly, but Donnie barely flinched since he was so used to Mikey doing this.

*Well??* Mikey chirped impatiently.

*Hmmm,* Donnie replied, not taking his eyes off the sharp metal things inside.
Please? You, you get alone time with just Raf, Raf said sorry and is now helpful yes? Mikey said, hoping to persuade his brother.

Not said sorry yet no, Donnie corrected, fishing a glass metal square with big cracks across its surface. He huffed, dropping it back down since it looked useless. Will he? Say sorry mean apology?

Yes, like to me! Angry-but-gentle he is, very good when trying, Mikey crooned, hoping Donnie would agree if Raf sounded better than he sometimes was. So yes? I go you stay Lee-oh come with?

Donnie sighed, and finally took his attention away from the sorting of clever things. Donnie leaned on one arm against the box, putting the other on his hip, and looked Mikey in the eye. No running hiding getting lost?

Promise!

And, no letting Lee-oh endanger you us we?

Promise promise proomise, Donnie-beloved-clever-brother, Mikey trilled convincingly, flashing a bright grin and waggling his tail eagerly. Lee-oh might be fast-scary-dangerous sometimes, but Mikey knew how to escape and hide from things that wanted to hurt him. If Lee-oh, for some reason, decided to try and hurt Mikey, Mikey would defend himself and disappear into the hiding holes he and Donnie had designated over the long time they'd lived here.

Donnie rubbed his face, pinching the bridge of his nose once before opening his bright red eyes again. Fine. But! Back soon not slow no playing, promise? Or no more alone with Lee-oh trips

I promise! Mikey exclaimed, letting go of the box and darting over to throw his hands around Donnie's stomach and squeezed tightly. Mikey purred loudly as he hummed, Thank you thank you love you love you loooove you

Donnie huffed, but returned the purring Love you hum, scratching his claws on Mikey's soft neck scales. Mikey tip toed upwards and nuzzled Donnie's snout once, before releasing his tight hug and running to go collect Lee-oh.

This was perfect, this was great! Now Mikey could have Lee-oh alone for secret games along the way for burning sticks, and Raf could say sorry to Donnie and everything would be perfect. Donnie would forgive Raf, and then they could all go home and share music and treats.

Leo had folded up the fabric Mikey had tossed at him, and was standing in the middle of the big area that was lined on both sides by the huge metal boxes of stuff. The area was in the middle of an exposed place, yes, but since it had high stone walls surrounding it and metal crisscrossing what places not blocked by stone, they were safe to be here as long as it was night time.

Plus only one tall light above the whole place, so it was covered in deep shadows for Mikey and Donnie to dart in and out of; and now that Lee-oh and Raf were with them, they could too.

Lee-oh said hello as Mikey approached, on just his back legs since Lee-oh seemed to prefer that to the faster way of running Mikey liked with all his limbs. Mikey tittered happily, and took the big folded fabric from his maybe-brother; setting it on the corner of the box so it balanced there. Donnie would remember to grab it, since taking it with Mikey and Lee-oh would be stupid and probably get it dirty.

Lee-oh protested only slightly as Mikey tugged him over to one of the metal criss-crosses, trailing behind Mikey as they scaled the wobbly metal.
It hurt just a little for Mikey to drop onto the stone below, but he was used to the sting on his hands and feet. Lee-oh landed soundlessly beside him, gracefully poised and on just his back legs. Mikey chirred shortly and stuck out his tongue, because that was just showing off.

Mikey led the other turtle through the maze of tall stone nests that humans lived in, keeping to the dark areas between both sides of the path. The place they were going wasn’t far, since Mikey was only allowed to wander for so long before he or Donnie got anxious about the distance. Mikey had discovered the place a long time ago, many turns of the season before, when he just following his snout for interesting food smells.

The new smell he found wasn’t food, but it was very weird and interesting, so Mikey followed it. That’s when he found the big bin full of many burning sticks.

They’d seen smelly and dirty seeming humans using them before, in the small paths behind the tall human nests. Those humans used fire to light the burning sticks, the flame created on even tinier sticks than the burning ones. Donnie took some from a sleeping human, a small bundle of fire starting sticks, and they’d tested the idea of using them in their nest.

It made it much easier for Mikey to see, since he couldn’t see nearly as well as Donnie could in the dark. Until Donnie figured out how to make the small man-made lights work, they relied on stealing fire sticks from the smelly humans who slept outside of nests and taking big bunches of burning sticks from the place Mikey found.

The huge stash of fire sticks they found one time on a dead human, inside the bag clutched to his cold chest, made their worries about lights go almost completely away. The box had been filled to the brim with bundles of fire starters, and with the endless supply of burning sticks from Mikey’s discovery they hadn’t needed to risk getting fire starters off sleeping humans in forever.

Lee-oh said something to Mikey, nudging his shoulder in question as they stayed crouched in a deep shadow of a big metal box. Mikey shushed him, one finger to his lips, and waited for the human he knew was nearby to make his presence known.

There, the telltale shuffle combined with the stench of unwashed human. The human who lived in the small path branching from the main one was home tonight, like he almost always was. Mikey waited a moment longer, checking the air for the smell of the human moving out of his nest, and then signaled Lee-oh to follow him.

They ducked across the path lit from above quickly, dodging by the small path that the human dwelled down. No sound of surprise of anger came, so Mikey knew they’d been unseen. That human always smelt too wrong and too sick to be much of a threat, but Mikey was cautious anyways.

Here here, this way follow fast not slow, Mikey chirped quietly, leading Lee-oh to their destination. The box was closed like always, but Mikey popped it open easily. Inside were all the burning sticks they needed, in all shapes and sizes. The thick ones were the best, since they didn’t break easy like and lasted for days.

Mikey tugged on the knot holding Lee-oh’s bag to his chest, and the other turtle complied in untying it to hand over. Mikey silently climbed up to get inside, making sure not to be noisy in case the human in the small path decided to be curious for once.

Mikey stuffed five thick burning sticks into Lee-oh’s borrowed bag, and a couple smaller ones because those ones smelled nice when you burned them. But not too many, because then everything was super overpowering and you have to go sleep in the small and uncomfortable tunnel between
tunnels until the nest airs out.

Mikey was only allowed to burn the smelly burning sticks on special occasions, and even then just for a little bit.

Lee-oh was talking to Mikey again, and Mikey shushed him. Again. Because that human in the small path might come looking if he heard another human-like voice, and Lee-oh might be a turtle but he still talked like a human. For some reason. Mikey wasn’t sure why, it seemed weird to him. Maybe because of the tall rat named Splin-ter.

Lee-oh gave him an annoyed look, because Mikey knew Lee-oh was used to being in charge and didn’t like being told what to do, but Mikey ignored him. Because this was important, and Lee-oh could grouch later when they were safe again.

A quick exchange of the bag back to Lee-oh, and then they were scurrying off into the dark again. The human in the small path didn’t make another sound the rest of the time they were there, to Mikey’s relief.

Before they got all the ways back though, Mikey pulled Lee-oh to a stop and told him to climb the high metal ladder that led all the way up the tall dark nest beside them.

His maybe-brother seemed unconvinced about the idea, but Mikey was already clambering up the first levels. Mikey only got to do this when Donnie was busy, and Mikey wanted to share it with Lee-oh. Because it was one of his favorite things, even if it was scary high up.

Finally, they arrived on the top of the nest, five whole turns of the ladder upwards.

Mikey went as close to the opposite edge as he dared, and sat down to look out at the view. Lee-oh sat down next to him, legs crossed instead of thrown outwards like Mikey’s.

Humans scared Mikey; they were dangerous and likely to be cruel even to their own kind. They made things that were just to hurt each other with, things that roared and raced like monsters, and things that were almost too strange for Mikey to comprehend.

But, the world they built, the towering stone nests and homes that spread forever in front of Mikey from his special place’s top, looked like stars fallen to the ground.

Only on clear nights could Mikey see the real stars, but this was close enough. The tall, far away lights of the endless nests the humans had built seemed more beautiful at night than they did during the day.

Mikey had found this place by accident, just like the burning sticks, because he’d been chasing a bird that’d stolen a shiny bag of dry food from him. It was his one secret from Donnie, because his brother never let him go any higher than the trees in the green place.

Mikey loved this high up place just as much as he loved every special thing he had, because it was precious and untouchable and wasn’t something any human could take away from him.

Lee-oh asked Mikey something, and Mikey turned his head to look at the other turtle. His maybe-brother was saying something in human again, making the words slow so Mikey might understand.

Mikey wasn't as good as Donnie was at understanding human words, he was just good at saying them back even if he didn't know what they meant. But he knew enough, through the lessons with the tall rat and the time he'd spent watching the small and not real humans on the Tee-vee with Raf.
Lee-oh repeated his question, and Mikey finally caught enough of what he meant to figure it out. Why are we here, what is this?

“Mine. Ssssspeh-shial place,” Mikey said, sweeping a hand across the horizon of the brightly lit nests. He switched to turtle speak again, because human words couldn't describe it right. My one secret my special place up high, strange wonderful like stars, yes?

Most of what Mikey was saying was lost on Lee-oh, but he seemed to get it anyways, and that was good enough for Mikey.

Lee-oh settled into a comfortable lean forwards, slightly mimicking Mikey's position. Mikey twitched his tail with a small bubble of happiness, because Lee-oh seemed so much more turtle like since he'd come to stay with Donnie and Mikey.

Mikey rumbled a purr in his chest, smiling as he savored having his maybe-brother with him somewhere Mikey treasured. Lee-oh glanced over, looking confused by the sounds Mikey was making. Mikey smiled warmly, increasing the volume of his purr. Lee-oh's expression went back and forth between embarrassment and happiness, and finally he turned away to look at the view again.

Oh well, Mikey would get Lee-oh used to that more later on. For now, he'd just look out at the twinkling world around them and keep purring anyways.

Lee-oh and Mikey stayed there for a while longer, enjoying the chilly breeze that rose over the tops of the nests to whisk past them. Eventually, maybe perhaps hopefully, Mikey would be able to tell Lee-oh properly how much he loved this one spot up high, how much he loved everything about his life. If Mikey could learn just enough human to tell him that, to tell Lee-oh and Raf how much he wanted them to be brothers-kin-family-loved-ones, to express just how many hopes Mikey had for their possible family... then Mikey would be happy with that, if he could tell them nothing else.

Eventually, they did have to leave Mikey's special secret spot, but that was okay. Because they were going back to Donnie and Raf, and their respective brothers were even better than a high up view.

Donnie only scolded Mikey a little bit for staying away for so long, and he let Mikey off with just a gentle whack on the head. Mikey took it in stride, because he'd gotten to show Lee-oh something special just for the two of them, and that made the concerned reprimands from Donnie worth it.

Donnie observed the interesting chaos that had invaded his home, keeping to the sides still, as Mikey interacted with their maybe-kin.

They'd come right home from the gathering place with all the boxes, sorting their new food stores to where they were meant to be and placing the burning sticks were old ones were melted almost completely. Donnie carefully stacked his new clever things with his other piles, putting ones that looked similar together.

The new thick fabric spread that Mikey found was an excellent addition to the pile of feather filled things in the wide room's corner. It covered much of the pile, and was so soft even Donnie had taken a moment to rub it against his cheeks.

Currently, Mikey was tying off the bracelet he'd convinced Raf to wear, while Lee-oh lounged on the soft red fabric near them. They were talking, the two human speaking turtles, but they made sure to include Mikey regardless of the language barrier. Soft human music played in the background of
their nest, not loud enough to disrupt the conversing, but just so that it added a layer of comfort.

After Raf had given his apology to Donnie, using the least threatening tone Donnie knew him to have and bowing his head once at the end, Donnie had given the okay for him to spend time with Mikey. Raf hadn't caused the fight that drove them from the Lay-err, and he hadn't actually injured Mikey or Donnie during it. So Donnie was more inclined to accept his apology than Lee-oh's, and didn't mull it over too long.

Watching the three turtles talk and laugh and playfully tease each other, Donnie felt a small warmth appear in his chest. He put a hand against it, to supress it or encourage it he wasn't sure, and it increased when Mikey's excited chirrups gave way to laughter.

Donnie usually felt the missing missing something someone's missing feeling there, but now it was warm like the lit burning sticks beside him.

Raf seemed to be genuinely interested, and asked Mikey for a coloring stick. Lee-oh got up from his position a few feet away and came to look over Raf's shoulder while the masked turtle started drawing onto Mikey's coloring bind.

Donnie glanced back up at his... brothers? Who were now looking at a wide and bound stack of colorful thin leaf-like sheets with Mikey's drawings on them. Raf seemed to be genuinely interested, and asked Mikey for a coloring stick. Lee-oh got up from his position a few feet away and came to look over Raf's shoulder while the masked turtle started drawing onto Mikey's coloring bind.

Donnie rubbed the surface of the warm spot in his chest. The space didn't feel full, still empty like a piece was taken out long ago, but it wasn't cold like it usually was.

Did Mikey feel that? Had Donnie's smaller brother notice the change, if it had occurred for him? Or was Donnie just imagining it?

Mikey broke his fascination of watching Raf draw to look over at Donnie, getting up and walking over close to the ground on all his limbs. Mikey crooned a long and soft sentence as he sat down in front of Donnie. Come be close be near, share fun share closeness

Donnie glanced back at Lee-oh and Raf, who seemed to be having a small and un-meaningful bicker about whatever Raf had drawn onto the white sheet. Their voices lost their volume and intensity though, when Raf snapped something at Lee-oh, who drew away slightly in shock.

Donnie caught the meanings, which were about Raf not feeling safe enough to show his ability to draw around Lee-oh. How odd, to not feel safe with your brother. Donnie drew Mikey close as he watched Lee-oh say something apologetic to Raf, because the idea of not having such closeness with Mikey sounded wrong and scary.

Mikey clicked questioningly, but settled against Donnie's chest anyways. Donnie kept watching Raf and Lee-oh's conversation while he scratched slow circles on Mikey's neck.

Raf seemed less hostile now, but smelled like upset feelings. Lee-oh said again that he was sorry, and while Donnie missed what the latter half of the sentence was, he guessed Lee-oh was sorry for making Raf feel like he couldn't make drawings around his brother.

Raf huffed, nudging Lee-oh's shoulder with own, and said it was fine. Donnie lost the thread of conversation there, but the tension between the two turtles had dissolved and now they were back to talking amicably like before.

Well? Come join? Mikey asked again, running a few scratches of his own along Donnie's back of neck.

Donnie hummed softly, because scratches always felt good, and because he thought he might try joining the group; at least for a little while.
Donnie retrieved his own bound set of sheets, his drawings mostly of clever things he'd thought of, and followed Mikey back to the small circle of turtles on the soft pile plus red fabric.

Raf was a very good drawer, and he did quick drawings of Mikey to prove it. The likeness of Donnie's brother on the sheet was amazing, because even with the slight off-ness that it had, it looked exactly like Mikey. Donnie traded his own drawings for Raf to see while he started an attempt at drawing an actual person. Donnie mostly drew things that didn't move, but seeing Mikey's image on the sheet inspired him to try something new.

Lee-oh was about as good as Mikey, and the two of them shared Mikey's collection of thick color sticks between each other as they used Mikey's sheets. Raf liked Donnie's thin wood covered charcoal sticks better, and chose to share Donnie's bound sheets instead of joining the others.

It was relaxing, the semi-quiet activity of just drawing and talking once and a while. Donnie felt a knot loosen in his chest, right next to the warm spot, as the night wore on. Eventually, they trailed off from drawing, and just started talking.

It was hard, but with patience on both ends, Donnie and Raf managed to hold a decent conversation. Mostly questions about Donnie's life from Raf, and Donnie asking how something he'd seen in the Lay-err worked. Sometimes it would turn to Lee-oh and Mikey, both of them comparing their brothers their habits.

Donnie suggested that they should set Mikey loose on Lee-oh more often, because while Donnie was wary of Lee-oh still, Mikey had a soothing effect on the high-strung turtle. Raf told Donnie that he hadn't seen Lee-oh so open in a long time, and he might just have to agree with that plan if it meant they both got a break.

After the conversation winded down, Raf said he should go home. That's when Lee-oh broke off conversation with Mikey, which had mostly been charades but regardless a conversation, and told Raf he should stay.

There was a short, rapid conversation between the two turtles, but Raf agreed in the end with only slight grumbling.

Donnie decided he'd take a break from the group then, and get their end of night meal ready. He was sleepy after translating so much talking in his head, and he could see Mikey starting to droop onto the soft fabric covered pile, despite his excitement of having so many people to talk with.

Donnie presented three jars between them all, plus one for himself, filled with yellow flower leaves and greens from the human's waste box. Donnie sliced open the top of one of the big fruit bags as well, adding the sweet treats to the meal.

Conversation was muted through eating, since to talk they all required full attention to their opposite set. Mikey mostly talked to himself, a constant stream of chattering that even Donnie had trouble keeping track of.

When the meal was finished, Donnie escorted Mikey to their sleeping place, and left Lee-oh to explain his and Raf's bed for the sleeping period.

Mikey flopped down onto his and Donnie's bed, soft things flying about and he snuggled into his favorite spot. The outside of their room was very dim now, because they'd blown out or turned off every light except the one Raf and Lee-oh were using.

Donnie stretched, feeling his pleasantly tired muscles pull and release their tension. Donnie waited
until Mikey was settled into his position before climbing in as well. He pulled along the fabrics they used to cover up; completing the sleeping routine they'd fallen into over the years.

Donnie lay down with Mikey facing him, pulling the sleepy little turtle close. Mikey mumbled, *Love you, thank you, had fun lots of fun was very very wonderful*

Donnie hummed back, *Me too, was nice was okay, Lee-oh maybe forgiven if continues*

Mikey chirped a drowsy exclamation of *happy* at that, because Donnie knew his *small-precious-brother* just wanted them all to be together.

Donnie was still scared though, that this would come back and bite them. Lee-oh and Raf might have been kind and compliant today, but what of tomorrow? Or in a few sunrises? Would they always be nice and fun and safe? Or would they turn around and attack again?

Donnie felt the small warmth in his chest flicker, right where the *missing* feeling always was. Donnie nudged Mikey back to semi-wakefullness, asking, *Feel it? Missing missing feeling not gone but not hurting anymore, different feelings now, different new warm*

*Hmmm... yes new feeling different feeling,* Mikey agreed, putting a hand on his chest and laying it flat. *Good feeling nice feeling though, I like it*

Donnie nuzzled Mikey's scaly forehead, letting a small purr escape his chest. *Me too, want it more, because it's better*

They didn't talk any more about the new feelings, because they were both tired and had a lot to deal with when they woke up again. Donnie hummed their special song with Mikey, back and forth made of lilting notes and mixing with their purrs, until he fell asleep; still curled closely to his small brother.

Mikey woke up, before Donnie for once, and smacked his lips.

He was hungry already, and didn't feel like waiting for Donnie to get up to eat with him. So Mikey stealthily slipped out of their bed, silently promising he'd be back before Donnie woke; he just needed to eat a little before he went back to sleep. His stomach was rumbling uncomfortably.

A quick stretch, from his fingers to his toes, and then Mikey ambled out into the darkness of their nest. He kept his steps light since there was not one, but three sleeping turtles still, and he didn't want to wake them before they were ready. Donnie always got grumpy if he was disturbed too early, whether he was awake first or not, so Mikey assumed Raf and Lee-oh would be similar.

Mikey took one of the long, thin yellow fruits from its storage spot, biting the top part's skin just enough for him to peel it. A nice quiet snack, and one that wouldn't leave any mess if he put the peel where he was supposed to.

Mikey shucked the gross tasting peel into their waste spot; a circle box made from human materials, and shoved the last few bites of sweet fruit into his mouth. Dry human food was great, but the sweet fruits from that one metal box were better; even if they didn't keep for very long.

Shuffling across the darkened room drew Mikey's attention, and he peered closer at its source. The red fabric, though it looked black at the moment, shifted around as one of the turtles sleeping under it adjusted his sleeping position.
Mikey, hunger satisfied for the moment, decided to sneakily check on the two turtles before he went back to sleeping.

Mikey crept carefully across the soft, but stiff fabrics that covered the stone floor, making his way over to Raf and Lee-oh's sleeping place. They both seemed completely unaware that Mikey was nearby, so Mikey continued getting closer until he was on the edge of the many feather filled fabrics.

The new big fabric that Mikey had found was tossed off Raf's legs, exposing them to the cool air. He must have gotten cold because of that, and decided to cuddle Lee-oh for warmth some time during the sleep.

Lee-oh had one arm thrown over Raf's waist, and was sleeping soundly tucked under the now unmasked turtle’s chin. Mikey couldn't see it clearly, but he guessed that Raf's arm on that side was pressed between the two of them.

Mikey snickered under his breath when Lee-oh bonked Raf's snout as he adjusted positions again. Raf grumbled something in his sleep, much like how he did when he was awake, and threw a leg over Lee-oh's still covered ones; effectively pinning Lee-oh from moving around anymore.

They looked peaceful like that, compared to how aggressive they could be when awake.

Mikey's smile dropped a little around the edges, because he sort of wanted to get into the bed and cuddle too. Not just one turtle to cuddle, but two.

He shifted on his feet, debating to himself. On one hand, if he did, there'd be lots of cuddles on both sides of him and Mikey loved to be close to others when he slept. On the other hand, Lee-oh and Raf probably wouldn't like it if he did that without permission, and then they'd be angry with Mikey.

Mikey thought a moment longer, and finally decided not to. They'd only known each other for a little while, and Lee-oh and Raf didn't seem very affectionate in general; even between just the two of them.

Besides, Donnie was still asleep and had no one to cuddle, and Mikey didn't want his beloved-brother to feel left out.

Mikey turned away from the other sleeping turtles, and went to go be close with the one he knew best.

Chapter End Notes

Another quiet, character building chapter; when will they end.

I keep skipping ahead of where we are in DD's plot line to later seasons of the show and thinking "Okay, but wouldn't THIS be fun to write-" before I cut myself off and remember it's gonna be months before I get even close to there. (Two words as to where my mind keeps going: brain worms. (☉‿☉✿) )

Damn my meticulous need to flesh out every little thing. I want to write action again.
I swear to god I'll end this arc next chapter, even if it ends up being like thirty pages plus to get there. _COUNTRY_THINKER:

Thanks for all of your continued support dear readers, it really uplifts me to have nice people say nice things about my writing!
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Connection.

Chapter Notes

I went through three stages writing this.

1) gOOGLE TRANSLATE HATES ME AND I HATE IT AND I APOLOGIZE FOR MY HORRID ANGLOPHONE-NESS AND SHITTY MIXING OF LANGUAGES

2) maybe.... if i just lay he r e.... the fic'll write itself....

3) *MANIC WRITING OF THIRTEEN PAGES IN ONE EVENING*

I can't really get into the groove of writing until at least ten pages in, then its like someone set a fire cracker off near me and away I go...

In advance, I apologize for my no doubt horrid translated words/sentences, because I did my best but its probably still awful.
I tried. I really, really tried. And I accept it was all for not, but you all have bare with me, I really really love bilingual turtles...
I'm so flippin' sorry,,,, but I did it anyways,,,

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Raph floated between consciousness and sleep, trying to resist whatever it was that was making him wake up. He tried to move his arm to get comfortable again, it felt like it was warmer than the rest of him why was that, and found he couldn’t.

Begrudgingly, Raph opened his eyes to see what was holding his arm down. As his three eyelids blinked slowly, clearing away sleep grit, he found Leo sleeping soundly against him; Raph’s arm squished between their plastrons and Leo’s own arm tossed over Raph’s side.

What the actual fuck.

Raph first reaction was to startle, jolting his whole body into awareness. The jolt traveled down his pinned arm, and caused it to smack into Leo’s jaw as Raph tried to yank it free. Leo’s teeth clicked painfully and then he too was awake.

“Wha-?! Raph-!”

“Get offa me, Leo!”
“Watashi wanai desu - what the hell-!” Leo shoved Raph away, hands colliding with Raph’s snout.

“Kuso!” Raph shoved Leo back, and for good measure, kneed him in the stomach. Leo curled in on himself with an “Oof!”, and his legs, that Raph had been pinning earlier, smacked right into Raph’s crotch.

“Sonofa-!”

“Ow, jesus-!”

Raph pushed himself back from Leo, and kicked his elder brother off the bed. Pillows went flying as Leo rolled out onto the cold floor, the red blanket tangling him up as he went. Raph hunched in on himself, groaning in pain; Leo echoed him, covering his eyes and curling up in the tangled covers.

“Sore wa, kono tame ni wa haya sugimasu, Raph, Christ-”

“Should’a thought of that before you c-cuddled up to me,” Raph spat, his mood already tipping deep into anger in the ten seconds they’d been awake.

“Mukatte imasu ni anata no saisu o torimasu soshite oshikomimasu sorera appu kimi no gesu yarō,” Leo muttered darkly.

“Oh yeah? Well, dikku o tabete soshite chōku.”

“Anata o fakku!”

“Īe, anata o fakku!”

Raph grabbed a pillow, a thick couch one, and brought it down hard on Leo’s face. Leo didn’t bother removing the pillow, instead choosing to just grab Raph’s arm and pull him into a headlock; pillow only dislodging as Raph flipped them into a roll. They grappled, spitting mixed curses of English and Japanese; Raph’s mostly English, and Leo’s almost all Japanese. Leo wouldn’t dare swear in English, but when their father was absent and they were speaking their first language, Leo was on level with sailors.

It was way too early for this, whatever time that might be, but Raph wanted the awkward wake up to be buried under something else. Fighting was easy and familiar, so that’s what he went with.

Physical affection. With Leo. And before Raph’d woken up, he’d felt comfortable.

Raph knew he should have gone back to the lair. This was way outside his comfort zone.

Leo finally broke them apart with a firm shove, rolling away and standing up; the red blanket tripped Raph a little, but he managed to stand up as well. They both stared each other down, panting slightly from the shock of adrenaline so soon after waking.

After a moment longer, Leo’s white eyelids flickered open again and he stepped out of his fighting stance. Leo sighed in exasperation, and rubbed a hand over his face. “Just once, I’d like to wake up and have our first conversation not be in the form of a fight.”

Raph glared, but lowered his own guard and opened his eyes. He dropped back onto the scattered bed pieces, feeling like going back to sleep was the most desirable idea and pretending this never happened. “It’s not my fault you got touchy-feely.”

“I did not- look, for your information, I was still on my side of the bed; you’re the one who moved
“into my space!”

“I wouldn’t do something like that-!”

“Well apparently that’s not true!”

“Fuck off!” Raph exclaimed, because Leo was wrong, he wouldn’t do something like that. It was way too... *childish* for him.

“Such an eloquent come back, you are truly the master of words,” Leo replied, voice dripping with sarcasm.

“Oh, you wanna go again?” Raph growled, gritting his teeth and feeling the familiar rising tide of anger.

“I don’t know, do you?” Leo challenged, narrowing his eyes and tilting his head condescendingly.

“Bring it!” Raph leapt back up from the pillows, already winding up a punch. Leo met him halfway through the move, smoothly deflecting Raph’s blow and turning the momentum so it unbalanced Raph. Raph caught himself before Leo could throw him onto the ground, and readjusted his arm so he could grip Leo’s shell tip. Raph yanked hard, and managed to turn Leo around so he could get his other arm around the older turtle’s neck.

Leo jerked his head backwards, hitting Raph’s snout a second time in the last minute, and in Raph’s moment of blinding pain; Leo got a grip on Raph’s arm and threw the bulkier turtle over his shoulder and onto the floor.

Raph wheezed, air temporarily gone, but managed to spin around on his shell and knock Leo’s legs out. Leo went down, and Raph snaked his lock back around his brother’s neck. Leo had gotten an arm between his neck and Raph’s lock though, so they were stuck at a stalemate of pushing and pulling.

Suddenly, two pillows flew at them both and one landed home on Raph’s abused snout; forcing him to release Leo. Raph held a hand over his smarting face and glared at whoever had interrupted the fight.

Donnie and Mikey were crouching by the ruined pillow bed, white covering their eyes and Mikey growling deep in his throat. They were both on all fours, and clearly ready to fight.

Raph moved his hand up to cover his eyes and groaned, anger receding entirely; he’d forgotten there were twitchy, feral turtles to disturb instead of just their Sensei.

“Please tell me we didn’t just do that,” Leo muttered, and Raph peeked through his fingers to check where his brother was at. Leo was on his front, forehead flat against the carpet.

Raph sat up, wincing at the new soreness doting his body. “I’d be lying if I did.”

“*Watashi o fakku,* we were doing so well.”

“Damage control?” Raph asked over Donnie’s hissing. Now he felt bad, letting his embarrassment and temper get the better of him, like he always did, and possibly undoing work they’d done to reconnect with their siblings.

“Please.” Leo replied miserably.

“No fight!” Mikey shouted from behind Donnie, peeking around his brother to glare fiercely at Raph and Leo. “No fight!!”

Raph grimaced at his brothers’ expressions. “We’re not fighting-”

“Lie.” Donnie said viciously as he stood up, turning his head side to side as he sized up Raph. “You fighting, no lie!”

“Okay, so we were fighting, but just a little!”

“We’re just having a small disagreement over our, uh, sleeping positions,” Leo added, sitting up from his crouch. He smiled apologetically. “It’s just, um, something that happens sometimes, we fight a lot you see. But it wasn’t serious, I promise!”

“It’s mostly his fault,” Raph said, jabbing his thumb at Leo.

Leo spluttered, regaining his earlier frustration. “It was not!”

“You’re the one who’s lying!”

“SHUT UP!” Donnie suddenly shouted, startling Raph enough that he bit down the retort on his tongue. Donnie looked less freaked out, but had retained his pissed off glare. “Loud a-and ssst-stupid. Shut up! Silence in-in the nnn-now!”

“‘In the now’?” Leo whispered in confusion.

“I think he’s just grumpy about being awake,” Raph whispered back.

“Well that makes two of us,” Leo whispered in an annoyed tone, aiming a look at Raph.

Donnie grumbled something low and furious, and stalked back into his and Mikey’s room. Mikey remained for a moment, looking unimpressed with both of the elder turtles, before shaking his head and following after Donnie. Neither of them emerged again, and there was only a short amount of trills and chatter to be heard before silence settled again.

Leo broke it by standing up and dragging the blanket back to the ruined bed; kicking pillows into a new pile as he went. “I don’t know about you, but I’m going back to sleep.”

Raph considered things for a moment, whether or not to continue the fight or just let it go; eventually he shrugged to himself and got up to help put the bed back together. “Sounds good.”

A minute later, the bed was assembled as close to the original as they could manage, and the two brothers situated as far as possible from one another on either side. The silent agreement was not to go anywhere near the other, and remain like that until it was actually time to wake up.

Raph lay awake in the relative darkness of the nest, trying to convince his keyed up body to relax and go back to sleep. But the cool air prickled his exposed scales, and kept pulling him back to wakefulness. Raph tugged the shared blanket upwards, trying to cover his shoulders, but Leo yanked it back with a quiet hiss.
An actual hiss, without words or anything.

Raph turned over to face Leo's direction, outwards at the rest of the room, and found Leo with his eyes shut and breaths even. He was asleep, as far as Raph could tell, and hadn't noticed what he'd done.

“You fucking kidding me,” Raph muttered into the dark. Leo didn't respond, continuing to sleep. Raph rolled onto his shell and put an arm over his eyes, grumbling to himself. Great, now they were both doing it; that almost more embarrassing than him waking up wrapped around his brother.

That was kids' stuff, or at least turtle kid stuff. Hissing and chirping and all that shit wasn't something they did. They were both almost adults dammnit, they'd left that sort of stuff behind, back before puberty. But with Donnie and Mikey communicating almost purely in primal sounds... it was triggering them, or something like that; pulling buried whatever from the back of their minds.

Instincts. They were pulling buried instincts from the repressed portions of Raph and Leo's minds.

Funny and ironic, considering Raph usually was the guy who relied on his instincts, and here he was feeling uncomfortable with the new/old ones his brothers were stirring up.

Raph let his arm flop back to his side, staring up at the black ceiling above him. He'd never considered himself repressed of all things, but from the looks of things, he might just be that. Leo too.

Thinking deeper into the subject, Raph could count a number of moments that probably fell into the category of 'Repression' just off the top of his head. As stupid as he felt admitting it, even only to himself, there had always been things his body wanted to do, and he hadn't ever been able put a name to what those things were. Like a muscle twinge somewhere he hadn't stretched out in a long time.

Raph had only known his feral siblings for what, maybe just over a week? They were already starting to influence how he acted in such a short period, and it was happening to Leo too; for all their training and exposure to humanity, only so much of their original nature could be erased apparently.

“Well that's not fucking ominous or anything,” Raph said under his breath, turning on his side to face the stone wall. He firmly tamped down on any thought following that last one, and shut his eyes; determined to go back to sleep and stop thinking about unsettling things.

In the dusty smelling dark of his sibling's nest, Raph refused to let himself wonder about what else was hiding inside his mind, and how much the effects of his siblings might draw out.

Leo sighed, leaning back against the tree trunk behind him. The midday sun was hot, raising his internal temperature to the perfect level, and pleasantly accompanied by a breeze that swept through the mini forest around him. His three brothers were scattered not far from his position on the edge of the tree line, each occupied by something quiet and restful.

A few hours after the ruckus he and Raph had caused, Mikey had prodded them awake for breakfast, chirping enthusiastically; Donnie seemed to have forgiven them for the sudden waking earlier that
morning, but he was clearly still grumpy about the interruption during his sleep. Leo had to agree, because not only had Raph not owned up to starting the fight in the first place, but he’d pretended like it’d never happened.

Not unusual for them, Leo and Raph fought often over lots of small things; spats made up half of their daily conversation, and the size of those spats varied wildly. Sometimes the fights lasted only minutes; sometimes the fights went on for hours. A lot of the time, there was no clear winner, and neither of them apologized.

Leo was positive he was in the right this time around, but he’d decided to be the bigger man and let the fight rest. No point in unnecessarily stressing out their younger siblings, since the petty dispute didn’t really mean anything.

Leo was still right though.

After they’d all eaten, apples and bananas with a side of canned tuna, Mikey had suggested they show Raph the ‘food place’. It’d taken a bit of translation from Donnie, but Leo had relayed to Raph that their siblings wanted to show him the pond and forest Leo had told him about.

Not a bad way to spend a chunk of the day, clear skies above and earthy smelling woods surrounding them; not a human in sight.

Leo shut his eyes and sighed contentedly, listening to the wind and quiet conversation a few feet from him. Donnie and Raph were talking, but it was mostly Donnie translating for Mikey, rather than adding to the conversation himself. All three turtles were quietly engaged by both conversation, and by whatever activity they’d brought with them. Donnie was sketching, like Raph was, and Mikey was doing… something with string.

Leo opened his eyes briefly to check on them all, noting each of their positions. Raph was closer to Donnie, without his gear for once and just his red mask hanging around his neck, plus the one bracelet Mikey had made for him. Their smallest brother was a bit further away, but chattering with Raph/Donnie regardless.

Leo hadn’t paid much attention to the thread of talk; he’d been meditating on and off, enjoying the sunlight while he could before it was back into the tunnels. Before spending time with his siblings, he would have thought it might be like back home; where any sort of disruption from Raph would break Leo’s concentration and jolt him back to reality.

But with Raph preoccupied by mellow conversation, all three voices nearby low and relaxed, Leo found himself able to drift from his surroundings easily. Despite the momentary chaos that morning, the afternoon looked like it would be smooth sailing.

Leo was almost always on guard, because a ninja was never caught unaware, and he was proud of that; of his wariness and ability to always see a threat coming his way. However, the combination of warm sun and soothing drone of conversation, Leo felt his body uncoil itself. With the scent of grass and water clouding his senses, he could barely smell the city around them; it was like they’d gone to a different planet, one where he didn’t need to constantly watch his back and could just… unwind.

Even if the premise had been negative, Leo had to appreciate his semi-vacation. He didn’t remember the last time he spent so long between bouts of training. He might be a bit sore when he started again, but he supposed that everyone needed a break once in a while. Raph took enough of them after all, and he was still just as fit as Leo; a few days of rest wouldn’t hurt Leo’s regimen too much.

And besides, he was bonding with his estranged siblings; training could wait until that was finished.
Leo opened his eyes to check on said siblings, and found all three paused in mid conversation and still as stone. Leo sat up, bringing all five of his senses back to complete awareness.

Raph opened his mouth to say something, but Donnie shushed him. The tallest turtle was staring intently at a clump of bushes, steadily raising his body into a running position on all fours. Mikey was crouched next to Raph, tense and utterly silent. All of their former activities abandoned where they lay.

Was it a human? Were they in danger? Leo silently drew his legs underneath himself and stood up; readying himself in case he needed to defend them. Donnie shot him a look though, and held a finger to his lips for continued quiet.

Donnie crept forwards, moving with predatory grace towards the thick underbrush of the forest. Leo twitched his hands, wishing he had his swords, or at least his kunai; this could be Footclan soldiers, come to capture and kill them all. And Leo and Raph would have led them here, straight to their siblings’ territory.

Donnie melted into the forest, his green form disappearing completely from sight. Leo took a moment away from the adrenaline flooding his system, to be impressed with just how skilled his brother was at hiding; totally untrained, and yet Donnie had slipped completely out of Leo’s sight. It’d taken Leo years to master that, under strict training too, and yet Donnie did it with pure talent. Incredible.

They all waited, for what Leo wasn’t sure because he’d missed whatever led up to this; Raph prepared for an attack like Leo, and Mikey crouching low to the ground and constantly turning his ear ducts towards where Donnie had gone.

Leo was about to go after Donnie, because the eerie stillness was too much to stand any longer, when there was an explosion of movement deep within the bushes and a high pitched shriek.

Leo and Raph simultaneously jumped into a defense position, creating a wall between whatever was in there and Mikey. Both of them jolted as something brown came pelting out of the bushes, Donnie in hot pursuit.

Mikey burst out from between Raph and Leo’s legs, cutting the rabbit off and steering it away from the safety of the woods. Donnie’s four limbs moved in perfect tandem as he switched directions, keeping pace with the terrified animal. In a single blink, Donnie grasped the rabbit’s outstretched back leg and slammed it into the ground.

Leo swore he could hear the leg break, the rabbit screaming an awful wail as it did. Donnie kept his grip of the broken leg, and swung the rabbit in a swift arc to again slam it against the ground. The creature twitched pitifully, making feeble sounds as blood seeped from its mouth.

Leo felt genuine horror as his brother grasped the head and underbelly of the rabbit, bending the animal so its neck was exposed. Donnie opened his mouth and sunk his teeth into the soft brown fur, tearing the throat out as he pulled away.

The rabbit stopped twitching, and Donnie spat a wad of bloody flesh and fur onto the grass.

Donnie calmly wiped away the worst of the blood on his chin as Mikey went over to him, trilling happily at his brother.

Leo vaguely heard Raph dry heaving beside him, and he shut his eyes; the image of Donnie killing the small animal so… so savagely imprinted on the back of his eyelids.
“Oh my god,” Raph rasped, and Leo heard him spitting onto the grass.

“They eat frogs too,” Leo said, adding his hands to cover his eyes. “Completely raw and still breathing.”

“Oh my god.”

Leo sighed, feeling the shock already draining away. Honestly, at this point, he should really just expect this sort of thing from his siblings.

He opened his eyes, peeking through his four fingers, and caught sight of Donnie and Mikey gutting the rabbit, using the knife Donnie had been with them. As the green filled stomach and intestines of the rabbit spilled out onto the grass, Leo covered his eyes again.

It was apparent to Leo now, that his siblings were more than just scavengers.

“I understand now, why you wanted those pizzas,” Raph said to Leo, watching his younger brothers steadily tear apart the rabbit’s corpse. Donnie broke the rib cage and handed half to Mikey, who immediately started stripping the meat away with his teeth.

A little gore didn’t unsettle Raph; after all he’d been in more than a few fights and dealt out his fair share of damage onto human and alien opponents. But… small animals though. They always got him, without fail.

Let it never be known that watching Bambi for the first time, when he was thirteen, made him cry for a solid ten minutes.

Seeing his admittedly skilled hunter of a sibling bring down a rabbit might’ve been horrifying, but it was also admirable. Raph could probably do it too. Maybe.

Okay so he wouldn’t be able to, but no one else had to know that.

“At least they haven’t offered us any,” Leo replied, idly picking at the grass around him. He and Raph were sitting a comfortable distance away from their gory siblings. Leo looked up from his grass fiddling and grimaced. “Oh, nope, I spoke too soon.”

Raph grimaced as well, seeing the hind leg that Mikey was carrying over to them. Mikey held it out to them, kneeling to be on the same height level, and smiled with reddened teeth. “Here! Food, ‘sss good.”

Leo gently pushed the smaller turtle’s hands away, clearly struggling to smile. “No thanks Mikey, we’re not hungry, you and Donnie can have it to yourselves.”

Mikey turned his offering to Raph, and Raph leaned away from the severed limb as much as possible. “Really! It’s fine! We’re not hungry, I swear!”

“No?” Mikey asked, tilting his head in confusion.

“Uh, yep, no is the answer we’re giving, thanks Mikey, but no thanks,” Raph guided Mikey’s bloody hand away from his person, avoiding the fresher spots on his scales. Mikey shrugged and bit into the leg, taking a good chunk of off the still warm meat. Raph felt his stomach rebel as Mikey
wandered back to Donnie, crunching on the leg bone as he went.

“You know, he did the same thing to me, but with a frog,” Leo said, going back to tearing blades of grass out of the ground.

“How likely is it that April would bring us another pizza?” Raph asked, feeling mildly desperate as he watched Donnie finish skinning the last parts of the rabbit.

“Not very.”

“Fuck.”

“Just a day and a half more.”

“Who says I have to stay?”

“Would you really abandon your brothers, after everything we’ve done to reconnect?”

“You’re full of shit, Leo.”

“Maybe, but no more than you, Raph.”

Raph glared at Leo, who kept his annoyingly indifferent expression. Then, Raph had an idea, a sly grin crept onto his face.

“I dare you to eat a bite.”

“What? No way.”

“Unless you’re too chicken, fearless,” Raph smirked, nudging Leo’s side.

“I’m not chicken, I’m sensible,” Leo said, crossing his arms and arching an eye ridge.

Raph nudged Leo harder with his elbow, pointing at their feasting siblings. “C’mon, isn’t this whole thing about bonding? You should try the local cuisine.”

“I’m not going to poison myself just because you’d think it was funny.”

“Sounds like you’re clucking.”

“Wha-that doesn’t even make sense!”

“Chiiiiicken.”

“Raph-!”

“Chiiiiiiicken!”

“I swear Raph, if you say that one more time…” Leo ground out, visibly near his limit; which was right where Raph wanted him to be.

Raph leaned in close, getting right in Leo’s face with a taunting grin, and carefully sounded out, “Cluck. Cluck.”

“FINE!” Leo snapped, standing up ram-rod straight and marching away from Raph; heading right for the pair of befuddled turtles with the rabbit meat. “I’ll show you who’s a chicken!”
Raph could barely contain his shaking, laughter trying to burst out of him as Leo held out his hand to take the leg Mikey had offered them. Leo turned back to face Raph, holding up the rabbit leg pointedly, and stuck the larger end into his mouth; taking a large bite off the already half gone meat.

Immediately, Leo clearly regretted his choice. He dropped the leg, Mikey catching it just before it hit the ground.

“Ah, ah, ah! You gotta swallow it, or it don’t count!” Raph warned as Leo’s expression twisted into disgust. Leo glared at him, holding his hands over his mouth and looking greener than usual. Raph grinned, gesturing for Leo to get on with it.

Leo swallowed, and a full body shudder went through him.

Raph finally lost control, and practically fell over laughing. “Oh my GOD, I didn’t think you’d actually do it, you fucking idiot! Ha ha, holy fuck!”

Leo didn’t spare another glance at Raph, running for the bushes to retch into the foliage. Mikey sniffed at the leg, obviously wondering why Leo was so sick from it. Raph finally gave up staying sitting, and just fell onto the grass, his sides hurting with each gasp of laughter.

Donnie sat exactly where he’d stopped a few minutes back, after the rabbit chase, and continued to calmly eat his meal. From Donnie’s twitching lips, Raph could tell his brother thought this was just as funny as he did.

Raph was definitely telling April about this later, she’d get a kick out of it.

When Leo finally came back to sit down, more so slumping that sitting, Raph couldn’t help but be set off into another round of laughter; Leo just looked so miserable. It was absolutely hilarious.

The promise of retribution in Leo’s eyes made it all the sweeter.

Donnie scrapped the marrow of the small-fast-long-eared creature’s rib, enjoying the sweetness mixing with the after taste of meat. Such a rare chance to have something fresh and warm was to be savoried, and savoring he was.

Usually, he and Mikey couldn’t stay so long outside the tunnels, and that made hunting a special event. But Donnie had found a fresh human scent trail and a new structure of metal set up, which meant that any human that could have shown up had already come and gone. There was always many days between each visit, and the safest times to be in the green place were when the humans had just left.

How lucky he’d been to catch the smell of prey nearby, the meat would sustain him and Mikey for the rest of the day and some of the night; the warmth settled comfortably in his gut, and renewed energy spreading through his body. Donnie always felt best after a live meal, the small creatures giving him and Mikey more energy than the things humans threw out.

Donnie finished the rib bone off, dropping it into the pile of cleaned off bits. That was the last one of his share, and Mikey was finishing his last bone as well. Good thing Lee-oh and Raf hadn’t wanted any, as vaguely offensive as that had been, since one creature only supplied enough food for two turtles; not four.
Donnie lay down languidly, stretching out on his front and propping himself up with his elbows. His hands were covered in blood, and sticky because of that. Easily enough fixed.

Donnie started licking off the worst spots, his claws and finger tips, working his way up. The salty tang was nice, but he had to stop once and a while to spit out stray hairs stuck onto his scales. When his hands were as clean as he wanted, he switched to rubbing spittle onto his mouth and cheeks to get the gore off of those places.

Donnie stopped mid rub when he noticed that Mikey was staring off into space and not cleaning himself up. Donnie reached up, poking his brother’s shoulder. *Clean self now food gone is time for clean*

_Have to?*_ Mikey whined, leaning out of Donnie’s reach.

*Yes, or not allowed in sleeping place no dirty turtles allowed, only clean small-precious-brothers, Donnie poked Mikey’s thigh, indicating the spots of red grime there. Clean self, no blood rot filth allowed in nest, makes for bad growth black-green-white mold, not safe so clean self now Mikey*

_Fine fine fine,* Mikey pouted, starting to lick away at his own messy hands. Donnie settled back into his own cleaning, satisfied that Mikey was listening.

With his hands and face clean once more, Donnie opted to go find something else to add to their meal. The yellow flower plants were still growing thick nearby, their numbers increasing every time the sun rose, so Donnie decided on them.

Donnie left Mikey back by the pile of bones, pelt, and not tasty internal bits, moving to the area further from the pond. Donnie pulled leaves from the ground, crunching the greens as he took a moment to observe the woodland around him.

*Lee-oh and Raf were still apart from them, Lee-oh pouting over the trick Raf had pulled and Raf continuing to look smug about the trick.*

Donnie was with Raf on that, it was a very funny trick. Donnie knew Lee-oh wouldn’t enjoy eating the _small-fast-long-eared_ creature, but he hadn’t bothered to stop the other turtle anyways. Because Lee-oh reacted so expressively, and Donnie might still harbor a grudge against the turtle.

A diminishing one of course, but a grudge regardless.

Chirping distracted Donnie from his thoughts, as well as Mikey’s skull bumping into his shell. Donnie turned his head, and found his brother wiggling back and forth, chirping, _Play time yes please fun things running things play-fighting things please?_

Donnie swallowed his bite of leaf, considering the idea and how much energy he was willing to expend, and then grinned. *Yes, me you us play*

=YES, Mikey trilled, bouncing away as Donnie got up from his sitting position. Mikey rounded on Donnie, all four limbs spread out and claws gripping the ground. He growled playfully, practically shaking with excitement.

Donnie got into the same position, still taller than Mikey even like this, and growled back; adding a snap of teeth for good measure. Mikey rushed him, trying to hop on top of Donnie’s shell, but Donnie grabbed him by the sternum and turned the jump into a roll.

They tumbled down the slight incline, rolling towards the swampy area below, and only broke apart once they’d rolled five times in a tangle. Mikey dashed around Donnie, trying to get into his blind
side, but Donnie kept up with his brother’s movements and Mikey couldn’t get a clear opening.

Mikey hissed, stopping his run and facing down his older brother. Donnie hissed back, and took a turn charging. Donnie caught Mikey by the shoulders, and tried to flip his brother onto his shell. He succeeded, but Mikey wrapped his arms around Donnie so the taller turtle fell as well. They pushed and pulled for a few moments; until Donnie took the opportunity to tickle underneath Mikey’s raised arms.

Mikey shrieked, and released his hold on Donnie. *No fair no fair no tickles! Not allowed!*

*Is fair all fair when playing*, Donnie snickered as he jumped away from Mikey, waiting for his brother to regain footing.

Mikey scowled, but the scowl gave way to a mischievous grin as he took another try at tackling Donnie. This time however, Mikey didn’t try to get above Donnie, but instead slid underneath Donnie and lifted him upwards.

Mikey threw Donnie sideways, using all his strength in the push, and toppled his brother despite their height difference. Donnie had only a moment to recover before Mikey did it again, throwing his smaller body into a roll that carried them both towards the pond.

Donnie felt slick mud underneath his shell, and while he hadn’t wanted to take another trip to the waterfall that day, he supposed he could give it his all now that he was dirty anyways.

Donnie grasped Mikey around the middle, and hefted him up into the air. Carrying his smaller, though still heavy, brother into the water; Donnie walked until it was deep enough and then dunked his wriggling, laughter shrieking brother into the pond.

Mikey came back up with a splutter and grin, grabbing Donnie’s arms and tugging him into the water as well.

Donnie let him, because play fighting was only fun if you let the other person get a win as well.

Leo watched with interest as his feral siblings play in the water, continuing the mock fight they’d suddenly started a few minutes ago. At first, Leo had been worried since he’d never seen them do that before, but he’d relaxed when he realized just what they were doing.

Very unlike how they usually swam, Donnie and Mikey were making as many splashes as they could in an effort to soak the other further. Or something along those lines. It looked like a regular water fight to Leo, but it might be something different from their perspective.

As he observed his siblings’ fun, an idea took root in Leo’s mind. He smiled slyly, casting a glance at Raph about ten feet from him. Leo’s brother was occupied and not paying attention to him, focusing solely on their brothers in the pond.

Getting to his feet, Leo crept across the grounds to get close to Raph. His hot-head brother was idly tapping his pencil against his pad of papers, a blurry sketch of a mutant turtle half done on the page. When Leo grabbed Raph around his plastron, the papers and pencil went flying.

“Leo-! What the hell, let go of me!” Raph shouted, trying to twist free of Leo’s grip.
“Nope,” Leo answered, moving quickly so Raph couldn’t get away.

Leo got his brother up onto his shoulder, by some small miracle, and started running for the pond’s edge. Raph kicked and punched Leo best he could, but it didn’t amount to much bent over like he was, as Leo drew near the water.

“LET ME GO- PUT ME DOWN- FUCKING HELL LEO YOU BETTER NOT-!”

“REVENGE!!” Leo shouted, stumbling into the water and body slamming Raph into the pond. The massive splash from both of them disrupted that whole side of pond, mud and silt flying up from the bottom of the pond and clouding everything.

Raph shoved Leo off of him, and they both surfaced in the waist deep water. Leo took one look at Raph, and burst out laughing; his brother had three lily pads tangled around his shoulders, and some sort of pond weed stuck to his head.

Raph tore the plants off his body, and faced Leo with hunched shoulders and a furious look.

Leo kept laughing, gasping between his words. “T-To be fair… you did make me… eat r-raw rabbit.”

Raph grinned, but it wasn’t a friendly grin, it was a fight me grin. “That so? Well, let’s even the score again, shall we?”

Raph got a single step in, right before Mikey burst out of the water and tackled him. Raph stayed standing only for a second, before Mikey’s weight unbalanced him too much and they went toppling backwards with another huge splash.

Just outside the range of splashing, Donnie raised himself out of the water with a handful of mud, a smirk spreading across his face. Leo backed up, raising his hands. “Wait, wait Donnie, c’mon don’t do this- ACK!”

The ball of packed mud exploded onto Leo’s plastron, the sopping soil sticking to him on impact. With Raph and Mikey still thrashing in the water, Mikey giving the same treatment of a mud facial to Raph, and Donnie grinning with clear challenge at him, Leo felt himself getting caught up in the swing of things.

“You wanna play?” Leo reached down into the water, pulling out a wad of mud for himself and not caring he was getting filthy. He rolled it between his hands, grinning back at Donnie. “Let’s play then.”

The following water fight was safe to say, absolutely epic.

April was nibbling on her pencil’s eraser, doing a review for her history quiz the next day, when her phone buzzed with a call. She’d finally remembered to switch it to vibrate, instead of the outrageously loud ring tone she’d had before.

April slid the phone open, accepting the call and holding it up to her ear. She leaned back in her chair as the line opened. “Hello, April speaking.”
“Hey April, its Leo again.”

April held back a sigh, tucking her pencil behind her ear; this could be a long conversation. “Hey, I guess you’ve still got that phone you stole. Unless you stole another one.”

“No, it’s still the same one. It’s got just a little battery life left, and whoever owned it hasn’t canceled the number yet. So. We’re good for at least the rest of the today.”

“Any particular reason you’re calling, again, in the middle of the afternoon?” April asked, checking the clock on the wall of the school library; two thirty, on the dot. Another hour of school then. “Because let me tell you, you guys have already exceeded the agreed amount I’d spend on pizzas this week, and no amount of sob story will make me give up my bus fare.”

“It’s not that, I just wanted to ask a favor, I swear.”

“Your favors usually cost me money.”

“Not this time, promise.”

“Fine, shoot your question, I’ve got studying to finish.”

“I’d just like to ask if you’d- hey! Donnie, no don’t touch, I’m busy-!”

April blinked, leaning away from the phone as the sound of scuffling exploded through the speakers. Muffled voices and what sounded like chirping rushed in a vocal blur, until a single voice took hold of the line again.

“Lo?”

“Uh, hi? Who’s this?” April asked, not recognizing the voice.

“Ap-Aprill?”

“Donnie? Why’re you on the phone?” April asked in confusion, not expecting the feral mutant’s presence on the phone line. “And it’s April, not Aprill, that sounds like a shrimp.”

“What. Wha’s a-sh-shreemp?”

“It’s a sort of shell-fish… wait, you don’t know what that is either… never mind. Why are you on the phone and not Leo?”

“Give it back Donnie!” Leo shouted somewhere on the other line, and more clicking filtered through the speakers. Probably Donnie talking to someone over there.

April took the phone away from her ear again as a hiss took over the speaker, turning into static on her end of the line. More shouting, mostly English, some of it whatever language Donnie and Mikey spoke. A moment later, trilled chirps and coos flooded April’s phone; high pitched and excited.

“Mikey?” April ventured.

“Pril! Pril! ‘lo ‘lo ‘ello!” Mikey exclaimed loudly into the speaker, making April wince. “’lo h-how you, you een ph-phooone?”

“Um, I’m not in it, I’m somewhere else,” April racked her brain trying to figure out how to explain this. “It’s like, um, do you know what a pipe is?”
“Pipe?”

“Those long metal things that carry water?”

“Oh! Yis yis yis!”

“It’s like that, with one person on one end, and another on the other end. Got it?”

“No…?”

April sighed, a smile forming on her lips. “Never mind, it doesn’t matter. Can you pass the phone to Leo please? I was talking with him still.”

“M’kay, bye ‘Pril!”

“Bye Mikey,” April said, giggling softly as the scuffling on the phone gained volume again. As strange as that conversation had been, it’d also been pretty darn cute.

“Hi, April? Its Raph, Leo’s a lil busy at the moment.”

“What’s he doing?”

“Trying and failing to keep a hold of Donnie. He’s pretty slippery.”

“Aren’t you guys ninjas?”

“Yeah, but they’re both covered in mud, so gripping is a little hard right now. Oh hey, you wanna know what I got him to do today?”

“DON’T YOU DARE, RAPH!”

“Enlighten me,” April said, smiling to herself at Leo’s distress in the background.

“I got the idiot to eat raw rabbit’s meat, it was fucking beautiful. He threw up and everything.”

“RAPH!!”

“Oh my god, that’s disgusting!” April laughed, putting a hand over her mouth to muffle her giggles. She was still in a library after all. “How did you manage that?”

“The fine art of shit talking.”

“You just kept calling me chicken! That’s not the fine art of anything!”

“You still did it!”

April put her head down against the study desk, shoulders shaking with muffled laughter. She’d never had siblings, but holy did they sound like trouble.

April kept her head against the table, letting her laughter finally die down while the phone on the other end exchanged hands again.

“April? Is-is Donnie again, ‘splain how ph-phone work. Leo not, Raph not.”

“Well, um, you know what a pipe is right?”

“Yes, yes do- NO MINE NOT LEO’S TURN-!” Donnie’s shouting was cut off by Leo grabbing the
phone from him again, the eldest turtle panting for breath as he finally held the cellular device again. “Hey April, really sorry about that, my siblings are being really annoying right now.”

“ Fucking deserve it!”

“I’m on the phone Raph; lay off for just a minute!” Leo yelled, aiming his voice away from the phone so it didn’t deafen April, which she appreciated. “Okay so before someone steals and possibly breaks the phone, the favor I wanted to ask was you heading down to the lair to tell Sensei what’s happening. I’ve been away for two days, and Raph spent the night here. He needs to know too that we’re both going to be here another day still. Could you do that for me?”

“Snrk, only because this was so entertaining to listen to,” April giggled, imagining Leo biting into a piece of raw meat. “You four doing alright? Things sounded kinda grim last time I checked in.”

“I think we’re doing pretty great right now. we’d be better though if someone would STOP TRYING TO STEAL THE PHONE I’M USING, DONNIE GET OFF OF ME-”

April had to hang up the phone, only saying a quick goodbye before doing so, because she was laughing too hard and the librarian had come to tell her off for it.

Chapter End Notes

Not as long as I’d hoped, but I’m already up to late as it is, and I have my first day of work tomorrow. (God oh god oh god JOB)
((I’m petrified, even more than I am of the reactions to my horrible copy+paste Japanese))

Anyways, here’s what Leo’s and Raph were saying:

I am not-!

fuck!

it is too early for this

i’m going to take your sais and shove them up your asshole.

eat a dick and choke

fuck you!

no, fuck you!

fuck me.

( ；‘Д ‘) Everything above was almost definitely translated wrong, but I acknowledge this already, pls be gentle with me over this.

I know I said this arc would be over, but alas, I didn’t have enough time to cram it all
into one chapter/thought the next one would be more meaningful as a stand-alone.

You all must be so impatient, I'm so sorry. I have the next chapter already plotted out, and I'll start on it on Thursday afternoon, after I'm done my third round of swim instructor training. I want to move forwards too, but there was just too much opportunity for sibling shenanigans this chapter...

Yeah, that's about it. Um, though, I'd like to recommend a playlist I made, specifically for April... because I love her character when she's written right, and I did one based off of how I'd like to present her in this AU. Strong, independent, and character development that sticks for more than one episode.  
( http://8tracks.com/incorrectgardening/not-a-token-girl )

So yeah, see you all hopefully.... monday? maybe??? I have a convention this weekend, and time planned with my partner sooooo... Yeah, I'll try though.

Have a nice day/evening everyone, sorry for the rambling. 珪(´ ` ; )珪
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Interlude...

Chapter Notes

... because I'm a shit author that can't tell where she's going right now.

Hey folks, I'm incapable of expressing how damn sorry I am. I had the WORST set of weeks, the last two, and it sent me into... well... not a nice place. I'm on the right track again though! I've broken the writer's block, by maybe kinda perhaps starting yet another series... um, yeah. Sorry in general you know.

I'm working on the actual final bit for this arc, but I ended up feeling so guilty about not updating that I seperated this bit from the chapter to post here. Its really just a continuation from the last one anyways, so its not TOO out of the way for the plotline. Erm. SO, enjoy this short chapter of filler fluff, because the real story isn't done yet and I only just got my mojo back. I'm hoping this chapter sates your need for more story, I've been staring angrily at it for three weeks now.

Again, SO SORRY.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

In the end, between Donnie and Lee-oh, they broke the phone.

Donnie was disappointed; he really did want to learn how it worked. If Lee-oh had just let him talk to Aprill a little longer, maybe she would have explained...

No, her name was April, not Aprill, she’d said so.

Did that mean Donnie had been pronouncing other names incorrectly? Perhaps he would ask the other turtles later. After their wash.

Donnie checked on each of his companions, noting their behaviour and current mood. Raf and Mikey were still play fighting, though to a lesser extent than they had been back in the pond; mostly just pushing and shoving, their interactions permeated with laughter and good humor. Raf might have been upset at first for being thrown into the water, but that had quickly worn off. He’d gotten just as dirty as the rest of them, and was loose with his posture and words now.

Relaxed. Raf looked relaxed. Same as Lee-oh, who was walking at the midpoint of their group; Raf and Mikey were at the front, their steps speeding up and slowing down without warning, while Donnie and Lee-oh walked at a steady pace.
Donnie rolled his shoulders, stretching the warmed muscles there. He felt relaxed as well, despite how wound up he’d been the last few days. Donnie was almost completely comfortable, even though his thoughts would whisper to be careful, be wary, now and again.

Donnie’s eyes flickered over to Lee-oh again, watching the turtle as he walked. Beyond the fight that morning, Lee-oh and Raf hadn’t shown any sort of meaningful aggressive behaviour. They’d both been calm, and actually rather playful. A very definitive change from how the human-speaking turtles had been before.

Donnie… he liked it. It was nice, having two other turtles to talk and spend time with. He loved Mikey, more than anyone or anything, but sometimes Donnie needed a break from his hyper active and occasionally foolish brother.

Lee-oh and Raf could be foolish as well it seemed, but in different ways. When they weren’t being surly, or confusing, or fighting over something… Donnie’s maybe-kin were enjoyable to be around.

Though… the feeling of the new scar was still present whenever Donnie moved his arm; he scratched absently at it, feeling the raised flesh underneath his claws. It’d hurt, and it was a firm reminder of how dangerous the other turtles could be.

Donnie could still recall the moment Mikey was flattened under Lee-oh and Raf’s assault; could still recall the exact feeling of Lee-oh beating him into the ground…

Why had they been fighting anyways, those two brothers? It’d come out of nowhere, escalating so quickly, and Donnie and Mikey had been given no explanation. Apologies yes, but not reasons.

Donnie was scrutinizing the turtle nearest to him, when Lee-oh noticed Donnie’s stare, and slowed his walk to be closer. “What is it, Donnie?”

Donnie took a brief moment to feel proud of himself, for fully understanding that question, before answering. “Jus’ th-thinking.”

Lee-oh seemed unconvinced. “What about?”

How did he put that into human words, his questions and remaining trepidations? Donnie mulled over the pieces of language he’d learned, and tried to figure out how to organize his reply so Lee-oh would understand. “…ffight. Fighting that you… an’ Raf did. Why?”

“This morning? That was nothing, I ------ you ----------- that,” Lee-oh replied. His misunderstanding of Donnie, and Donnie’s own lack understanding Lee-oh’s words, made Donnie click in frustration four times before he tried again.

“No. No! S-Second oldest one... bad one. Real-Really bad one.”

Understanding, finally, alights Lee-oh’s expression; which then fell slightly as he turned his eyes to stare at the stones beneath their feet. Lee-oh looked guilty, and for the first time, Donnie felt bad for making him look like that.

Lee-oh didn’t look at Donnie as he spoke, but they were walking close enough Donnie could hear fine. “Someone, a human, tried to hurt me and Raf; in our… territory. And we ---- the fight, even if we ------- with our lives. I was… angry. And it had ------- to do with you, but I took it out on you ---- ---. I was. Upset, and… scared. For all of us. ------ though, I was too ------- to ----- defeat.”

Donnie tilted his head, putting the sentence through translation. “Pri-dih-full?”
“Yeah, I could-- ----- my own -----, which means I was too prideful,” Lee-oh said as he put a hand over his slashed cheek, fingers covering the twin marks from sight. “We all ---- for that. And I’m sorry for -------- it, the fight. I’m going to try ----- better in the -----, and not fall back in—that ---- of -- ----.”

So they’d fought someone, and lost badly; and then Lee-oh hadn’t been able to accept it. That wasn’t much excuse, but… it was a reason at least, for Lee-oh and Raf’s actions. Their scared-angry-HURT-fighting-fight-me scents should have tipped Donnie and Mikey off, but they’d thought those feelings wouldn’t be turned on them.

They’d been wrong of course, but now… Donnie wasn’t as angry about it. Because he understood how a human threatening you, in your own territory no less, could shake you; making you say and do things you didn’t mean.

Back when he and Mikey were small and vulnerable… there had been a time, after Donnie had gotten lost in the spiraling human world above, that Donnie had been cruel to Mikey. Lashing out because he was too confused to keep straight the waking and sleeping worlds, and saying… saying some truly harsh things when Mikey tried to help him.

It was a bad part of their lives, that forever feeling while. Donnie didn’t miss that time.

Guilt and fear, those were things he could understand, especially when it concerned family.

“Who. Who wassss… human, the human?” Donnie asked, wondering who was it that would’ve tried to attack the other set of brothers; both of them so deadly and intimidating in a fight. They even smelled like strong males, it would be stupid to challenge them recklessly.

“Shredder, someone who hurt our father ------ a long time ---. He came here to kill us, and get ------- on ------,” Lee-oh explained, dropping his hand and narrowing his eyes with each word. Whoever this human was, they’d attracted a lot of anger from Lee-oh. “He’ll try again, soon, but we won’t let him hurt you, or Mikey. I promise.”

Lee-oh promised a lot of things, and hadn’t kept some of those promises. Donnie hoped though, that this was one he’d keep.

“…I forgive you,” Donnie said suddenly, startling himself as the words left his mouth.

Lee-oh’s head whipped around, his feet stumbling as he did. They both stalled in the tunnel, staring at one another as their siblings kept going. Lee-oh swallowed, still looking shocked, and his voice was unusually nervous as he spoke. “Really…? You do?”

The warm feeling, the one that’d taken the place of the missing feeling, fluttered in Donnie’s chest. The cautious hope in Lee-oh’s eyes was unfamiliar, and it made him seem so much younger than he acted.

“Yeah. I do.” Donnie said, feeling light headed somehow, as the warmth fluttered again. He reached out, and put a hand on Lee-oh’s muddy shoulder. “I forgive you, for the fight, a-and the hurt.”

Lee-oh’s eyes flickered around at the injuries Donnie still carried, put there by his own hands, and though he seemed sad about them still, he smiled lopsidedly. The slashes on his cheek crinkled, the red standing out on the green scales, and Lee-oh looked happier than Donnie had ever seen him.

“Oh. Thanks, thanks so much,” Lee-oh said, the other side of his smile creeping upwards as well. “I’m glad. I’m really, really glad you forgive me.”
Donnie frowned, noticing **Lee-oh**’s rapid blinking. He moved his extended hand up to **Lee-oh**’s cheek, and brushed once underneath the scarred eye socket. “Crying?”

**Lee-oh** didn’t jerk away like Donnie expected him to, continuing to blink mist away instead. Something was going on in **Lee-oh**’s head at that moment, and for the life of him Donnie couldn’t guess what. Finally, after an extended heartbeat, **Lee-oh** spoke again.

“No. Well. Maybe just a little,” **Lee-oh** laughed, rubbing a palm across his left eye. He chuckled again, grinning sheepishly at Donnie. “I’m just. Kinda -------- right now. You came out of -------- with that one.”

Donnie huffed, smiling back. **Lee-oh** acted so stoic, like **Raf** tried to, but there were real emotions hiding underneath his scales. Donnie patted **Lee-oh**’s shell comfortingly; same as how he treated Mikey when he was crying. **Lee-oh** smiled again, the single escaped tear being wiped away as he did.

“My! What’s the ---- up?” **Raf** bellowed down the tunnel, making both turtles look over. **Raf** was in the middling of holding onto a struggling Mikey by the arm, the slimmer turtle trying to drag them both further into the tunnels. “I’m fucking ------- and Mikey’s gett--- -------. Can we please hurry up?”

Donnie laughed as Mikey succeeded in dragging **Raf** forwards by three long steps, **Raf** almost toppling as his feet skidded on the stone. **Lee-oh** laughed as well, and started talking with **Raf** as he went to catch up with their siblings.

**Donnie lingered for a moment, watching all three turtles interact without him, before starting after the group as well. They really did need a wash, the mud had long since dried onto their scales, and Mikey was still running high from the big play fight they’d all had earlier. If they didn’t want the smallest turtle to start getting really annoying, they’d best do as he wanted.**

**Mikey released** **Raf** suddenly, dropping the other turtle in favor of bouncing up to Donnie. **Lee-oh** and **Raf** glanced behind only once, before continuing their conversation as they went. Donnie lifted his arm and slung it over Mikey’s shoulders, letting his small and filthy brother tuck himself against Donnie’s side.

**Mikey was vibrating with energy and purrs, happiness radiating from every bit of his muddy body. Donnie chuckled, bonking their foreheads together and purring right back.**

*Happy happy, you pleased-content veeeeeery happy yes? Reason what?* Mikey asked, his clicking trills slightly warbled from the purring.

*Nothing just because,* Donnie said, pretending to not be smiling as he did.

*Lies happy for reason why happy so happy,* Mikey persisted, looking up and down at Donnie, and then glancing over at the other pair of turtles. He must have spotted **Lee-oh**’s grin and own happy expression, because Mikey lit up and doubled the volume of his purrs. *OH! YES! Wonderful happy the-absolute-best! Forgiving good great fantastic!* Mikey wrapped his arms around Donnie’s stomach, making them both stumble as he clung to his brother. Donnie laughed though, and hugged Mikey back.

*Yes forgiven, is forgiven,* **Lee-oh** explained *why fighting why hurting me you us and I forgave him,* Donnie said, trying to get his words heard over Mikey’s purrs.

*No more fighting-grudges?* Mikey asked hopefully.
No more fighting-grudges, Donnie agreed, leaning his snout down against Mikey’s and rubbing their scales together.

Mikey wordlessly exclaimed his happiness, shoving his snout against Donnie’s again before dashing off to hug Lee-oh from behind. The startled turtles up ahead made a lot of fuss, surprised by Mikey’s assault of affection.

Donnie laughed, the warm feeling in his chest flaring brightly as he trotted to catch up to the others.

For Mikey honestly, the funniest thing to have happened all day was Raf’s reaction to the washing flow. The bigger turtle had been just as reactive as Lee-oh, and made the too cold washing more than worth it. Mikey did not like taking washes, but if he didn’t, Donnie would scold him for tracking dirt into their sleeping spot. Raf, according to him, didn’t like taking washes either. Perhaps together they could one day escape washes and scolding brothers, and not have to deal with either ever again.

Though, for that to happen, that would mean no more Donnie or Lee-oh, and nothing was worth that.

Mikey discarded the thought, letting it fade away like the many other frantic ones that popped in and out of his head all the time. No point in thinking on that, since for that thought to come true it would be without their precious siblings.

Mikey huffed, rolling onto his back at staring at the arching ceiling above him. If he was thinking about things like that, it meant he was truly and completely bored.

Having more turtles was supposed to mean more fun things! More playing and games and wonderful exciting adventures! But when they’d come back to the nest, Lee-oh and Raf had sat down, and hadn’t done anything else in forever.

Mikey peered at the other two turtles, kneeling side by side near the edge of the nest; they weren’t talking, weren’t twitching, and didn’t look like they were even breathing! Mikey had tried hard to understand what Lee-oh had said about this activity, but he couldn’t make the words form in actual words.

Donnie hadn’t been any help, already preoccupied with his clever things and unresponsive to even Mikey’s best attempts. So now, Mikey was alone and bored and so, so tired of waiting for something to happen.

He’d already had a nap, back in the soft green sunning spot where they’d all gotten warm again, so he couldn’t go to sleep and wait for things to happen again. Donnie had told him to be quiet, and so had the other turtles, so he couldn’t make the music box work either or sing to himself. And! He’d run out of ideas for more bracelets, so he couldn’t even do that!

Mikey growled quietly, flopping back onto his front. He didn’t want to leave the nest, not when there was a chance something would happen when he was gone looking for fun things. But this was no good either, waiting for the others to do stuff again; it was boring, boring, boring.

How to make it un-boring though… that was one of his questions.

The other question was how much trouble he was willing to be in.
Mikey looked around his home, checking each of his noisier possessions. The wind up clever thing, that was fuzzy and made noises with metal? No, it only sat in place and made sounds; not enough. His biggest ball of ribbons and string? No, too quiet and easily ignored.

Mikey’s eyes alighted on one toy, pushed off to the side in its cubby hole for safe keeping. It was a gift from Donnie, at least three turns of seasons old, and was made for chasing away rats in an entertaining way.

Mikey crept over to it, keeping his steps light and undisruptive. No one noticed, and he pulled the toy from its spot. It had a thin layer of dust, but no spiders had come to call it home yet; it hadn’t been too, too long since Mikey had used it. He checked the moving parts, making sure they still spun, and then turned it on.

The front of the toy whined at the lightening inside it started moving, the lights blinking green and yellow; that meant it had enough charge left for at least a little while. No need for new energy yet, Mikey could get lots of use out of what was already inside it.

Mikey picked up its controller, flicking it on as well. Both sets of lights on each clever thing blinked green, ready for play.

Mikey set it down, and silently scrambled back across the nest to hide up on the highest ledges. He perched himself in his favorite ceiling corner, a nook in the arch ways that fit him just right. This was the best vantage point in the whole nest, and it had him hidden from the other three turtles.

Mikey giggled to himself, pushing the knobs on the clever thing to make its counterpart begin moving.

Mikey watched the mobile clever thing rove across the ground, bumping over raised bits of floor fabric. Mikey couldn’t hear from so far away, but the small toy would be humming with lightening now, its extended metal bits charged up and ready for battle against rats.

Though this time, Mikey’s prey was turtles.

Cackling, Mikey sped up his toy and aimed it for Lee-oh’s perfectly still form.

Leo heard something whirring nearby him, but he kept his eyes shut and tried to keep meditating. He and Raph had skipped so many training sessions recently, it was important that they at least continue to meditate; their Sensei would be disappointed if they did nothing but goof off.

The whirring got louder, accompanied by shuffling on the carpets; not footsteps though, which confused Leo.

Reluctantly, Leo opened his eyes and turned to look for the source of disruption. He blinked in surprise when a toy truck came rolling up to him, scratched up blue coloring and a silver mesh grid stretching around its front. It was small and worn looking, but whirred merrily away as it drove towards Leo.

“Uh, hi there,” Leo said to it, looking around for the driver of the motorized toy. “I’m guessing you belong to one of my brothers?”

The truck came closer, almost touching his thigh. Leo peered down at it, examining the modifications.
clearly done by Donnie. “Can I help you?”

The little toy didn’t answer, and neither did the unseen driver. Instead, it rammed its front guard into Leo’s thigh.

Leo yelped, jerking away from it and knocking into Raph.

“The fuck- Leo! This was your idea, quit interrupting!”

“It shocked me!” Leo exclaimed, rubbing the sore spot on his scales.

“What did?” Raph asked, leaning around Leo to see the toy. “Huh. One of Donnie’s things?”

“I don’t know it just-OW! See?! It did it again!” Leo shuffled away from the toy, putting Raph between him and the toy.

“Oh come on, it’s almost smaller than your fist, it can’t be that bad-FUCK!” Raph cursed as the hot, stinging force of the metal shocked him as well. “Okay, how does something so small pack so much juice?”

“I don’t know, but I’m not pleased with whoever’s driving it,” Leo looked over at Donnie, who had a suspicious pile of scavenged electrical devices in hand at the moment. “Hey! Donnie! Quit it with the toy car, we’re trying to meditate!”

Donnie glanced up, took in the two of them shying away from the small truck, and went back to his project. “Not me.”

“You’re the only who makes stuff like this though-OW!” Leo leapt away from the truck again as it shocked his very exposed feet. Raph was shocked similarly, and then they were both trying to dodge the mini menace.

“Where’s Mikey?!” Raph shouted, jumping over the toy and trying not to break it with a careless step, but also avoid the electrocution. “He’s the only other person who’s even here, he’s gotta be the one doing this!”

“I don’t know! I don’t see him!” Leo bit his tongue as the toy car caught his ankle, sending a very unpleasant wave of pain through his nerves. Just how much power had Donnie packed into this thing?

Leo jumped out of the way of the truck, almost losing his balance as his foot stepped on something soft. He tried to regain his footing, but his other foot landed on another pillow; without proper traction, Leo slipped backwards and onto the temporary bed he and Raph had shared.

Leo lay on the pillows, swathed by the red blanket, contemplating how exactly he was supposed to discipline his siblings for this, and if he was even allowed to.

Raph shouted, the end of the shout hitting a very high pitch indeed, somewhere beyond Leo’s range of vision at that moment.

Okay, so it might be a little funny then.

Leo sat up and retreated further into the bedding, where the truck couldn’t catch him; he might as well watch the rest of the show.
Raph’s foot got caught on a hole in a rug, and tripped as the truck whizzed up to shock his trapped foot. He landed heavily, his shell clacking against the line of exposed stone between carpets. Raph momentarily lay on the floor, before he caught sight of a certain brother hiding on the ceiling.

“MIKEY!” Raph yelled angrily, to which Mikey only cackled. Raph shouted as the truck ran right into the side of his head, the shock making his eyes skitter and he rolled away. Raph crouched and jumped over the truck, bounding up the steps and towards the spot where Mikey had hidden himself.

Mikey yelped, realizing Raph was out for blood and very capable of catching him. The controller was abandoned, dropped onto the thick ledge next to him, and Mikey started to spider-man his way across the ceiling; clinging to the aging pipes hung from it.

Dust fell as Mikey made progress, falling like snowflakes as he scrambled to get away. Raph grit his teeth, and clambered up the hand holds in the wall; worn away bits of stone and empty pipes. He was bigger than Mikey, so the ledge wasn’t as comfortable, but he was a ninja, he could accomplish this just fine.

Mikey was already halfway across the ceiling, aiming for the pillars lining the drop off onto the tracks; probably to climb down on and escape into the tunnels. Raph grasped the pipes like monkey bars and started swinging his way over.

Mikey shrieked as Raph advanced, and Raph almost growled in response, he was pissed off and ready to give a little pay back for it. It figured that just he willingly agreed, for once, to meditate with Leo, he was interrupted by a different sibling.

The pipes holding them both though, were not as strong as either turtle; they broke off the ceiling just as Raph started grabbing at Mikey’s feet.

Both of them fell, lengths of old pipe following them to the ground.

In the split second before Raph expected to crash into the ground, he took a moment to revaluate his choice of action.

Why didn’t he just throw shit at Mikey? Why did he try to clamber onto clearly unstable metal?

Raph hit the ground with a heavy ‘whump!’, and lay there trying to figure out what happened and why he wasn’t in pain.

Dazedly, he lifted his head up. He and Mikey had landed on what looked like the entire collection of pillows and blankets he and Leo had slept on the night before.

What the hell.

Leo and Donnie sat on the edge of the pile, Donnie sipping indifferently at a jar of water and Leo looking far too amused for Raph’s liking.

“…what the hell?” Raph asked, repeating his thought.

“You were going to fall, we both figured that before you even got to the ceiling,” Leo said, exchanging a glance with Donnie, who now had a small smirk on his lips. “Donnie suggested a plan to keep you idiots from getting hurt.”

“Speaking of idiots…” Raph sat up and seized the foot of a certain trouble maker who’d been trying
to sneak away. He yanked Mikey back, ignoring the cry of distress, and grabbed the turtle in a choke hold. “Someone. Needs to be reminded. Who’s the older brother.”

Mikey dragged his claws on the pillows, trying to get away, but Raph tightened his hold and raised his fist.

Mikey’s shrill cry was music to Raph’s ears as he noogied their youngest brother.

Leo flinched in surprise when Raph raised his fist, and Leo darted his eyes over to check Donnie’s reaction to the coming violence. Donnie visibly tensed up, eyes widening a fraction in the split second following, and Leo was about to intervene as Raph’s brought his fist down on Mikey’s head, but-

Raph didn’t hit Mikey, like Leo had expected, but just started grinding his fist against Mikey’s skull in a firm noogie. Mikey shrieked, but it wasn’t in pain, and was followed quickly by hysterical giggling.

Leo put a hand over his heart, the thick plastron there not blocking the thudding of the organ. Donnie relaxed again beside Leo, settling back down to sip at his jar of water.

Sudden violence was still something they had to avoid, even if the earlier play fighting had loosened the rules.

Raph continued to give Mikey what he deserved, while Leo opted to lie back onto the unused cushions near him.

What a day, and they still had one more to go.

Joy.

Chapter End Notes

I don’t have much to say beyond, once again, I am sorry for not updating on time.

Best thing I can offer is that apology, and a fic rec to my new ongoing series "how long till spring?". A post invasion/leo's injuries, pre Northampton arc, fiction based around a playlist I made. (I’ve come to accept I’m more than a little addicted to making those.)

"how long till spring?" is a bit of a stress reliever for me I suppose, as well as a fulfillment of missing bits of canon that I wanted. So yeah, go check it out, and have a nice day.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Conclusion.

Chapter Notes

Hope ya'll are ready, because this goes zero to three hundred with the feelings literally right off the bat.
Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first drop of cold on Donnie’s snout isn’t enough to rouse him, but the following second, third, fourth, and onward was.

Begrudgingly, Donnie opened his eyes and woke up. Beneath him, the comfortable moss had grown cold without the sun’s rays, and the tunnel was no longer pleasantly warm with midday heat.

Another rain drop fell between his eyes, leaving a slick trail as it fell on his scales. Donnie glanced upwards, and found the sky above a dark and foreboding near-black.

A storm, and a bad one at that.

Donnie nudged Mikey beside him, elbowing his brother back to wakefulness as well. They needed to leave, and leave quickly at that. Mikey groaned and shoved back at Donnie, but Donnie persisted in forcing his brother to get up. They didn’t have time for Mikey’s whining, they had a lot of ground to cover and not a lot of time.

The falling rain increased in repetition, becoming many rather than singles at a time. The icy drops were enough to wake the other two turtles as well, Raf and Lee-oh both making annoyed exclamations as the rain fell.

Mikey finally sat up, blinking away his sleep, and he tensed up as he realized why Donnie had woken him. Mikey looked up at Donnie, not even needing to vocalize his question, and Donnie nodded. Being out during a storm was the worst thing they could do, they had to move fast if they didn’t want the rain to flood the tunnels before they got to their nest.

Donnie wished he hadn’t let the day get away like he had, but they’d been so comfortable under the sun, he hadn’t wanted to move. Sleeping had been mostly unintentional, but he’d been so relaxed…

Donnie shook his head to himself, collecting his thoughts as well as his personal items. Slinging his bag around his shell, Donnie gestured for Lee-oh and Raf to follow him and Mikey. The other turtles
seemed a bit confused about Donnie’s haste, but Donnie didn’t spare a moment to explain; every moment they wasted was a moment closer to some of their tunnels filling with powerful rushing water.

Donnie’s steps were speeding up, and with him the rest of his companions. Mikey kept pace, right next to Donnie, almost touching as they half ran through the tunnel; Lee-oh and Raf were just behind them, and Donnie ignored the questions being thrown his way.

Tunnels passed in a blur, Donnie’s focus on reaching safety eliminating much of his usual observance. Soon, they reached the end of the dead tunnels and entered the active ones. The streams along the bottoms of the tunnels were already starting to overflow.

They went by an opening to the above ground, and water was already starting to rush from it in a mini waterfall. They were running out of time faster than Donnie anticipated then.

_Faster faster_, Donnie muttered to Mikey, picking up the pace further; Mikey nodded, and switched to a steady lope along with Donnie.

Donnie’s legs might be longer than Mikey’s, but Donnie’s _small-strong-foolish_ brother could keep a sprint that not even Donnie could match sometimes. Behind them, Raf and Lee-oh’s questions were getting louder, but Donnie kept ignoring them. The two turtles were smart enough to follow even without explanation, and that was good enough for now; Donnie would explain everything when they were safe again.

The sound of rushing water up ahead though made Donnie slow his steps steadily, the slick water covered stones beneath his cold toes foretelling the exact fears he had.

They were in a tunnel right below the surface still, and the water pouring into it had risen to ankle deep; icy and dirty, filled with mud and filth. What lay ahead was worse, and everything Donnie had been scared of.

The pipes, as he’d recently learned they were called, were already gushing water from above into the connecting place of tunnels. The usually calm water drain was swirling ominously, and almost to the edges of the room. The whirlpool was enormous, and to get to the right tunnel, they would have to get past it.

The large metal crossed opening above the room let even more water fall in, the rain from above already starting to become a true downpour. It was now or never then, soon the tunnels between their safe ones and here would become exceedingly dangerous to be in.

_Scared cold not wanting to please no no no no_, Mikey whimpered, shying away from the edge of the tunnel as a new flood of water started from a pipe; smaller ones were opening their covers, dumping their contents into the already swelled flow.

Donnie’s muscles almost locked up, looking at the thickening swirl of water, but he forced himself to take a step forwards; ignoring the sensation of waning air supply in his lungs. _Have to we must can’t stop sorry sorry sorry, scared too must go though_

Donnie took Mikey’s hand, and pulled his brother gently along as they entered the current of the room. The water was up to their shins now, and getting stronger.

“What’s happen----, Donnie? Why the ----?” Lee-oh yelled at Donnie over the sound of the water. Donnie didn’t look back, focusing on taking one step at a time and keeping Mikey’s hand in his.

His thoughts were getting louder with each step forwards, telling him this was a bad place to be they
shouldn’t be here this was dangerous dangerous dangerous-

-swept away, no fresh air, only Mikey close to him, rushing water knocking them against stone and metal, where was father where were they? What was happening- he couldn’t breathe, couldn’t see, the water wouldn’t let them go, where was it taking them-

-they needed to move faster. Donnie tightened his grip on Mikey, his brother already clutching fiercely as he followed Donnie’s progression. One step at a time, keep your eyes on the tunnel ahead, safety in the dark and the familiar, don’t look at the sky don’t look at the whirlpool, don’t look just keep moving-

-(again and again, debris knocking painfully into Donnie, his and Mikey’s shells slamming against the walls of the tunnels, where was father where did he go why were they alone-

-“-ing on? Stop and ---- wi-- me, Donnie!” Raf shouted at Donnie, grabbing his shoulder and stopping Donnie’s steps. Raf looked angry for some reason, and while Donnie’s building panic kept him from figuring out why, he could tell at least that it wasn’t aimed at him. “We’re --- and ----, jus- stop --- ---- --- to --, would ---?”

Another pipe opened, water thundering from it into the already overwhelmingly loud room. Donnie yanked out of Raf’s grip, his feet unsteady in the clouded swirl as it hid the floor from him, and then-

-(no air, he couldn’t breathe, what had happened-why had it happened- they’d been with their family, their kin-kind-companions, they were alone and cold and icy- everything hurt it hurt and Donnie couldn’t swim couldn’t fight, not without letting Mikey be swept away too- where was their father- WHERE WAS HE-

-lightening cracked across the sky above, illuminating the dark room for an instant, and then a bone deep roar of thunder followed.

-(alone alone they were ALONE-) Donnie tugged Mikey along as he ran for the other tunnel; the whirlpool’s current dragging his- their-steps off course, the water getting higher with each passing step-

-(ICE COLD WATER, gripping dragging DROWNING-) -thunder roared again, so loudly it shuddered through Donnie’s plastron, and gripped his heart in true and complete fear-

-( burning lungs, spinning tunnels, THEY WERE ALONE AND ALONE MEANT-) KEEP RUNNING, Donnie shouted to Mikey. (- DEATH.

They ran.

Too close to the surface, too exposed to humans and water and the storm-

-somewhere they reached dry stones, somewhere they’d let go of each other, somewhere they’d dropped the ground used all fours limbs to push harder run faster run faster-

-Donnie’s head shrieked at him, incoherency in his thoughts and emotions, keep running don’t stop if he stopped they’d both be caught by the water, the flow that could take and rend and kill as it
pleased-

-in the dark they were safe, far from water and humans and the storm raging above, too close that had been too close-

-underneath, be hidden from sight from sounds. Donnie locked himself around Mikey, keeping him close as physically possible- couldn’t lose him keep him close, don’t let go never let go-

-he felt cold, so cold, fingers toes limbs, cold and aching-

-close close keep close, safety only when they were together, safety only in the dark and dust, safety in-

(-family? where did they go, where had their family gone-)

-just them. Just Donnie and Mikey. Just them.

Raph’s lungs burneded as he pushed panting breaths in and out. Dirt and gravel stuck to his soaked feet, pinching between his toes as he put one step in front of the other.

He was cold and annoyed, all of the heat he’d sucked up earlier in the sunning spot Donnie and Mikey had shown him long gone. He only had warmth in his core now, and his limbs were ice by comparison. The rain had slicked his scales, making him lose even more heat, and while Raph didn’t usually care about that sort of thing, his wet mask shifted against his neck uncomfortably as he ran.

He couldn’t stop though, and neither could Leo; Donnie and Mikey had bolted without explanation a few minutes ago, and from the raw terror on their faces… whatever kind of headspace they were in at the moment, it wasn’t a good one.

“Why d’you think they ran? We didn’t do anything, right?” Raph asked Leo as they turned the last bend of the tunnel.

“I don’t know, they seemed fine before we went to sleep, but then-”

“-Donnie and Mikey started freaking out because of the storm-”

“-yeah, and then the whirlpool and thunder, plus the lightening-”

“-and I grabbed him by the shoulder-”

“-I don’t think that has to do with anything, he’s really relaxed the last day-”

“-it could though,” Raph insisted. “Donnie touchy about touching, it might’ve helped set him off.”

Leo grimaced, but nodded. “Maybe. But I think it’s mostly the storm.”

“I don’t get it, it’s just a storm,” Raph said as they slowed to a jog, closing in on the last bit before the nest. “They’ve gotta have been through them before; I don’t understand why they’re so freaked out
“Me neither.”

“-wait, wait SHIT. I get it. Son of a bitch, I get why they’re freaking out,” Raph slapped a hand over his eyes, completely halting as he dragged his hand down his face.

“What?” Leo asked, his steps also stopping.

“Just. Christ. Did you forget how they got separated from us in the first place?”

“No, they- oh. Oh.”

“Yeah.”

Leo blew out a harsh breath, echoing Raph’s gesture by wiping rain water off his face. “What do we do then?”

“I dunno, check on ‘em? They. They didn’t even look back, not once. And how they were running—”

“-just like when we first found them,” Leo said gravely, looking towards where they’d find their siblings. “Donnie wasn’t responding in English when you tried talking to him, and Mikey just kept making those whines and- jeeze Raph, do you think they understand us at all right now?”

The tunnel ahead was completely dark, not a hint of the lights Mikey and Donnie lit every time they were home. Not a sound outside of Raph and Leo’s breathing. Everything was stiflingly quiet, and that unnerved Raph.

“Only one way to find out,” Raph concluded.

In the dark of the nest, Raph and Leo’s unguarded steps sounded louder than usual to Raph. He paused at the edge of the platform to scrape off the worst of the gravel and filth on his feet, then proceeding into the eerily still nest of his brothers.

No sign of Donnie or Mikey, and even in the gloom of the nest, Raph could tell they weren’t in the main room; the long stretch of carpeted stone floor empty of anything living.

Leo nudged Raph’s shoulder. “You see them? I can barely see anything right now.”

“They’re not here, must be in the bedroom,” Raph replied, peering over at the black doorway of their siblings’ room. Raph took a step forwards, and felt something under his foot. He bent and picked it up. It was the soaked through satchel of Mikey, the strap torn apart. Further evidence of just how panicked the two turtles had been.

“Can I light a candle? Its pitch in there and I’d rather not go in blind,” Leo asked, picking up a knocked over bottle with a long candle sticking out of it. “Think it’ll freak them out more?”

“Dunno,” Raph said truthfully, dropping the satchel back onto the carpet. “It’ll be better if you can see though, an’ I wouldn’t say no to some extra light right now.”

“Okay, just have to find those matches then…”

While Leo fumbled in the dark, opening the mini shelving unit and retrieving a packet of matches, Raph took a tentative look inside Donnie and Mikey’s room.

Even with his better vision, Raph couldn’t see much more than blurry shapes in the near complete...
darkness of the room. He was fairly certain though, from the movement under the mountain of blankets and pillows, that Donnie and Mikey were hiding in there.

Raph heard Leo scratch the match stick, and the hiss of fire starting; dim light shone from behind Raph, illuminating the room for him.

Donnie’s bag was abandoned on the floor as well, and like Mikey’s had been, the strap was broken into two ends. Donnie’s knife was also on the pile, belt used to hold it split just like the bag’s strap was.

Leo approached, the light from his candle announcing him. With the fiery wick so close by, Raph could easily make out the shapes of his two brothers underneath their blanket burrow.

A soft hiss escaped from underneath the pile, followed by quiet growling.

“I don’t think we’re very welcome right now,” Leo whispered.

“So we’re supposed to just leave them then?”

“….no, but what are we supposed to do about this? They’re scared and freaked out, and definitely not listening to us.”

“Then we make them listen,” Raph said, stepping into the room.

“Raph….” Leo warned, even though he was following Raph.

Raph waved him off, going to kneel beside the huge pile that his brothers were hiding inside. One of them hissed again, louder this time, and the warning growl was throatier; deep enough that Raph could feel it. “Aw jeeze. C’mon guys, it’s just us.”

One of their brothers shifted underneath the layers of cover, and in the light from the candle, Raph caught a glimpse of white eyes staring out at him. Then they were gone and the hissing started again.

Raph looked over at Leo, searching for some support; Leo had been an older brother a heck of a lot longer than Raph, there had to be something Leo knew would work here.

Except, as far as Raph could recall, he hadn’t ever gone to Leo with this sort of problem. Raph didn’t recall ever having a problem like this period.

“Um. Mikey, Donnie, its Leo and Raph, would you guys mind coming back out?” Leo asked awkwardly, setting the make-shift candelabra aside to lean nearer to the pile. “I mean, I’m guessing you’re scared, and I suppose that storm is kind of scary right now, but we’d, uh, like to talk about it… maybe…”

Leo’s questions got a growl in response, and Raph rolled his eyes. That attempt had been weak at best.

“Aren’t you supposed to be the eldest here?”

“Hey, I’m doing the best I can. I’ve never dealt with anything like this before, okay?”

“Yeah, that’s kinda obvious.”

“Do you have any better ideas? Because you haven’t offered anything useful so far other than, ‘we’ll make them’, which really wasn’t useful at all.”
“I don’t know either, alright? Just. You’re the plan guy; shouldn’t you have a plan for this??”

“Why would I plan for this?” Leo hissed between his teeth, sounding closer to their brothers than he probably noticed. “You’re the instinct guy; use your gut or whatever to figure this out!”

“That’s not how that works,” Raph muttered back.

A growl shut down Leo’s reply, and they both went still; waiting for another reaction from the feral turtles. The growl kept rumbling through the pillows, even though both Raph and Leo were silent now. The white eyes appeared again, through the gap between pillows, and Raph saw there were freckles doting all over the growling turtle’s face.

Mikey then, Mikey was growling at them both in a way he hadn’t before. How scared was he, for him to step up and be the one who threatened Raph and Leo?

How scared was Donnie, for him to go completely silent like this?

They wanted Raph gone, and Leo too, but Raph… he didn’t feel comfortable leaving them like this. He knew how badly a phobia attack could shake someone; it was one of the worst things that could happen to you.

He remembered very clearly, the time he’d gotten himself locked inside a garbage can as a kid; stuck inside it for what felt like hours. In the dark of that tight space, he’d been trapped with the occupants of the can; cockroaches.

He’d always hated bugs, the horrible little things that would crawl over him while he slept. Before the lair, they’d had to fend off the insects of wherever they settled each day, to varying degrees of success.

If storms and water to Donnie and Mikey were what cockroaches and insects in general were to Raph… well, he had a pretty good idea of what was happening then.

What would snap them out of it? Killing and getting rid of the bugs and then maybe spending a few hours with his punching bag were what fixed it for Raph; what would do it for his siblings?

Then, Raph remembered what Mikey had done after Donnie’s stitches had been removed.

Their father had left the room, and Raph had been on his way out of the dojo to give the two turtles some space, and as Raph stepped over the threshold of the room, he’d heard the rising and falling of Mikey’s voice.

Donnie might’ve put on a brave face, but letting someone get so close with sharp objects had been trying for him. And while the tallest brother had remained stoic until Splinter had left, a soft whimper had escaped from Donnie as he leaned against Mikey.

Which was why Raph had started to leave in the first place, because that was a private moment, and not something he felt he was allowed to see.

With his shell turned to the other mutants, Raph had heard Mikey’s lilting version of the lullaby. Something to comfort Donnie, something they used to show their bond.

Mikey sang it to Raph, and then Donnie had, and when Raph responded in turn, they’d both accepted him.

That was the key, the lullaby.
Raph sighed, and rubbed a hand over his face. Of course it was. “I have an idea.”

“Yeah? What is it?” Leo asked, keeping his voice quiet as possible.

Raph had any spare heat in his body, his cheeks would’ve burned. “Well, you see…”

Mikey growled, his plastron vibrating with the sound. They were still there, even though he’d said they weren’t welcome.

GO AWAY, He growled again, raising the volume of his warnings. The interlopers, the turtles who were in his sleeping place- Donnie’s safe place- they were maybe-kin, maybe-brothers, but not now.

Donnie was cold and shivering and too silent, and this was not the time for bonding not the time for play.

The turtles whose names were long and difficult and too human for comfort needed to leave and stay left until Mikey said it was okay to come back.

Donnie’s anxious purring kicked up louder as the voices outside their hiding place started again, even though Mikey had said be quiet be quiet SILENCE many, many times now. Mikey dropped the growling and hissing for a moment to curl tighter into Donnie’s desperate clutch, purring back that he’s here, he’s here and not going anywhere he swears he promises.

Mikey hated it when Donnie did this, became quiet and fragile and lost up in his deep clever thoughts. Only storms and humans could do that, and they did that to Mikey too, but not so horribly. Mikey didn’t lose himself inside the places that Donnie did, but even so, Mikey’s scales crawled with invisible not-real sensations.

Of water, of cold, of aches he couldn’t place and couldn’t remember. It’d slip in and slip out, the answer the why that Mikey knew he knew, the reason why storms were so dangerous and the reason why they made him so, so lonely. The reason why Donnie was so scared.

Mikey hated seeing Donnie scared, because while Donnie was afraid of so much in the world above, he didn’t let it control him; didn’t let it stop him from going up every time they needed supplies, or Mikey really, really needed to go exploring.

Shh shh, I’m here we’re here safe safe safe promise I promise, precious-beloved-brother I’m here we’re here together we’re safe, Mikey trilled softly, bumping his snout against Donnie’s. Mikey’s shivering brother didn’t respond, only hiding his head under Mikey’s chin.

Mikey’s lip wobbled, and he bit it as tears sprang into his eyes. It hurt, it hurt so much to see Donnie like this, scared and quiet and not there.

Why had he asked to stay longer, why hadn’t Mikey listened when Donnie said the weather was going bad, and they should leave for the sunning place and then go home. But they’d been having so much fun, climbing jumping running in the trees and bushes, and their maybe-brothers had been excited and affectionate and happy- Mikey hadn’t wanted it to end, not when every time they went back, their maybe-kin would stop being turtles and be like humans again.
Mikey should have listened, he should have he should have *he should have*

_Please come back I’m here I’m here please Donnie please come back_. Mikey whimpered, hugging Donnie closer. Mikey didn’t want to be the brave one right now, he was cold and he was scared and he just wanted Donnie to be _Donnie_ again.

The thunder and lightning still echoed in Mikey’s mind, and the sight of the dark and terrifying whirlpool stuck to every thought he had. Mikey still had the raw fear of earlier mucking up his insides, and that fear was trying to drag his thoughts back into panic.

But Donnie needed him, _Donnie needed him_, and he couldn’t let it take him, Mikey wasn’t allowed right now to be small and scared, _Donnie needed him-

_Donnie, please_ Mikey whispered, warm tears trickling onto the fabric they lay on. - _I need you_

A hum came in response, but it wasn’t Donnie’s.

Startled, Mikey blinked away his tears as the hum got louder; muffled only a little by the fabrics Mikey had piled over Donnie and him. The hum turned into a song, rising and falling tentatively and Mikey _knew that song_.

It was his, it was _theirs_, the song that was family and love and safety.

Who was singing, _why_ were they singing?

Mikey eased himself from Donnie’s grip, moving his brother’s arms to be around his waist as Mikey moved thick fabrics away so he could peer out.

The other turtles- _Raf, Lee-oh_, those were their names- still knelt outside Mikey and Donnie’s sleeping place turned barrier. _Raf_ was singing, slowly and steadily humming the song.

And then, _Lee-oh_ did too.

Mikey’s eyes widened, hearing the new and formerly missing voice match with _Raf’s_._Lee-oh_ kept hesitating, skipping notes and putting emphasis in the wrong spots, but he was singing their song. _He was singing their song_.

Mikey took a deep breath, and sang back.

It felt right, it sounded so, so right, the addition of _Lee-oh’s_ voice. Where Mikey and _Raf’s_ voices went down, _Lee-oh’s_ went up, just like when Donnie sang. They reached the end of the song, and though Mikey expected them to stop, the other turtles looped back to the beginning and kept going.

Their song, new and old at the same time from the turtles, filled the spaces where fear and panic was festering in Mikey. Two loops through, Mikey could think clearly again, and his voice was just as strong as _Raf’s_ and _Lee-oh’s_.

Slowly, so slowly, Donnie’s desperate grip around Mikey loosened. His shivering died off, and Mikey felt Donnie’s lungs expand fully for the first time since the tunnels.

_I’m here_, Mikey trilled gently, running his hand over Donnie’s shell. Maybe _Raf_ and _Lee-oh_ could somehow tell it was needed, because their hums melted together into one, perfect tune; letting Mikey and Donnie know they were there, that they were all together. _I’m here Donnie, we’re here we’re all here_
Mikey? Donnie asked, raising his head and blinking the last of his daze away.

Mikey pulled Donnie close again, singing loud as he could and warbling it with his purring. Yes yes I'm here we're here Donnie we're all here

Donnie sighed into Mikey’s shoulder, tension leaving him completely. That meant Donnie was back, he was back and no longer lost in his clever thoughts. He was back and Mikey wasn’t alone anymore.

Donnie’s tune started weakly, exhaustion still haunting his voice, but it grew as the two outside their hiding place did.

One, two, three-
-four.

Four voices, singing humming sharing themselves together, were completing the song. A song, which until recently, Mikey had only heard sung with two parts. But with Raf and Lee-oh’s voices added, it was finished. One song, made up of four parts that locked in just the right ways.

This was what was missing, missing for so, so long.

One last loop, all of them singing together, and Mikey’s cold ache of missing missing someone’s missing filled up with warmth.

When the last notes died off, Mikey emerged from their hiding place, meeting eyes with the two turtles illuminated in the burning stick’s light.

Brothers, Mikey whispered to himself, to them all.

“Hey, Mikey,” Lee-oh said softly, smiling just as.

“Hi Donnie, welcome back,” Raf said, voice low and gentle as Donnie slowly moved out from the thick fabrics.

Missed you, Mikey said to no one and everyone. Missed you so much

Then he was out of their hiding place, and hugging Lee-oh tight as he could. Because he was Mikey’s and Mikey was his, and he’d proven it, singing the song only family knew.

Hello hello missed you missed you so so much, Mikey trilled, arms wrapped firmly around Lee-oh’s shoulders. Welcome back welcome kin-of-mine, brother welcome home

Welcome back, Donnie echoed, lowering himself between Lee-oh and Raf. Donnie still looked tired and frail, but not so that Mikey had to worry. Hello brother, hello Lee-oh… I am yours are you mine?

Ours, Mikey purred. All ours, you me them us together yes yes yes

“What?” Lee-oh asked, looking back and forth between Mikey and their brother. “I ---- ---------.”

Donnie picked up Lee-oh’s hand, and Mikey leaned away so the two could talk easier. Donnie moistened his lips, picking each word carefully. “Us… brothers, Lee-oh oursss… Raf ours. Mikey, I, yours...?”

“Yeah,” Raf said immediately, putting a hand on Donnie’s shoulder and grinning at them all. “Yeah,
we’re brothers.”

“…of course,” Lee-oh said, squeezing Donnie’s hand nodding. “You’re our brothers, of course.”

Strong-strange-brother Lee-oh, strong-strange-brother Raf, yes yes yes, Mikey said, wrapping his arms back around Lee-oh.

Finally, finally, they were all together. Lee-oh’s hand remained in Donnie’s and Raf’s arm was slung across Donnie’s shoulders and Mikey hugged Lee-oh all the tighter.

Finally, things were perfect. Finally they were together for real and everything had been forgiven. No more grudges, and no more fear.

Mikey sighed contentedly, slumping tiredly onto Lee-oh. He was ready for sleeping again now, no more excitement or reunions; sleeping and cuddling was needed very, very badly.

And now that they were all brothers and they all knew it, that meant…

Mikey grinned to himself, and his tail flicked back and forth with new excitement. That meant they could all do something he’d been wanting for days and days.

Leo blinked at the newly darkened ceiling as his singular candle finally went out, listening to the soft breaths coming from his three brothers beside him.

It’d been Mikey’s idea, because these ideas were always Mikey’s it felt like, that they would spend the last night all in one bed.

Honestly, in a weird way, Leo didn’t mind it. Sharing beds with Raph had been routine at best, annoying at worst, but with Donnie and Mikey between Leo and Raph on either end, it was okay.

Leo was a little jealous of his younger siblings; their bed had turned out to be very comfortable once it’d been turned back into an actual bed. While the fort pile had been good for hiding in, it wasn’t so good for sleeping on.

Mikey had dragged the huge red blanket into the room as well, adding to the already thick layering of blankets the pillow pile had. Leo shifted onto his side, facing Donnie’s shell and shifting deeper under the soft covers.

It’d been… it’d been something to hear his brother asking to be brothers with him. The quiet, stilted words Donnie had asked with, the precision he’d obviously used when choosing them…

Leo put a hand on the bracelets tied around his bicep, he had so many after spending so much time with Mikey, and truthfully he probably wasn’t going to take them off for a long while. Well, maybe one or two, but he’d definitely keep the very first one; red and blue, the first gift Mikey ever gave him-

Donnie shifted onto his back, startling Leo from his thoughts. In the dark, Leo couldn’t make out Donnie’s expression, but the tired sigh was enough to tell.

“You doing okay?” Leo asked in a whisper, not wanting to wake Raph or Mikey.
Donnie turned his head towards Leo, a quiet rustle following the motion. There was another moment of silence, but Donnie replied eventually with, “Yes. Am ok-k-kay.”

“That’s good. You were, uh, pretty shaken up earlier…” Leo said awkwardly, not sure of how to approach that still. Singing, *god he’d been singing and with Raph of all people*, was good and all, but other than that, Leo wasn’t sure how to interact with Donnie about his shut down earlier.

Donnie shrugged, and turned his eyes back to the pitch ceiling. “Happened. But, gone now. Am f-fine.”

Leo nodded, even though Donnie probably wouldn’t see, and let silence settle again.

Mikey mumbled something in his sleep, and tossed an arm over Donnie’s plastron; Donnie putting his own arm over Mikey’s, humming a single note to get Mikey to rest again.

Leo could barely see, but he saw well enough that he could make out Donnie rubbing his thumb over Mikey’s back of hand; gentle and soothing, the picture of an older brother.

Leo bit his lip, thinking of how many times he’d screwed up in just the last two weeks as an older sibling. How did his younger siblings end up so much better at that than him? It made Leo feel somehow inadequate, to not know how to react like they did.

Even Raph had managed, suggesting the singing and then starting to even while Leo was still trying to grasp the situation. Leo hadn’t even remembered the melody right, and he’d had to depend on Raph and Mikey’s humming to guide him through.

Maybe it was just the exhaustion talking, but Leo felt like he hadn’t done anything the past few days to really fix anything between them all. Why had Donnie and Mikey forgiven him, when he’d done nothing but sit in their home and fumble through trying to understand them?

And he *still* didn’t understand them, verbally or even mentally. Worse yet, each accepted apology left Leo feeling less and less like he understood himself, the rise of unfamiliar emotions each time left him confused and vaguely unsettled despite the gratefulness.

Leo didn’t get it, and that frustrated him.

“Hey, Donnie?” Leo whispered into the darkness, eyeing his brother’s form through it.

“Yesss?” Donnie replied, dragging his ‘S’s’ in his sleepiness.

“Why… why did you forgive me, I didn’t actually do anything to deserve it,” Leo confessed quietly.

Donnie was silent for a long, long moment; so long Leo thought his brother had fallen asleep. But Donnie’s reply did come, less sleepiness in his tone than before.

“…’cause you… t-tried. You ssaid sorry, an’ apologised, an’ ssstayed. Here. and…” Donnie turned his head towards Leo, and though Leo couldn’t see them, he could feel Donnie’s eyes resting on him. “…want… want-ted more. For me, for Mikey. Family to… to have an’ care of. Take care of.”

Leo was mute, listening to Donnie as he slowly explained himself. “Lone-lonely here, ssometimes. Jus’ us two. Mikey is mine, v-very loved he is, but… not e-nough. Sometimes. Wanted more, more than jus’ us. Wanted Raph and… Leo, for us. All of us.”

Donnie trilled a couple words in addition, but they were lost to Leo; the tone however wasn’t.
Whatever it’d been, it was something Donnie had said with warmth and deep care. Something important.

“Teach me how to say ‘family’ in your... language, I suppose. Could you?” Leo asked hopefully, because he could at least do that, at least start there.

“Family...yes, is-” Donnie made something like a drawn out click, caught between an English word and the sounds he produced when speaking turtle, as Raph had so dubbed it.

Leo tried to mimic it, rolling the word into what he hoped was the right clicking sound; but from the soft huff of laughter from Donnie, he guessed he’d got it wrong. Donnie repeated the word, and Leo tried again.

Leo did again and again, trying to dig into the back of his brain for the right movement of tongue and air flow, until finally, Donnie said, “Yes, c-correct. Well done.”

Leo grinned, and his nearly healed scar barely itched as he did. *Family?*

*Family,* Donnie replied, brushing his hand against Leo’s under the blankets.

“Thank you, Donnie,” Leo whispered, feeling proud of himself for managing that one word. “Will you teach me more later? When Raph and I come back next?”

“Yesss, ne-next time,” Donnie said, tiredness creeping over his voice as he spoke. “But. Now, sssleep.”

“Yeah, sleep sounds good,” Leo agreed, relaxing into the bed of pillows again. “Good night Donnie.”

“Good sleep, Leo,” Donnie replied, turning away from Leo and curling around Mikey one more.

Leo’s smile slipped away, and he closed his eyes, listening to the three other turtles in the room until he fell asleep.

Raph briefly woke up with Mikey half way cuddled up to him, Donnie’s long arms slung over Mikey side and brushing against Raph’s, once again, pinned arm.

His brothers were both asleep, breathing deep and even. Mikey’s forehead was pressed against Raph’s shoulder, and his breath warmed that area each time he let it out.

Raph was tempted to extract his arm, more gracefully than he had with Leo, but somehow…

Somehow he was okay with this, the touching thing.

What was it with his siblings and cuddling in their sleep though? Weirdos.

Raph sighed, and let sleep drag him back under. They were leaving soon anyways, might as well let Mikey do what he wanted one last time.

And if Raph enjoyed the closeness even just a little, well… no one had to know about that feeling.
They made the trip home next early morning, Leo feeling secure and more like himself again with his katanas across his shell. It was exceedingly early when they left; an oddly emotional goodbye with their brothers stalling them only for so long, but when Leo and Raph finally reached the lair it was inching towards the hour that most humans woke at.

Leo felt grimy and tired, and while he already missed having Donnie and Mikey around, he was glad to be in his own home again.

“I’m hungry as hell,” Raph said, rubbing his stomach as he made a beeline for the kitchen. “I’ve lived off greens and garbage vegetables for two days, an’ if I don’t eat actual meat right this second, I think I might actually die.”

“I feel the same way,” Leo admitted, running his tongue across his filthy, sweater covered teeth. Oh, he was never going anywhere without his tooth brush ever again, not for the rest of his life. “Ham sandwiches?”

“I’d kill a man for one right now,” Raph said as he opened the kitchen door.

Leo’s reply of “Me too.” died on his tongue as he took in the occupants of their kitchen.

April was sitting across from their Sensei, sipping from a mug of hot tea. There was an open file between them, and tens of papers spread over the table top.

Leo’s father stood up as Raph and he entered the kitchen, sweeping around the table and putting a hand on each of their faces. Splinter’s whiskers trembled as he spoke; deep voice soothing what unnerve was left in Leo from being away for so long. “My sons, you have returned safely at last. Where are your brothers? Have they come with you?”

Leo’s heart clenched, and his shoulders slumped in defeat. “No. I’m sorry Sensei, they were very adamant about staying where they were. They said sorry, but…”

“They didn’t wanna leave their home,” Raph finished for Leo, his tone of voice just as disappointed as Leo’s; in them, because they’d failed to do one of the few things their father had asked of them.

To Leo’s surprise, their father didn’t reprimand them; instead sliding the hands cupping their faces around their shoulders and pulling both Leo and Raph into a hug. Leo could feel his father’s voice reverberate through his chest, and for a moment Leo let himself enjoy being hugged by his father again.

“I… I had hoped, but I did not expect. I am sorry they did not come home with you, but… I can understand,” Splinter said, a soft sigh following his words. “Donatello and Michelangelo must come by choice, or not at all. Leonardo, did you succeed in the other tasks you set for yourself? Your contentedness seems to suggest that you have.”

Leo smiled, and nodded. “Yeah, I did. We’ve patched everything up now, and they accepted my apologies.”

“Same here,” Raph added. “We’re all good, us four; even Donnie and Leo.”
“That’s great you guys,” April piped up from the table, setting her mug down and leaning on one elbow. “I’m glad everything’s sorted out now, because while you two were away, master Splinter and I did some chatting and…”

“It is time to begin preparations,” Splinter said, stepping away and returning to his seat at the table. “Both the Shredder and the Kraang are making movement through the city, April’s, ah, websites have claimed so.”

April flashed a collection of papers. “I got some good tip-off’s on Kraang activity, and people have started posting about those ninja guys you fought a couple days back.”

“The Footclan,” Leo corrected automatically.

“Yeah, them. Anyways, sit down you two; I’ve got school in about two hours and not much time to give you a re-hash on what new info I’ve got here.”

Leo’s stomach rumbled, and he put his hand flat across it. “…can we eat while we talk?”

Leo’s father laughed deep and rich, and gestured towards the fridge. “Yes, of course my son. You must both be very hungry from your journey home, replenish your strength while we go over miss O’Neil’s paper work.”

“Thank god,” Raph muttered, opening the fridge right away and starting to assemble sandwich ingredients.

April was staring at Leo still, leaning on her elbow and quirking an eyebrow. Leo crossed his arms, feeling scrutinized. “What?”

“You’re weirdly dirty, for you. Also, bracelets, and nice ones at that, what’s up with those?”

“Ugh, talk to Mikey about that,” Raph said from inside the fridge. “I think it’s like, pathological or something with him.”

April laughed lightly, going to move papers away from sitting spots so Raph and Leo could have plate space. “Think he’d make me some?”

“ Heck if I know. Probably.”

“They look very nice, Leonardo,” Splinter commented, smiling over the rim of his tea.

Leo ducked his head, feeling embarrassed about the number of bracelets Mikey had managed to snag him in. “Thanks, Sensei. I kinda like them myself.”

“Catch, Leo,” Raph said, tossing a squishes together sandwich that, by some small mercy, held together as it flew into Leo’s hands.

“Hey- don’t throw sandwiches Raph! Actually, don’t throw food at all!”

“What? You caught it didn’t you?”

“Raphael, no throwing food; regardless if your brother can catch it or not.”

“Sorry, Sensei.”

“Seriously people, I have school today and I gave up an extra few hours of sleep to do this, can we please humor the human and get to work?”
“Of course, miss April. Boys, please seat yourselves,” Splinter said in a tone that left no room for argument. “We have much to catch up on, and then, I would be pleased to hear how your time spent with Donatello and Michelangelo was.”

“Hai, Sensei,” Leo said, taking a stool for himself and biting into the first fresh food he’d had in days.

“Let’s get this over with,” Raph grumbled, taking one next to April and peering at the papers she’d stacked to be on top.

Leo took another large bite out of his ham sandwich, enjoying the spice of mustard in it as April pointed to different documents.

In the warmth of his home, and with the deep voice of his father, Leo felt an anxiety he hadn’t realized was there vanish with each bit of his sandwich. He could see why then, why their brothers had stayed in their train station nest rather than follow Leo and Raph. Nest had been cozy, after the first day or so at least, but it wasn’t the high looming arches, or the minimalistic decorations of the lair.

Leo looked over the papers closest to him, reading printed maps with marked spots of neon pink; Kraang hideouts, and a lot of them at that. And across the table, blurry photos of figures on top of buildings, pictures of abandoned shurikan imbedded in stone and wood; the evidence that the Shredder’s forces were moving in and taking root in their city.

They’d only been gone for a few days, but they already had their work cut out for them it seemed.

Leo finished the last of his sandwich, licking away the crumbs on his lips, and he leaned forwards to be better heard by the other people in the room.

Back to normalcy then.

Privately, Leo couldn’t wait for the conversation to be over; he really, really wanted to take a shower.

When April finally packed up and left the lair, jogging so she wouldn’t miss her bus, Leo had asked for Raph to tell his part of their story while Leo took a wash.

Raph said he was feeling benevolent, and agreed to take over talking for a while; but only if Leo did his share of the chores for the next three days.

Leo had grit and grime in places he didn’t even want to think about, and he agreed hastily; escaping to the blessedly hot water of the shower block.

There were only three working showers in what used to be a locker room for human staff members, but the water was steaming hot and exactly what Leo had been craving for days.

Leo stayed in the shower block; lathering every inch of himself he can, for almost a full hour.

When he emerged, his father’s amused impatience was worth the hot, hot shower he’d gotten.

Chapter End Notes
Okay so, I'm hoping this was the ending you all were looking for in this stupidly long arc of mine; I'm fairly satisfied with it myself, but I dunno about you all beyond the screen. I'm praying I made the wait worth it here, I really am.

So who here is excited to get to more plot now, because I sure as hell am! I've been dreaming up what happens after this arc for weeks now, and I've got so many details already plotted out. I have whole paragraphs people, whole damn paragraphs, living in my brain. They want out so badly, and I want them out just as.

Sweet release, thy name is 'finished story arcs'.

I'll leave it at that for now, and let you all get to psychoanalyzing my writing or re-reading it or whatever it is you all do when you wait for patiently for me to update. Honestly, you guys are troopers, thank for being so patient; I'll try to keep up better from now on.

It's getting to be around 4 AM here rn, and I have work after today and if I don't sleep I'll probably fuck up on my shift and get in trouble. Again. Adulting is harder than television tells you it is; it lies about everything being kitchy apartments and boy's-next-door's and fairy tale endings to shit jobs as a waitress. I work as a pool attendant and the best I'm hoping for is my damn paycheck to actually show up and my continued luck in dodging the really creepy pool goers. (don't flirt with people who are working, it is gross and annoying and I cannot bitch slap you for commenting on my body while I'm in uniform. ugh, humans.)

Yeah, hope you all enjoyed, and hope you all keep coming back, even if I'm not the steadiest updater ever. ; v ;
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Shifting events-

Chapter Notes

Hey, sorry this took so long guys; I'm the only one at my work place who can take majority hours right now, because school in back in sesh for most folks. Anyone subscribed to me probs saw I've been working on that other tmnt fic of mine; yeah, I only ever had the energy for goofy things after work, not enough for relatively serious junk like this.

Anyways, this arc is a quick one, rapid fire and all that; even this first chapter is short, apologies for that. The next will be longer. Can't wait to write it when I get around to it!

(Also, its my b-day, hap birth to me! Celebrating with turts galore!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two weeks later, and Leo was fairly content with the new pattern his life had formed.

The usual training, the usual patrols and Kraang fighting, but now with twice a week visits to see Mikey and Donnie; four visits all together so far, and they got easier every time.

It was nice break, a sleep over every few days away from familiarity of the lair and the potential danger that lurked in their neighborhood. Still no sign of the Footclan, which made Leo nervous; after a strike like that, attacking him and Raph with so much force, it felt like they were in the eye of the storm. Waiting for the next bolt of lightning to flash across the sky and hit the ground next to them.

On the other side of the city though, twice a week, Leo would get a chance to breathe and not worry too deeply about the suspicious calm. His brothers were extremely distracting individuals, it was hard to focus on anything other than them when he was in their home.

Visit one, Leo had taken two steps onto the platform that made up the bulk of his brothers’ nest, and he’d had a net filled with water balloons dropped on his head. Apparently, that’d been the string thing Mikey had been fussing with that one visit to the pond. Impressive ingenuity, including Donnie’s additions to it; hooking the whole thing in a pulley system around the pipes on the ceiling. With all three of his younger brothers laughing at him, Leo had been sorely tempted to just keep their dessert to himself; a bag of skittles that, mostly against his will, he’d begrudgingly shared after Mikey’s whining got to be too much.

Visit two had been calmer, less pranks and less fighting over rare sweets, but just as engaging. Using
a children’s encyclopedia Donnie had had on his wobbly bookshelf, Leo and his taller brother had exchanged words and meanings in English and… whatever Donnie and Mikey spoke. Turtle-ese? Maybe. Raph and Mikey had distracted them from that though, with a balancing competition; mostly on objects around the nest, and later, pipes and poles in the sewers.

Mikey had won, somehow. Someone untrained shouldn’t have that good of balance, it was just absurd.

Third visit… Leo was still unsure of how Donnie and Mikey had gotten the vending machine down into their nest; it weighed a ton even with most of its pieces missing. It answered a few questions about where Donnie got some of his machine parts though, and at least they were getting enough salt from the snack foods.

Just. A whole vending machine?? Mostly disassembled at that point, but still… how had they even? Walking into the nest and finding Mikey buried in snack wrappers and Donnie tangled in wires… not what Leo had been expecting to find. At all.

There hadn’t even been tracks for drag marks. What even.

At least there’d been more skittles.

Their fourth visit had been the calmest, probably because Mikey had been too sleepy to stay awake all night with the rest of them. According to Donnie, Mikey had been exploring the entire day; a portion of the old tunnels had caved in, opening a new route of previously sealed tunnels. Ancient and filled with abandoned machinery from years before any of them had even hatched. Donnie and Mikey had gone as deep as they’d dared, and had marked safe tunnels inside. Mikey had done most of the exploring apparently, Donnie staying in one spot so they didn’t lose their way and calling to Mikey to guide him back; lots of leg work, which was why Mikey had been so tuckered out.

While Mikey had slept, and Raph too after a few hours, Leo had tried learning more of his siblings’ language, sharing more of his own in exchange.

So far, it’d been a lot harder than he’d expected, since a lot of English words didn’t line up at all with the ones Donnie used. One sound, a click or trill, could mean up to five things all together. It was slow going, especially since Donnie hadn’t known the equivalents of many things in English.

Mostly, they’d stuck with single words, and used the children’s encyclopedia.

Leo now knew brother, annoying, stop, no, yes, mine, stupid-small-brother, poison, human, and a variety of other single or simple words and phrases. Not enough to hold a conversation, if he could even keep track of his own words that well to begin with; too many sounded exactly alike, and Leo would lose his place in what he’d been saying.

It was almost unfair how well Donnie had started to pick up English; his pronunciation still needed work, usually highlighting S’s and T’s too much, but he’d made a lot of progress considering his reluctance at first.

All in all, good visits, good bonding; Leo counted each as a win. One step closer to… well, not to be offensive to his brothers, but getting them out of their filthy hiding hole and into the safety of the lair; where they could be protected, and educated.

With the Shredder lurking in New York, it was only a matter of time before the real war began. Leo’s Sensei had cautioned Leo to be gentle and slow about the process, but as quickly as he could, to convince his siblings to join them on their side of the city.
It would probably be a very slow process, unfortunately.

But, Leo wasn’t thinking about that tonight.

Tonight was a night spent doing something that almost all native New Yorker teens did: skateboarding.

Raph’s board shrieked as he completed the grind, sliding off the large modern art statue he and Leo had chosen to experiment with. He stuck the landing, and did a victory lap around Leo. “That’s fifteen wins to me, twelve to you.”

“Oh, not for long,” Leo replied, kicking his board into his hand and leaping up to the top of the statue. Raph rolled his eyes, because Leo had already wiped out twice on the way here, and Raph really doubted his brother could make up the three point difference so easily.

Raph idly circled the huge stone cube while Leo got into position, waiting for his brother to lose another round to him. And- yep. Leo had lost control at the last second, and dropped his board during the landing.

“Make that fifteen to eleven,” Raph said snidely, counting off a point for Leo’s fumble.

“Whatever, it’s just a dumb competition.”

“A dumb competition you were pretty into, about a half hour ago when you were winning.”

Leo glared at Raph, and Raph ignored him in favor of hopping onto a railing and sliding down it; metal and wood grinding against each other as he did. Stick the landing, and swerve around to hit the wheelchair ramp to street level. Nice, not a single stumble either; at this rate, Raph would hit twenty points first, and Leo would have to take his share of the end of night chores.

Then, Leo shot past Raph’s side, and rocketed down the center of the street; despite being the one who’d cautioned them about being seen, not ten minutes ago.

“Real mature, Leo,” Raph grumbled, kicking off the sidewalk and chasing after his brother.

Street lights flashing over them as they rolled past, Raph and Leo raced each other through deserted streets. This late at night, their Sensei was taking his midnight walk, and they were free to take a break from patrol and training. Good opportunity to get some skate practice in; Raph had just finished tuning up both their boards, adding new trucks he’d dug out of the recycling bins he’d visited with Donnie and Mikey last week.

The new trucks were wider, which meant more axle support; being on the other side of two hundred because of their shells and bone density, their boards needed extra strength in order for them to hold up. Thicker decks, larger wheels, extra care to the bearings… a lot of work to fine tune the things, but definitely worth it.

Leo should’ve been more grateful to Raph, since he did majority of the maintenance on their boards.
Speaking of… Raph watched as Leo fumbled again on a grind, slipping off the road divider before he’d completed the whole slide.

“Fifteen to ten,” Raph said as he rode past Leo.

“Ugh, c’mon, I’m off my game tonight; quit rubbing it in,” Leo grouched, flipping his board over and hurrying to catch up with Raph.

“Just stating the facts, keeping the score,” Raph replied, breezing around an alleyway corner and down the short road towards the fire escape. “But. I’ll give you the chance to redeem yourself, by trying a few tricks on the roofs again.”

“Raph, wait.”

Raph paused, stepping backwards on his board and grabbing the front tip. Something about Leo’s change of tone quieted his smug confidence, and slid it right into mission mode. Leo was pointing at the darkened corner of the alley, and Raph followed his brother’s finger; the steel shutter to whatever building was in front of them had been warped and torn apart, and now that Raph listened, he could hear crashing inside the darkness of the broken shutters.

Raph slung his skateboard across his shell, hooking it onto the straps there; he cracked his knuckles, and spun his sais out of their holsters. “Guess we start patrol early tonight.”

“Indeed we do,” Leo replied, unsheathing his swords and taking lead into the darkness.

They entered into what seemed to be the back loading zone of the building, following the trail of destruction. Over turned crates, slashed cardboard boxes, smoldering scorch marks along the walls… a steady path leading them towards the broken doorway at the end of the room. On the other side, they found…

A skinny black man, smacking a sputtering machine on his arm. He was dressed in a makeshift battle suit made from odds and ends, wires sticking out everywhere and pitifully exposed vital areas. He was standing in what looked like a ruined secretary’s office, a small fire burning on the desk.

Raph opened his mouth to demand what the guy was doing, but-

“Halt, villain!” Leo shouted, pointing his swords at the cursing man.

Raph felt his expression screw up. “Halt. Villain? Are you kidding me Leo?”

“We’re heroes. Th-that’s how heroes talk…?”

Raph nearly face palmed.

The skinny man in metal spun on them, leveling the malfunctioning wrist flamethrower at them. “You will feel the fury of my powered battle- holy cow!” The man blinked, taking in their appearance. “You guys are turtles!”

“That’s right. We’re the turtles of justice!” Leo said proudly, for some god forsaken reason, striking a pose like something out of his dumb cartoons.

“Wow. Just. Wow,” Raph said dryly, because somehow, that sentence had been what curdled milk was to his nose; only, it’d been in his hearing instead. “I’m disowning you, Don and Mike are my only siblings now.”
“Wha- rude, Raph.”

“I honestly don’t understand how we’re related.”

“I’ll have you know, the importance of a heroic entrance is pivotal during a fight—”

Then the mystery burglar clumsily charged at them, thankfully cutting off Leo’s speech.

The guy, whoever he was, was completely laughable at fighting. Even in the tight space, the human in the tin-man suit couldn’t land even a glancing blow on Raph or Leo. Using rebounds off the office walls, leaving slight foot prints as they did, Raph and Leo sliced off wires and ligament supports on the ‘battle suit’; keeping it up until most of it was on the floor, and they human was left with just his useless helmet and pink sweater.

It took one final blow to put him down, Raph’s knee to be precise; right into the guy’s stomach.

Raph stood over the wannabe burglar, the man wheezing for breath on the linoleum floors. Well, that’d been disappointing. He’d been hoping for at least some Kraang, maybe some random human who could actually put up a fight.

“You… hhhhhhh…. haven’t seen the laaass- last of me!” The man wheezed, twitching on the ground. “I’ll… I’ll get you-you tur-huur- turtles!”

“Well, this is just sad,” Leo commented, sliding his katanas away with two soft hilt clicks. “That was, what, about two minutes? Less?”

“I’m betting a minute an’ twenty seconds, at most,” Raph added, kicking a stray piece of the guy’s disassembled suit. “So what do we do with him? Call the cops or somethin’?”

“I suppose, but with what—” Leo’s foot connected with the wrecked flame thrower gauntlet, and it sparked to life one last time. Just enough fire power to shoot it through the wide front windows of the building, and set off the alarms as it shattered the glass.

“Are- are you kidding me?!” The man on the floor shouted, raising himself onto his arms. “The one set of alarms I didn’t hack, and you set them off?!”

“Why didn’t you hack them?” Raph asked, putting his foot on the struggling man’s back to keep him trapped. “What’s the point of hacking only some of the alarms?”

“I was in a rush! Do you know how much time it takes to take out a whole security grid on your own?!”

“I don’t, and I don’t care!” Raph spat, kicking the man one last time; turning and striding towards the way they’d come in. “Let’s get out of here, Leo; the cops’ll be around any minute now.”

“Wait, gimme a second,” Leo pulled out a length of wire from his belt, and quickly tied the man’s wrists to his legs; forcing him to keep fetal position. “There. If you know what’s good for you, you’ll wait patiently here for the police to pick you up. Unless you’d like to struggle instead, and possibly slice your wrists in the process. That wire there is meant for slitting the necks of men, just to inform you fully of your situation.”

Leo smiled pleasantly at the man, making him “meep!” in fear.

Raph huffed, and decided he might as well add his own touch to that fear. “And just make things clear, you tell anyone about us…” Raph flicked his white eyelids closed, and grinned widely at the
cowering man. “We’ll find you, an’ make you sorely regret it. Capiche?”

The guy whimpered in fear again, especially since Leo had pulled a similar trick with his eyes, smiling icily at the human.

“Glad we understand each other,” Leo said, patting the human on the shoulder.

They managed to keep their intimidation up until they got out the door, but under the cover of dark again, Raph heard Leo start chuckling.

“Snrk, ‘Capiche’? What are we, Italian mobsters?”

“You have literally no room to talk, mister ‘we’re heroes’.”

Leo shoved Raph’s shoulder, and Raph shoved back; knocking his knuckles against Leo’s as they emerged back into the alley. As they heard sirens, they scrambled up the rungs of the fire escape.

From up on top of the building, Raph perched comfortably on the roof edge; watching as the two cops arrived, and pulled the weirdo they’d caught into the police car.

As they drove away, red and blue lights flashing down the lane, Raph yawned and leaned backwards against the bricks behind him. “Who even was that guy?”

“Dunno, probably no one important,” Leo replied, copying Raph’s position.

“Yeah, probably not.”

“Wanna finish the bet now?”

“You mean the one you’re losing?”

“Not for long I’m not.”

“You keep tellin’ yourself that.”

They tied, but only because their Sensei cut them off on their last trick.

Their boards were confiscated, and they were banned from skating for the rest of the week.

Attempting to do a full loop-de-loop in the same tunnel that your twitchy, ninja master father is in, is not an advisable move. Which they learned after being thrown against the stone walls, having surprised their father bad enough he reacted on instinct.

Raph and Leo both thought they would’ve won the bet. Another bet was set, for a rematch.

Just as soon as they earned their boards back.
April raised an eyebrow, reading the headline on the newspaper she’d been disassembling.

“‘Transformers: scientists in disguise?’ oh come on, that’s an awful title,” April muttered aloud. If she were a reporter, she would have at least come up with a pun, and not just ripped off a trademarked slogan.

She tossed the page onto the discard pile; nothing too unusual about a scorned scientist trying to take revenge. She wasn’t looking for that sort of thing anyways; no, she was looking at the five different newspapers in front of her for Kraang information.

More scientists were disappearing, none of their occupations lining up with her father’s. Small time newspapers talked about a rise in property buy outs, displacement of struggling businesses in lower income neighborhoods. And the one conspiracy magazine April had found that was semi-reliable; it boasted that aliens were among us, and that they were here to destroy the foundation of society by collapsing the economy, one buy out at a time.

Not quite what was happening, but close enough. The people who’d written into the magazine with their own sightings helped a little, giving April at least an idea of new Kraang hideouts.

She clipped out another strip of magazine, tacking it onto the cork board she’d borrowed from her aunt’s antique shop downstairs. A huge map of New York was stretched over it, neon pins placed on suspected and confirmed Kraang hideouts.

There were a lot more suspected ones than confirmed, since going over each area was such a slow process with just two people on the ground; ninjas or not.

April added another pale pink pin over the new magazine strip, marking it for further investigation. She’d have to ask Leo and Raph to check on it in a couple days; tonight they were all busy, including her.

Evening was approaching, and that meant she’d soon be heading down into the subway to catch a train headed opposite of her home. Her backpack was already set out on her bed, filled with fresh fruits, batteries, and a spare sling for her arm.

Experimentally, April flexed her recently un-casted arm for the fifth time that hour; it felt good to have that plaster off, the itching of healing skin and bones had driven her crazy the last while. The only evidence left of her fall was a large pinked over scar, and the twinging of her atrophied muscles. A small price to pay, in exchange for her life.

A part of April felt like she really owed Leo and Raph for saving her life; and that was one of the reasons she was going to their brothers’ home that evening.

April glanced at the clock, half past five already, and decided she’d better start cleaning up her scattered clippings.

She’d been really surprised when Leo and Raph had come back from one of their sleepovers with their siblings, and told her that they wanted to meet her again. Something about getting to know Leo and Raph’s side of the family.
April didn’t really consider herself family to the mutants per say, but the muddled translation between languages was probably to blame for that addressment. Regardless, she’d been flattered the two feral mutants wanted to try being friends, despite their bad experiences with humanity.

April was willing to try as well; out of gratefulness, but also curiosity.

As mildly to extremely unsettling the two mutants could be… they were also very interesting. April felt a little bad for it, but her scientist side raised its head almost every time she started to think on the two feral turtles. It was just somehow really fascinating, the differences between them and their elder siblings; their mind sets, and personality development.

It was probably really insensitive of her to want to study the boys, even just a little. Must’ve been all the Discovery Channel shows she’d watched as kid, plus exposure to her father’s work over the years.

Hopefully, she’d be able to keep that side of herself under control for the duration of the visit; and however long her tentative friendship with the turtles lasted.

At least until her father was found, and the Kraang dealt with. Whatever the aliens were planning, it was something sinister; and the only ones who could probably even put a dent in those plans were two, maybe four, mutant teenagers.

April sighed under her breath, shoving the remaining scraps of paper into her waste bin. Not too long ago, the most she’d worried about was future college opportunities, and how she’d continue avoiding discussions of potential boyfriends with her classmates. Now she was trying to rescue her father from hostile aliens, and possibly prevent the destruction of humanity.

Also, she was attempting to create friendships with people who technically couldn’t be counted as actual people, and with only half of their family speaking proper English. Plus, they might be her only shot at ever seeing her father again; because they were modern age ninja warriors.

What even was her life?

April checked the clock again, and figured a quick dinner needed to be prepared in the next ten minutes. Time slipped away so quickly, and she could be out at night for only so long; school was the next day still, weirdness of her private life or not.

Tucking her arm back into the support sling, April stretched her cramped legs from kneeling on the carpet, and headed for the kitchen.

Unbeknownst to April though, or the still sleeping Leonardo and Raphael, Donnie and Mikey were in the worst danger of their lives.

Slinking in through the tunnels, tens of silent footsteps pattered across slick stone, traveling deep into the feral mutants’ territory.
The Shredder hadn’t just been resting after the failed capture of the two mutant turtles; he’d had his network of spies observing the mutants’ activities, including their trips from their staked territory.

Leo and Raph had thought they were hidden from all human eyes, carefully keeping their journeys secret and unseen.

They hadn’t been careful enough.

Tracked to the location of their estranged brothers, the human ninja that had followed them reported back to the Shredder, about the existence of more mutant turtles. Vulnerable and alone, placed far from the reaches of master Yoshi’s territory; easy pickings for capture.

The Shredder had sent two teams to capture the mutants, and waited for them to be brought to his feet.

Hamato Yoshi would fight him, one way or another; and the leverage of having… whatever these creatures were to him, would be more than enough to flush the coward out of hiding.

Evening settled over the city, and men and women clad in black invaded the sanctuary of two feral children; steel and chains ready for their blood.

They expected an easy fight.

They did not get one.

Donnie was the one who raised the alarm, scenting a change in the slight air current that ran through their home.

Humans- too many of them to fight- and they were almost upon them. They had to run; they had to escape before-

Black figures swarmed into their nest, rapid and shadow like, and with them came a hail of sharp metal.

Donnie dove to the side, rolling out of the way; only his left leg getting clipped by the attack. Across the room, he heard Mikey shriek in fear and rage, and then the humans were on them both.

Metal weapons, long or short or like woven braids, lashed out at Donnie; he barely avoided most, getting sliced multiple times as he darted through the swathes of humans. He had to get to Mikey, had to get them both out of the nest, away away away-

Something looped around his neck, and jerked him to the floor. Donnie hissed and snarled, choking as he struggled against the humans holding him. How dare they, how dare they, this was their home, their home only, no humans they weren’t allowed no one was allowed but him and Mikey- Donnie coughed, throat constricting as the humans pulled the length of rope tighter.
He couldn’t breathe, he couldn’t breathe at all, and more rope was being tied around his arms and legs, he could feel the hands all over him, holding pushing squeezing, just like back then the first time the lost time-

A scream of fury and desperation cut through Donnie’s blurring thoughts, and then Mikey was freeing him from the humans.

Donnie’s brave-strong-beloved-brother slammed into the human holding the rope, and Donnie could breathe again. Filling his lungs with air, Donnie found the strength to break the binding on his limbs, and rejoin the fray.

Donnie didn’t know where his sharp-cutting-tool had gone, but he had his claws and his strength, and that was all he needed. He tore into any human who dared get close enough, ripping away the flimsy fabric hiding their necks and stomachs, and tearing away at their soft insides. Red and screams filled their once peaceful nest, and Donnie added his own to the humans’. A fierce and dangerous howl ripping from his throat, joined by Mikey’s manic screams.

Many humans or no, they wouldn’t lose their lives to their invaders.

Screaming at and tearing into and crushing the bones any human he could, Donnie fought to make enough room for at least Mikey to get free and into the tunnels. Mikey stayed right beside him though; a flurry of red and green, viciously attacking every human close enough.

Donnie kicked a human male hard enough he fell away, falling onto their many burning sticks. Whatever had been in the man’s fabrics, it caused the fire to leap and explode across the room; blooming bright as the daylight outside. The man screamed, consumed instantly by the heat.

The fire spread across the old floor fabrics, burning rapidly through them and filling the air with smoke. The chaos of the invasion doubled, humans yelling at one another as their attacks increased urgency.

Donnie grabbed a human closest to him, ignoring the stab of the human’s weapon against his chest, and threw the woman into her companions; freeing space for Mikey and himself to flee through.

With fire getting larger by the moment, and humans regrouping their strength; this was the only opportunity they may get to escape.

They moved together, vaulting over the fallen humans that lay prone on the floor, and skidding on loose stones as they fled on all fours.

Only a few humans stood in their way within the first tunnel, avoided or dispatched as Donnie and Mikey fled.

One got close enough to almost catch Mikey with a long-sharp-slicing-tool, and Donnie slammed the man’s head so hard against the stone wall that he could hear the human’s skull cracking.

Mikey tackled the final human charging them, her flying metal almost landing in Donnie’s eyes; he plunged his claws into the woman’s neck, and tore out her throat.

Blood and gore and burns covered them both, and their senses were filled with the growing smoke from their nest and their screaming instincts to flee flee run hide fight escape run-

More air born metal flew at them, the humans in black fabric emerging from the haze filled tunnel; running after Donnie and Mikey still.
Donnie didn’t glance back at their ruined home again, and neither did Mikey.

They ran, and the many humans pursued them into the darkness.

Across the city, April met with Leo and Raph; backpack ready, arm in a comfortable sling.

Amicable conversation was exchanged before separation for transport, good moods and high hopes for the evening.

They arrived too late, far too late.

Chapter End Notes

: 3c
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

-destruction of familiarity.

Chapter Notes

HEY! Here ends the arc of the Nest Invasion, and the path of canon truly begins!
I sat at my desk and wrote this all day, hope ya'll love it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Raph was the first to notice, the heavy scent of burning things, wafting from deeper down the tunnels.

“Is that…?” Leo asked, tensing up as he caught the scent as well.

“Smoke.” Raph jerked a nod, agreeing with Leo. “Stay close April, we don’t know what we’ll be walking into.”

“Uh, right,” April shuffled closer to the middle of their group, her flashlight waving across the floor up ahead.

Raph’s hands drifted to rest on his sais’ hilts, and he felt himself shift into the observant indifference required for recon missions. With Leo flanking April’s other side; they walked as stealthily as they could into the now eerily quiet tunnels, only April’s footfalls disturbing the hazy ambience.

By this point, Mikey should’ve shown up; it was almost routine, how quickly their youngest brother found and greeted them. The last time, Raph had been vaguely concerned about his younger brother; thankfully, Mikey had only been sleeping, laid out on top of a pillow pile in the nest.

With the increasing fog of smoke though, it didn’t look good. Absent brothers was one thing, signs of fire plus that was a whole other.

As they moved deeper into the underground networks, Raph’s nose and eyes started to feel itchy and dried out. There wasn’t enough air flow for the smoke to escape properly, and so most of it had stagnated within the tunnels. Soon, April’s flashlight made the areas in front of them into a grey haze; Raph could still see through it, but he could tell Leo was starting to have trouble, ditto for April.

He took lead again, and heard Leo’s footsteps fall a bit further behind; probably protecting their rear guard and April’s back.

They were close now, only the last tunnel to enter and travel through before they emerged into
Donnie and Mikey’s nest. Raph flicked his third eyelids shut, blocking the worst of the smoke out and stopping the sting; his lungs still felt achy though, and he could hear April stifling coughs.

Just a little more, then they’d find out what-

Raph’s toe nudged something loose, and it made a metallic clatter against the rail tracks. He looked down and-

A throwing star. There was a throwing star not forty feet from his sibling’s home.

“Leo,” Raph said in a hushed voice, a rising tide of panic and rage filling his body. “Get out your swords.”

Raph’s sais were already in his hands- he wasn’t sure when he’d drawn them but he had- and behind him came the sound of Leo’s ringing blades.

April’s quiet gasp didn’t distract Raph; instead he channeled everything into his awareness and tight control over his anger. He felt his adrenaline rocket, and his lungs expand as he took a long silent breath; they continued walking towards the end of the tunnel, nothing but darkness and smoke ahead.

Finally, Raph stepped up to the stone platform, and April’s flashlight illuminated the scene before them.

It was-

Raph clenched his fists, gritting his teeth and shaking with coiled anger.

It was nothing but wreckage.

The fire was long since out, not a trace of heat left excluding the higher temperature of the stones. Smothered by lack of fresh oxygen and fuel to burn.

There were shurikan and kunai across the whole room; imbedded in the walls and floor, lying strewn where they’d fallen. Torn and burned carpets, exposing the stone beneath them. What remained of Donnie and Mikey’s things were strewn in the chaos; Donnie’s bookshelf in shambles, not a sign of any of Mikey’s ribbon balls. All of their possessions, burned or broken.

There was blood on the floor.

A lot of blood, spread out everywhere. Whole dried pools of it, long splashes across the floor.

There wasn’t a single sign of life.

Leo disappeared into the bedroom Mikey and Donnie shared, ghosting across the blackened and reddened floors. Raph knelt down, fighting with himself to not go off, to not yell and curse and hunt the sons of bitches down and-

“What happened here?” April asked, voice small and scared.

“Footclan. The Footclan happened,” Raph spat, examining the closest puddle of red now turning brown.

“Is that-?”

“No. It’s not mutant blood,” Raph said, poking it with his sai’s tip. The whole smell was wrong,
reeking of human and not mutated turtle. “It’s human’s blood. Whoever tried to get my brothers, they didn’t have an easy time.”

“How can you tell it’s not… theirs?” April questioned, stepping into Raph’s field of vision and further into the ruined home.

“I’ve been around enough of them both to smell the difference,” Raph replied, ignoring April’s slight shudder. Whatever, if she thought it was freaky; tough. Raph had bigger problems than a human girl’s squeamishness.

“They’re not in their room,” Leo reported, stepping back out of the separate room. His swords were lowered, probably in case their siblings had been in there, but Raph knew they’d be up and thrusted before he could blink if necessary. Leo was visibly tense; Raph could read it in every movement his brother made. Leo stepped carefully around the worst of the fire damage, skirting as well the pools of blood. “We need to start looking right away; if the fire is out, and the blood is this dried…”

“…it’s been a few hours, at least,” Raph finished grimly. Fuckers, who knew what could’ve happened in those few hours. And he and Leo were the ones who led them here, it was their fault-

“There’s a lot of evidence of struggle, not so much of actual capture,” Leo observed, rejoining April and Raph near the platform edge. “That means they got away, at least from here. I sincerely doubt after all this damage that the Foot would’ve let them off without inflicting serious injuries; there’s no blood from them, right?”

“None, far as I can tell. Means they got out into the tunnels,” Raph stood again, the need to hurt things crawling up and down his arms. “We start there, and keep looking until we find them.”

Leo nodded, and stepped off the platform; wading through the smoke and into darkness again.

“…do you think they’re alright?” April said softly, dropping noisily onto the gravel. “That blood… this whole situation… could they really have escaped?”

“They better have,” Raph nearly hissed, keeping close to the human girl so she didn’t end up getting her untrained self killed. “Or Shredder’s gonna get what’s comin’ to him, and worse.”

“For once, we’re in agreement then,” Leo said in a cold tone from further down the tunnel.

Raph grit his teeth, and growled under his breath. They’d find their brothers, take them home, their real home, the lair, where they were safe, and then he was going to find Shredder and deliver the same treatment he’d given to Raph’s father and brothers.

No one fucked with his family, no one.

April tried not to shiver, her nerves fraying worse as Raph spun his sais again; the slight echo of metal ringing coming from the movement. His whole body radiated fury, and with the pale illumination of her flashlight, he looked down right terrifying.
April was in way over her head; stuck in tunnels that could still be crawling with enemy ninjas, and unable to leave the side of two extraordinarily pissed off mutants.

She was worried for Donnie and Mikey of course, but her first priority was her own safety; and at that moment, watching the two brothers near prowling the area around them, April didn’t feel safe at all.

It was easy to forget, listening to the two of them banter and bicker like ordinary teens, that Leo and Raph were highly trained, extremely dangerous individuals; bigger and stronger than her, and with only a cautious friendship to tie them all together.

Likely, they wouldn’t be thinking of her safety at all at the moment; they would be focusing purely on their brothers’. Understandable, but that didn’t make April feel any better.

April wanted to get her can of pepper spray out, to have that sense of safety and control; but she’d left it at her aunt’s house, because she’d been trying to avoid making herself threatening to the skittish feral turtles.

She felt bare and vulnerable, and sorely human compared to the mutants guarding her.

“The trail leads this way,” Leo said up ahead, his swords glinting in April’s flashlight. He was pointing into… into a collapsed portion of the tunnel, murky black inside the opening. “They must’ve tried to lose the Footclan in here; they might still be hiding deeper in.”

April really, really did not want to go in there; it practically screamed do not enter. But… she couldn’t exactly leave the two brothers; without them, she’d be a sitting duck for any remaining Footclan ninja.

April really wished she’d brought her pepper spray.

Raph nudged her shoulder, and April suppressed her jolt at the contact; she was not in an okay space at the moment, she didn’t need Raph’s impatience adding to it.

But, regardless of the adrenaline and frayed state of her nerves, April walked forwards, and stepped into the uncharted tunnels.

There was way less smoke inside the ancient tunnels, but that didn’t decrease the creep factor. There were still scatterings of blood on the tunnel walls, and the occasional abandoned throwing star. The deeper they crept, the worse the tunnel conditions got; crumbling stone, cracks spider webbing up the sides, dirt and dust everywhere, replacing the choking smoke from earlier with choking silt.

April coughed into her hand, and tried not to breathe too deeply as she dislodged another cloud of dirt.

Eventually, after what felt like forever, they arrived in an intersection of tunnels; three different paths to take each way. Leo disappeared immediately into the closest, following the fading trail of shurikans that way. Raph stayed with April though, and signaled her to follow him down the tunnel opposite to Leo’s chosen one.

April saw why he’d selected this one, an almost unnoticeable speckling of blood at the foot of the tunnel. Then, Leo reappeared silently beside her, and April fumbled with her flashlight. He didn’t even glance at her, instead getting ahead of Raph and hurrying down the tunnel.

April sucked in a shaky breath, and tightened her grip on the flashlight’s base. She could do this, even if she didn’t feel safe, Raph and Leo would keep her safe. They’d said so, they’d promised; she
They’d keep her safe. She had to believe in that, even with the ominous atmosphere of the tunnels and their moods.

Her flashlight’s beam seemed weak now, in the pressing dark of the tunnel; it reflecting ever so slightly wrong off the stones, and made the eerie effect worse. It was like every horror movie she’d ever regretfully watched; silent tunnels, lurking danger, inhuman creatures stalking… not her, but still stalking.

Raph was saying something to Leo, but April wasn’t listening closely enough to follow the conversation; mostly, she was trying to reassure herself that she’d be fine, and that there was no reason for her heart rate to be steadily climbing.

“Wait,” Leo said suddenly, making both April and Raph pause. He was standing in the middle of the tunnel, swords pointed downwards, and not looking back. Something was up ahead.

April peered around Raph, shining her light at Leo and beyond him, and-

There was something lying in the tunnel.

There was something lying in the tunnel.

April’s light flashed over the discarded sword beside the body, the shapeless black of its clothing, the exposed and torn neck skin-

April dropped her flashlight.

She heard its glass break, the beam flickering over the stones, but she didn’t care.

April was not okay, none of this was okay, she wasn’t safe at all, there was someone dead lying not twenty feet from her and she’d seen it-

“No no no no no, this can’t be happening, this can’t be happening oh my god-” April wheezed, putting her hands over her ears and facing away from the body. “Oh god, oh god oh god oh god-”

Someone was dead. There was a dead body. She was so close to it, she was still in the same tunnels where that person had died and as far as she knew the people who’d done it were still around and she knew they were supposed to be her friends but they’d killed someone they’d probably killed so many people and she couldn’t breathe April couldn’t breathe and she was going to die-

“Hey. Hey.”

April looked up.

Raph was in front of her, mostly in shadow, but she could see his intense neon eyes staring directly into her own.

“Look at me April,” Raph said in a low tone, reaching out and gently pulling April’s gripping hands from her head. “You’re hyperventilating. I know you’re scared, but passing out isn’t going to help anyone. We’re gonna get out of this tunnel right away here, but first, you gotta take deep breaths, okay? Do it with me, one… two… three… You’re doing great. Again. One… two… three… Now again…”

April followed Raph’s instructions, breathing deeply with each count and copying his breath rate.
Slowly, her constricting throat opened again, and her head cleared.

She was fine. She was okay. It wasn’t her on the floor, and it wouldn’t be her on the floor.

April blinked away the stress tears collecting on her eyelids, and tightly squeezed Raph’s hands in her own. Another deep breath, long and drawn out. She was okay. She could do this. She could freak out later, when there weren’t two missing kids to find.

“…thanks,” April whispered hoarsely. “I’m okay now.”

Raph nodded, and released her hands. He stepped around her, and she heard him picking up her broken but still working flashlight. “Don’t turn around. We’re leaving right away anyways, there’s nothing here, right Leo?”

“Right, the… the body is cold. He’s been dead for a few hours now.”

April shuddered again, taking deeper breaths as Leo and Raph talked behind her.

“They aren’t here then,” Raph said.

“Not anymore they aren’t. My best guess, Donnie and Mikey were cornered by this guy after they lost most of the group; and then… I guess his team didn’t find him again afterwards,” Leo replied, soft footfalls as he approached them.

“So where are they now?”

“…I’m not sure. The trails didn’t lead anywhere else, but both of the other tunnels were dead ends. Still no sign of capture-”

“-which means they got away clean. Feh, I knew they wouldn’t be taken that easily; not by these fuckers.”

“That still doesn’t answer the questions of where they are now.”

“They might be further down, but I kinda doubt they’d be stupid enough to leave a trail like this; plus, Donnie mentioned these tunnels weren’t even all that stable, and he’d never endanger Mikey like that, so… I guess we’ll figure it out, once we’re outta these tunnels. C’mon April, we’re going now,” Raph said, pressing April’s flashlight back into her shaky hands. April nodded numbly, and let Raph start leading her away from… from the body.

It was still on the backs of her eyelids, she could still see very clearly the blood and gore in her mind; the details heightened by her imagination and horror.

April wasn’t going to be sleeping tonight, or maybe ever again.

They walked through the intersection again, retracing their steps back to the newer tunnels. April kept her eyes on the ground, her flashlight lowered as well; absently watching Raph’s huge feet walk silently beside her.

“How did you know what to do?” She asked, wanting to relieve the tense silence. “About my freaking out. I… I wouldn’t have expected that from you.”

“…I got Entomophobia,” Raph replied after a beat. “I’ve… I’ve had panic attacks a’fore, and my dad would talk me through ‘em. Entomophobia is-”

“-the fear of insects,” April said, nodding her head.
“Yeah. How’d you know that?”

April smiled sadly, feeling an undercurrent of pain with that question. “My dad’s a psychologist, I’ve known the correct terms for phobias and mental disorders for as long as I’ve known how to read.”

“Oh. Cool,” Raph said awkwardly, probably hearing her melancholy tone. He glanced over at her, and for once he seemed to be showing actual concern, instead of just gruffness. “You sure you’re okay? I get that this isn’t what you were expecting tonight.”

April grimaced, and shrugged. “I’m doing as well as I can. Doesn’t matter though, I can flip out some more after we find your brothers.”

“I’m not. good. with this kinda thing, but just… if you really need anything…?” Raph put a tentative hand on April’s shoulder, and his grip felt incredibly light compared to the power she knew he could exercise. “Ask or somethin’, if you gotta. I’m not asshole enough to leave you alone with a panic attack, alright?”

However awkward Raph might’ve been delivering that statement, he sounded sincere; and that helped something in April’s chest unwind a little more.

Raph was rough, and rude, and one of the most dangerous people she knew. But it seemed, underneath all that, that he was also one of the most genuine.

“Thanks, I’ll keep that in mind,” April said gratefully. Raph jerked a nod, and let go of her shoulder. They walked in silence for the rest way, the slightly less ominous tunnels beginning again once they stepped out of the broken ones.

April might not feel okay, and probably still had another panic attack waiting to emerge later on, but at least she knew she’d be safe, so long as she stuck with the guys. She could trust them that much.

Leo paced restlessly, up and down the small illuminated space April’s light provided.

“We don’t have any more trails to follow, so what now? Where would they have gone?” Leo muttered, mostly to himself. He absently slashed with his swords, jerking the movements back before they became full swings. “They’re scared and panicking, and their home is destroyed. We’re miles from the lair, and I’m not sure if they’d even be able to find their way over there. Where would they have gone?”

“Well… what other places do they hang around?” April asked, doing her own version of pacing; shuffling a few feet each way, and then retracing her steps. Raph was the only one standing still, Leo’s brother leaning against the tunnel wall and spinning his sais.

Raph tinged his sais’ tips together, which didn’t help Leo’s grating nerves. “There’s those recycling bins, an’ the candles spot, an’ the sunning grates, an’—”

“The green place!” Leo exclaimed, suddenly realizing the obvious answer to their situation. “I can’t believe—”
“-we fucking forgot that place, holy shit. Of course they’d go there!” Raph leapt off the wall, already heading back the way they’d come, towards the right tunnel connections. “We’re fucking morons; we should’ve gone there straight away. C’mon, who knows how badly they’re injured.”

For once, Leo didn’t fight with Raph about giving the orders. They had a lead, and a chance to make things right.

This was their fault; they’d led the Shredder’s forces right into Donnie and Mikey’s home. They’d endangered their siblings again, and this time it could be truly life threatening.

If they weren’t alright, then Leo would join Raph on his man hunt. Shredder wouldn’t get away with this, Leo wouldn’t let him.

Oroku Saki would pay for what he’d done, and he would pay dearly.

Tunnels blurred together, and their footfalls were echoed by April’s harsh breathing. She kept pace though, despite being an ordinary human. Leo wanted to dash ahead, leave her in the dust like the first time she’d been in his brothers’ territory, but he couldn’t; she was… not to be insulting, but she was weak. If they left her alone, and something or someone attacked her, she’d be as good as dead.

April was brave, for not collapsing on herself at the sight of an actual dead body, and back when they’d first met her; keeping herself together despite losing her father and meeting aliens and mutants all in one night.

But she was also untrained, and essentially an average human girl. On the off chance a Footclan ninja was still around, she’d be long dead before they got back.

So Leo restrained himself and his speed, noting that Raph did as well, and set a pace that April could follow with only some difficulty.

Leo smelled fresh air and organic life, the scent that always caught his attention when they got close to the green place. He could see the ladder now, April’s waving flashlight showing its dark frame up the wall. He was the first to grab onto it, and he moved fast as he could to shove the sewer cover away and burst out into the evening air.

Leo’s thoughts were uncharacteristically panicked; losing his usual calmness and scattering around his mind. He wasn’t used to feeling this worried, this scared for someone else. He waited only long enough for Raph and April to emerge from the tunnel as well, and then he was heading into the foliage of the small forest around them.

Please, please let them be here, please let us find them, please let me make this right-

“Leo, slow down!” Raph called out. “Running around ain’t gonna help us find them any faster, so fuckin’ cool it with the sonic impression.”

Leo whirled on his brother, who’d come up behind him when Leo wasn’t looking. April stood a few feet behind a scowling Raph, panting as she leaned on her knees. Raph gestured to the dark woods around them. “We got one flashlight, a human to keep an eye on, and two very skilled hiders to find. I wanna find them just as badly, but we make a bunch a noise and they’ll be gone before we even knew they were there. Capiche?”

Leo blinked, vaguely surprised by Raph’s sensible advice, and took a deep breath. He collected himself again, and buried the panicking energy back inside himself. Cool, calm, smart; leading qualities that he needed to remember. Leo smiled, and relaxed his stance. “Again with the Italian mobster?”
“Shut up, The Godfather is a good movie series,” Raph huffed.

“I kinda resent the comment about watching the human, but you know what, I’ll let it slide if we stop running,” April added breathlessly. “Please. I don’t think I can keep up that pace anymore, my side is seriously trying to split itself right now.”

“Sorry April, no more running, at least for now,” Leo said, feeling slightly embarrassed how he’d lost his cool. Donnie and Mikey seemed to bring that out of him, regardless of whether or not they were actually around. “We’ll start from here and… I guess search until we’re sure they aren’t here. Your flashlight got enough juice?”

“Plenty, but I think the lens is beyond repair.”

“Good enough,” Leo turned back towards the dense underbrush and trees. “Let’s start looking then.”

Leo let Raph take point; his brother’s better vision was more likely to spot things beyond April’s flashlight. Leo stayed by April, using her light to search the ground for signs that his brothers were nearby.

The trees around them loomed in the dark, and the peaceful atmosphere Leo had come to expect of the woods was absent. With a night sky instead of a blue one, and their brothers’ lives in question, it felt almost like the tunnels had. Eerie and wrong; a stark difference to how it’d felt the last few times.

They kept walking, circling around the pond and clearing, and pressing deeper into the ravine. Occasionally, Raph or Leo himself would call out Donnie and Mikey’s names, but neither of them responded. The forest remained silent excluding the sounds of nocturnal animals.

The third time round that Leo whipped around at a sound, and found a squirrel or bird; he let out a long sigh. This wasn’t working. Their brothers, if they were here, would’ve shown up by now if they’d wanted to be found.

“Let’s stop for a moment, maybe they’ll come out if we aren’t moving around,” Leo suggested, stopping in a semi open space in the woods.

“Oh thank god,” April whispered, sitting down on the spotty grass growing in the micro clearing.

“Mikey, Donnie! You guys out here?” Raph asked the woods around them, his voice raised slightly above normal range. “We’re here to get you, come out, there’s no one else with us! Well, there’s April, but you know her… kinda I guess…”

While Raph kept calling out, and April rested her lungs, Leo circled around the edges of the clearing. Huge thick bushes covered the whole of one side, most of them hiding six feet and up worth of tree line. He bent, checking a scuff in some of the rotting leaves that blanketed the underside of the foliage. Could it be…?

Leo put his hand beside the disturbed leaves. Yep, about the same size as a mutant turtle’s hand. The scuffed leaves left and imprint of hurried movement, likely one of his brothers running through here.

Leo opened his mouth to tell Raph and April, but something shifted inside the bushes. Leo looked up, catching movement right in front of him, and were those eyes-?

Something leaped out at Leo, tackling him around the waist, and sending them both to the forest floor. And then Leo had a lap full of snuffling, tearful Mikey; whirring and clicking rapidly as he attempted to squeeze the life out of Leo.
Leo dropped his swords, and wrapped his arms around Mikey. “Oh my god, oh my god Mikey, are you alright?? Are you- are you hurt anywhere-?”

Mikey made a high pitched whine and hid his face in Leo’s neck, cutting off any other questions Leo had.

Mikey was shaking all over, and though Leo couldn’t see most of his brother at that moment, what he could see of Mikey’s legs and arms… didn’t look good.

“Shh, shh Mikey, it’s okay, we’re here now,” Leo rubbing a hand across his brother’s shell. He wasn’t used to doing this but—”Shh. Don’t- don’t cry, okay? I got you.”

—he’d try anyways.

“I got you, alright? I got you.”

Raph turned away for a split second, and then there was Mikey; wrapped around Leo like a green octopus. Mikey’s arms were… they had red all over the length below his elbows. Dried and tacking blood, and splatters of it going further up. It definitely wasn’t Mikey’s.

And- jeeze. Mikey was making a horrible whining sound, the fear in it grating on Raph’s ear drums.

That was one brother, so where was Donnie?

“Donnie? You out there?” Raph asked, walking slowly over to the bushes where Mikey had been hiding. Nothing moved, but Raph hadn’t expected it to be that easy to spot his brother. “At least answer me, okay?”

While Leo kept shushing Mikey, who still hadn’t stopped that horrible, horrible whine, Raph peered as closely as he could at every shadow beyond the bushes. Only trees and more bushes, nothing moving or even twitching, until-

Donnie stepped out of the foliage, materializing from the woods like a gaunt specter. April’s light shook, and Raph thought he heard her gasp. Donnie’s eyes were brighter than the drying blood that nearly coated his body.

Raph had been right; whoever those ninjas had been, his brothers hadn’t given them an easy fight.

In fact, it looked like they’d won.

Donnie was the opposite to Mikey’s constant stream of noise; blank and utterly silent as he stared at them all. His eyes were a mite too wide to be normal, and Raph felt almost pinned by the intensity in the bloody irises.

Donnie said something, creaking and too quiet for Raph to hear.

“What? What’d you say?” Raph asked, cautiously approaching his taller sibling.
“…came for us,” Donnie whispered, the slightest tremor in his words. He stared directly into Raph’s eyes, and Raph felt himself pale at the horror Donnie’s expression held. “Came for us.”

Raph did a quick once over of his brother, checking for serious injuries. Donnie’s plastron had a painful looking gouge near his heart, but it hadn’t broken deep enough to draw blood. There was a slash on one leg, scabbed over but it looked like it’d bled a lot before stopping. Donnie had dark bruises around his neck, standing out like a brand; a patch of scales torn by whatever had gotten him there.

Donnie’s hands were shaking.

Every other part of Raph’s feral brother was perfectly still, completely and totally frozen, but his hands were shaking just the slightest bit.

Raph pushed every bit of his own emotions, the fury, the rage, the fear that’d been mounting all evening- and stepped forwards with his arms open. “Hey. I’m here now, we all are. You guys are safe.”

Donnie didn’t move, but his eyes darted at Raph’s extended arms. Raph watched his brother’s throat shift as he swallowed, waiting for him to make the decision. “Come on, I got you. It’s like Leo said, we’re here now.”

Another moment, and the glaze of terror left Donnie’s stare. Raph didn’t move as his brother leaned down, letting Donnie initiate the contact.

Finally, Donnie’s long and lean arms wrapped all the way around Raph, and it was like someone had cut his strings; Raph’s tall brother folding on himself, and leaning heavily onto Raph.

Raph caught Donnie’s weight, and felt the shudder that went through his brother. Ignoring the smell of fire and iron, Raph held Donnie, and whispered, “That’s right, I got you. I promise, I got you.”

Donnie nodded shakily, and Raph felt it more than he saw it. Another shiver through Donnie, and Raph added some tightness to his hold.

He had his brother, both of them, and he swore he wasn’t going to let them go a second time.

April stood outside the scene, keeping her light lowered to the ground.

In the face of… in the face of the Donnie and Mikey’s appearances, her panic attack earlier suddenly felt minuscule in gravity.

They were lucky to be alive, so unbelievably lucky. But… they’d paid a price for that.

Blood and gore and visible injuries cloaked both of the brothers, and when Donnie had emerged from the woods, April had actually been very afraid. For herself.

But now, they were clinging to their older brothers, and seemed so much less intimidating. They looked like scared kids.
April swallowed her semi-irrational fear, and averted her eyes from the private moment the four brothers were sharing.

She shouldn’t have been here; this wasn’t something she was allowed to see.

April stood apart from the family reuniting, and suddenly felt very privileged to have a safe home to return to, and a loving guardian to greet her.

Mikey reached out, and tightly grasped Donnie’s hand. They were standing in what had been their home, their nest, their safe place.

All he could smell was smoke, and all he could see was black and red.

There was nothing left, the fire and humans had taken it all and burned it away.

No….. Mikey mumbled, searching for anything of his own, anything of his brother’s. Gone… all gone...

Searching, looking finding maybe, Donnie told him, squeezing Mikey’s hand once before stepping away.

Mikey glanced over at their other brothers, and at April; the others standing close by on the edge of Mikey’s nest. Lee-oh made encouraging gestures, urging Mikey to start looking.

They only had a small moment to look, then they would have to go and leave Mikey’s home for good. Now that humans, the Shredder, had found their home, they would have to go with Lee-oh and Raf to theirs. For safety.

Mikey didn’t want to go, but Donnie said so, so he would.

Mikey dropped onto the blackened floor, unhappy with how the fabrics crunched under his hands and feet as he walked through what remained of his nest.

He could take few things, just most precious things; or what he could find of precious things at least. Mikey wanted all his things though, all his strange and soft and fun things that he’d found and kept all the long seasons he and Donnie had lived here.

Where Mikey knew his favorite red fabric had been, the whole space was ashes now. All their carefully found and kept fabrics, burned away into white and grey.

Mikey didn’t see anything that could mean his special gifts from Donnie had survived, everything too black and twisted to tell apart.

Mikey wandered up the higher parts of his nest, looking for anything that had escaped the blaze.

He found his big sharp shining glass, broken into too many pieces to count. Shards of it were scattered everywhere in the spot it had sat for many, many turns of seasons.
Mikey gazed mournfully at the many split reflections of himself, and all the broken pieces of him stared mournfully back.

Mikey sniffled, and let tears drip onto the glass shards.

They didn’t somehow make the glass go back together, they just sat there, adding another layer of reflection.

Mikey turned away from what had been one of his favorite things, and left it behind.

Donnie carefully picked up the breaking and blackened book, the one he’d used to communicate with Leo.

He’d only just learned what it was really called, what the black squiggles inside said.

Donnie closed it one last time, the spine giving a creak as he did, and he placed it on the ruined book-shelf. All the other books on it were already too burnt to tell the names of, each one beyond hope of saving.

Donnie sighed, and picked himself up from the floor.

Nothing could be done for almost all their things. What Donnie had known was his piles of clever things, were now melted and scorched metal and _plass-tick_.

However, between two knocked over piles of clever things, Donnie’s box of tools remained.

He dug it out, and dusted away the ash on it; smearing black over the mottled red of his hands. The colors of it were burned away, but the metal box remained intact.

Donnie opened it, and sighed in relief. His carefully collected tools were still alright, he could keep them.

Mikey reappeared at his side, pushing against Donnie for comfort. Donnie put one arm around Mikey’s shoulders, humming one long note of _safe_ at him.

_Safe, am safe with you_, Mikey said back, bumping his cheek against Donnie’s. _Look, look what found what I have what lived still good still saved_

Mikey pushed something soft into Donnie’s chest, and Donnie looked down at it. It was a ball of Mikey’s soft strings, small and unburned.

_Lucky lucky lucky, lived safe still good for use_, Mikey chirped, the first hint of his usual self all evening. _What find what have there?_

_Tools my tools, still good inside box during the fire, can keep can bring_, Donnie replied, showing Mikey the tools. _Find anything else?_

_No…. _Mikey said sadly, returning to his upset and mournful self. _No nothing all gone all gone_
Mikey keened, and pressed against Donnie, purring with stress and not happy emotions Donnie purred back, adding his own upset feelings to the sounds Mikey made.

Have to go, time to leave and not come back, Donnie said quietly.

Don’t want to… not wanting to leave nest, your mine our nest home safe place, Mikey whined.

Have to, Donnie regretfully insisted. With Lee-oh and Raf and April, safe in lay-err with rat-that-is-tall, safe with family

I know...

Leaving, coming with me? Donnie removed his arm from Mikey’s back, and held it out for his brother to take.

Mikey did take his hand, letting Donnie pull him off the sooty floors. Together, they walked back to their waiting companions, and together, they walked out and away from their once home.

There was no coming back, not ever.

Donnie restrained his tears, stood straighter, and led Mikey away from the ruin of their home; following the steps of their brothers and their human.

April tapped her fingers nervously against the steering wheel of the very much stolen car she was driving.

This evening had been planned as a meet and greet. Now she was sitting in the driver’s seat of a stolen vehicle, with four mutant turtles in the back; two of them injured and covered in blood that wasn’t their own.

Her bad arm twinged as she turned the wheel, easing the car back into motion as the stop light turned green. Her sling was in her backpack, along with its extra.

God, she prayed, please do not let me go to jail for stealing a car, please do not let us get arrested because I suck at driving, please let me get to the other side of the city in one piece and deliver the four brothers to somewhere safe.

“Oooooooh my god, I can’t believe I’m doing this,” April mumbled, switching lanes for a turn up ahead. Thank the heavens she’d started lessons at school and with her dad, otherwise, it’d have been one of the turtles up here and April would’ve had a heart attack every other second.

She still was anyways, unused to being the one driving in the night time traffic of New York.

April glanced in the review mirror, checking the cars behind her, as well as the brothers in the back seat. They’d stolen a minivan, and put down all the seats inside it so there’d be lots of open space. It’d been an older model, so Raph had been able to hotwire it to life. How he knew that, April didn’t want to know. She just prayed the wires near her knees wouldn’t set her on fire.
In the back, Donnie had his head down and was curled tightly on himself. The moment they’d gotten in the car, he’d folded completely on himself, and gripped Mikey’s hand like a lifeline. Mikey had informed them in a garbled manner that Donnie had been taken at one point, in a big car, and had gone missing for a long, long day. Or something like that. He wasn’t making much sense at the moment, English too broken to really understand, and tending to stick with trilling at everything.

Donnie remained silent, and didn’t respond to Mikey’s vocalizations.

Leo sat across from them, shell against the plastic interior, and he seemed to be brooding. Once they’d left the immediate area of Donnie and Mikey’s home, he’d slid into this stormy state of cold… anger. That’s the feeling that April got from him.

Raph was similar, but at least his anger was normal feeling; hot and restless, not at all like Leo’s icy disposition. Raph was kneeling between the front seats with her, keeping an eye on the roads and on his brothers behind him.

As April tensely avoided going too fast, but also too slow, Raph spoke.

“…thanks for doing this. And for… um. For not makin’ fun of my phobia earlier.”

April glanced over at him, and he seemed oddly vulnerable having said that. He covered it though, scowling and shrugging. “Just. I know it’s a dumb fear, an’ it was nice of you to not point that out.”

“No one’s phobia is ‘dumb’,” April replied, turning her eyes back to the bright road ahead. “It’s someone’s phobia for a reason, and I think that reason should be respected. We’re all afraid of something.”

“Yeah? What are you afraid of then?”

April hummed; thinking of the robotic aliens that’d changed her whole life, of her father being dragged away and her helplessness to stop them, of falling from that helicopter and dropping onto the unforgiving ground.

She thought of the inhuman strength and power that the brothers possessed; the brothers she’d had to bet everything on in order to possibly see her father again.

She thought of failing to save her father.

“A lot of things. I’m afraid of a lot of things these days,” April said truthfully.

“…I can get that,” Raph replied, nodding to her out of the corner of her eye.

April nodded as well, and pressed a little harder on the gas pedal.

Leo led Donnie and Mikey into the dim light of the lair, his brothers silent and weary.

Their father was sitting on the couch, reading a novel as they entered.
Splinter dropped his book immediately as he caught sight of them, sweeping over to Leo and his siblings.

Donnie and Mikey flinched away, stepping behind Raph and sticking close as they could together. If their father was hurt by this, he didn’t show it; only asking what had happened, why their younger brothers had come home with them, why they were covered in blood.

Leo explained best he could, and by the end of his explanation, his father’s tail was lashing across the floor.

“Take them, and clean their wounds. I… I see that they need space, and I feel I too am in a state to need that,” Splinter said, whiskers quivering as he spoke. “I will… I will leave them to you, Leonardo, Raphael. I am going to pay a visit to the world above. I will return before morning, rest assured.”

Leo’s father put a firm hand on his shoulder, and stared directly at him. “My son, my sons, take care of one another. I will be back soon, I promise you this.”

And then he’d left, taking his walking staff, and disappearing into the tunnels.

That had left them with a new dilemma: getting their brothers clean.

Upon suggesting they take a shower, Leo had realized that Donnie and Mikey hadn’t ever actually taken a real shower. A proper one, with soap and warm water; not freezing temperatures and pond scum.

Leo wasn’t entirely sure why they hadn’t shown them how to last time they’d been in the lair; he supposed it’d sort of taken a back seat to things.

Raph had sighed long suffering, something Leo found himself echoing, and they’d led their brothers to the bathroom together.

New-new dilemma: Donnie and Mikey didn’t know how to clean themselves. They’d stared blankly at the bottle of shampoo and bar of soap Leo had handed them, and Leo had almost face palmed.

Rolling up his metaphorical, non-existent sleeves, Leo had turned on all three shower heads, and started a process he genuinely never thought he would participate in; communal bathing.

Raph took Donnie under the spray of one shower head, and Leo pulled Mikey under another. After all the trauma and gravity of the earlier evening, it was relieving to see Mikey start to perk up again. Underneath the hot water, he’d made the longest, more excited series of trills Leo had ever heard from him.

Like Donnie had already done, Mikey sat down on the tiled flooring, and started scrubbing absently at the blood caked onto him.

Leo had ended up sitting with him, using an actual scrubbing brush as well as actual soap to get the job done, because Mikey’s hand washing just wasn’t cutting it.

Mikey also ate some shampoo, the fruity smelling one, before Leo could stop him.

Mikey’s exclamations of disgust had started a laugh out of Leo, and drawn a chuckle from their other two brothers beside them.

Blood and dirt swirled down the drain, turning all the water near Mikey and Donnie murky and thick
Leo, despite feeling out of his element, kept at it; helping Mikey with his shell, and showing him how to use the sponge properly.

Mikey purred to himself, and to Donnie, and to Lee-oh, and to Raf. He felt warm and safe even if it tasted gross, the so-oohp felt nice on his scales. And the scrubbing things Leo gave him, they rubbed just hard enough to scratch when he pushed, and they got all the blood off him really easy.

Much better than licking, Mikey thought he might ask if he could have a scrubbing thing for himself after.

Donnie was still silent beside him, even though everyone else was talking quietly. Donnie had that far off look in his eyes, but it wasn’t the far off look Mikey needed to be worried about. Just his sad and thinking far off look, not his gone away far off look.

Mikey’s cuts and bruises stung, but he ignored them, because they weren’t that bad, and the water was so warm.

Mikey thought he might stay in the showerrr for good. It made everything feel less awful and sad.

Then Leo started scrubbing extra hard at something on Mikey’s shell, and he was able to bury completely the sad upset angry feelings inside him; for a while longer at least.

Raph squeezed another dollop of soap onto the scrubby in his hand, giving it to Donnie so his brother could start washing his legs.

Raph was kind of concerned, about how silent Donnie was being. After the six words he’d said back in the woods, he hadn’t said anything else to Raph or Leo. Only a short conversation in the nest with Mikey, and that was it.

Raph picked up the loofa beside him, and started at the soot and blood that stuck to Donnie’s shell. God only knew, he never thought he’d be helping his brother shower of all things. But desperate times called for desperate measures, and if they wanted the cuts on their brothers to remain uninfected, that meant Raph would have to help them clean themselves.

Donnie did most of the work at least, copying what Leo had shown him and Mikey. But his motions lacked life to them, and once he’d finished scrubbing his arms and legs, Donnie had simply stopped. Sitting mutely under the water, with his head tilted upwards; eyes closed, breathing even.
Raph finished scrubbing the grit and gore off Donnie’s shell, and sat back against the corner of the shower block. It was warm in here, and the water felt nice; plus, Mikey was still finishing up, Leo having trouble keeping their brother still long enough to get the backs of Mikey’s legs. Raph didn’t feel inclined to move yet, so he stayed partially under the water; half watching their loud and rambunctious brothers, half watching Donnie.

Donnie remained unmoving, lax yet statue like under the stream of hot water.

Raph remained in his corner, letting the hot water on his legs warm him steadily.

Under the soothing heat falling over his whole body, Donnie let the stress of his day flood through his whole system; finally free of the blocks he’d placed on it.

They were safe, for the moment. Possibly for the next… who knew how long.

He could let go, Mikey didn’t need him to be strong for at least this moment alone.

Donnie breathed out slowly, and with the water cascading over his face, no one saw him cry.

He was tired. He was angry. He was furious. He was sad. He was scared. He was so, so tired.

Donnie breathed in, and wasn’t able to distinguish his tears from the hot water falling on him.

He stayed like that, breathing in and out and in and out, crying in a way no one could tell he was, until Raf nudged him back to awareness.

Donnie was disappointed he had to leave the warmth and peace of the showerr, but he let himself be coaxed out regardless.

A fluffy fabric was given to him, and Donnie used it to dry himself off; Mikey requiring coralling by Lee-oh to get him dry. Donnie would’ve helped, but he was too tired out to. Lee-oh had it under control anyways, and Mikey listened despite likely not understanding what Lee-oh was saying to him.

Donnie didn’t either, but then again, he trusted his brothers to take care of things until he found his energy to do anything again.

Donnie let Raf and Lee-oh wind white strips around his legs, his neck, and his arms; placing sticky bandages on smaller injuries, and giving him three foul tasting pebbles called pills. Mikey was given a similar treatment, though Donnie’s small-precious-brave brother kept up a constant chatter; while Donnie had been content to remain silent.

Finally, they were shown to the room they’d slept in the first time in the lay-err. It remained the same, and smelled faintly of must.

It made Donnie feel terribly nest-sick, for the huge and comfy sleeping spot he and Mikey had built over the seasons.
Mikey dove into it immediately, starting to cover the bed once again with their scents. To make it feel and smell just a little more like home.

*Thank you, brothers,* Donnie said to *Lee-oh* and *Raf,* taking from them the last remaining treasures of Donnie and Mikey’s old home.

“Uh, w-welcome? *Lee-oh* said, getting the pronunciation slightly wrong, but none the less correct with his wording.

Donnie nodded, and closed the door to them; shutting out the light and wrong smells of the *lay-err.* He gently placed his box of tools, and Mikey’s one soft string ball, in the corner of the room. Then he lay down with Mikey, curling around his still chattering brother.

Donnie shushed him, because Mikey didn’t have to hide himself with his never ending talking anymore; they were safe, and they could rest.

Mikey snuggled closer, gentle with Donnie’s injuries as well as his own, and trilled a soft good sleep to Donnie.

Donnie trilled back, too tired to purr like Mikey was, and drifted into exhausted blackness.

In the lair living room, Leo stared at nothing as he flipped a kunai in his hands. Raph paced nearby him, restless energy emerging again now that their brothers were asleep.

Leo knew exactly what his brother was thinking; about marching into the still un-located hideout of the Footclan, and taking Shredder down.

Leo wanted that too, but they had to plan. Charging recklessly into a fight would get them both killed.

…thinking on this after hours of stress and exhausting worry wasn’t helping them either.

But, Leo couldn’t just go to sleep. He felt tired out and wired up at the same time.

He also felt crushingly guilty.

They’d hurt their brothers, again, however indirectly. They’d led the Footclan right into their brothers’ home, and left them alone for slaughter.

Granted, it seemed their brothers had done the slaughtering, a whole other thing to think on, but it still stood as a clear result of Leo and Raph’s thoughtless actions.

Donnie and Mikey might be strong, they might independent, they might be able to fight off a whole squadron of ninjas and walk away the victors-

-but they’d also just lost everything they’d had in one fell swoop, and Leo couldn’t imagine how
badly they were hurting over that. What little his brothers had assembled out of trash and refuse, it’d been burned away in nothing. They could never go home again.

Leo had left his little brothers alone, and they’d almost died for it; because their older brothers had brought the blood feud of someone they’d never heard of right to their doorstep.

No matter what Leo tried, it felt like he ended up hurting his brothers somehow; emotionally, and physically.

Maybe-

“Raph,” Leo said, flipping his kunai over again. Raph turned his head towards Leo, pausing in his pacing. Leo moistened his lips. “Would… d’you think maybe they would have been better off, if we’d never found them?”

Raph looked at Leo, and Leo looked at him. Leo waited, for confirmation or a denial, but Raph ended up just looking away from him; going back to his pacing. “I don’t know Leo, I really don’t.”

Leo’s eyes drifted back to the blade in his hands, and he returned to flipping it over and over his knuckles.

That question, and its lack of answer, hung poisonously in the air until their father returned.

Above the sewers of New York, even above its streets, a man turned rat darted over the rooftops of buildings.

Behind him, billowing plumes of smoke rose from a building.

In his hand, Splinter sheathed his hidden sword, and returned his weapon to its staff form.

The message, a declaration, burned brighter in the distance.

What had been a business owned by the Shredder, now burning steadily to the ground. Detached from buildings around it, and formerly hiding illegal weapons storage. It would burn to nothing long before the fire department arrived; Splinter had made sure of that.

Splinter had not been complacent, the nights his sons were away. He’d investigated what businesses April had told him to, and marked which had turned out to be owned and operated by Splinter’s oldest and bitterest enemy.

Now, Splinter burned every one within ten miles of his home. Five in all, blazing brightly into the already light polluted skies of Manhattan.

The Shredder had brought the war to Splinter, disrupting the peace he had finally found with his sons. Now, Splinter found he was ready to fight that war.

He’d hoped that perhaps… Shredder would not push him to leave his lair. But Oroku Saki had crossed a line, involving Splinter’s estranged sons.
There was no honor in attacking innocents; bystanders had no place on the battlefield.

Splinter would see Shredder pay for that act, and Splinter could tell his eldest children would also see that he did.

Tonight, Splinter accepted the Shredder’s invitation for war.

He would not see Saki take his family from him again, and if that meant Splinter would have to take up his sword once more, then so be it.

Splinter left behind him a wake of fire, an echo of the one from over a decade ago.

In the halls of the Footclan, whispers of a lost battle were shared amongst newly terrified ninja.

Many had seen the first soldiers of master Yoshi; turtles with skills of ninjutsu masters, strong beyond human measures, alike to the Kappa of mythos and legend.

Now though, the whispers turned to the newly discovered mutants; the ones who truly resembled the Kappa of legends. Vicious, terrifying, utterly deadly.

*Animals*, many whispered.

*Beasts*, others did.

*Monsters*, said most.

There were many soldiers in the medical bay, more in the morgue.

Some wondered in the privacy of their thoughts, if following their master to this new land had been the correct move.

Others wished they hadn’t gotten the promotion to this branch, and had stayed behind to be lower tiers. At least they would not have been fighting true yokai, only yakuza and mobsters. Much safer.

On his throne, Oroku Saki drummed his fingers on his arm rests, listening to the hurried messages of informants; many of his businesses had just been set aflame, too far gone to salvage, and already swarming with police.

No one could see his grin, but they heard his deep laughter. The younger members of the Foot felt shivers go down their spines, hearing their boss laugh at the news of destruction. He must be insane, laughing off so much damage to their clan.

Oroku Saki was not insane, he was vindictively happy.

Beneath his mask, the Shredder smiled wider than he had in years, and laughed so loud it echoed in his chambers.
Hamato Yoshi had finally made his move.

The war could truly begin now.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so. Hope you enjoyed that, hope it hit all the lil buttons I know you guys have for these sorts of fanfictions; I refused to go to bed until I finished and posted this, couldn't wait to hear what you all thought!

Also! I'd like announce that we're taking a quick break from the canon of my non-canon fanfic here, because.... I've decided to write a quicky one-shot about that lovely little question Leo asked. Would the feral kids have been better off never found? Would the World have been better off? Well, you're going to find out, soon as I write the thing and add it to the series. If you aren't subscribed to Tetrada Unity, then now is the time to do so! Don't miss out on the chance to read my 'What If?' scenario for things; its going to be dark, gory, and ooh, Very sad. (°∀°)

I'm so excited to write it, hope you're all ready for that kind of read!

My folks and readers and excellent commenters, thank you thank you thank you for all your reviews and kudos; we are now up to 137 kudos and 21 bookmarks, and ain't that just amazing? You're all amazing for that, thank you so much. The validation I feel is beautiful, and your support helps me to work harder, and grow further with my writing.

One day, I aim to be mainstream published author and make money off of it; this series here? My pride and joy and true War On Canon? Its going to help me there, and I'm going to have a lot of fun along the way.

Bless you all, and have a good night. (/ᐠ_ꞈ□ꞈᐟ\)/*:·”✧
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Translation issues, reckless endangerment.

Chapter Notes

i'm turning the summaries into four word shit, bc four is an A++ number, and its easier than trying to summarize everything into one word.

may have typos and shit, ’cause i'm posting this hella late and have no energy to super thoroughly pick over it.
also, hello trigger warnings. nice to see you again, haven't talked in a while.
mild spoilers for the chapter, skip if you feel you can live with whatever comes your way.
(TW: referenced past sexual assault, attempted sexual assault, gracious violence, and the usual from there.)

hey aunt carol, nice to meet you, i think you're already one of my fave OC's. be nice if the show had given you a life of your own, but nah, now i get to make you the hooskiesiest aunt there is. oh well, point to me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Raph opened his eyes and, according to his digital alarm clock, it wasn’t even nine AM yet.

Why was he awake. He’d been asleep for maybe four hours. He usually slept at least until five PM, sometimes later. Why on earth would he be looking at his ceiling during the AM, unless by force of god.

Raph blinked a little longer, eyeballs stinging, and decided it was because his ‘someone’s-in-the-lair’ senses were tingling.

Raph groaned, and rolled out of his bed, placing his bare feet on the cold concrete of his room’s floor. It better not be April, or some stupidly lucky Foot ninja; he was too tired for this shit. He’d been up all night discussing circles around the subject of his siblings with Leo and his Sensei; nothing resolved, beyond that Donnie and Mikey would definitely be staying with them from now on.

They hadn’t been able to make progress with the whole ‘they're-both-actual-murderers-technically-
Ugh. A morality talk was in the future for Raph’s younger siblings, and he had the gut feeling that it wouldn’t be easy. At all.

Raph picked up his sais from their place on his abused bookshelf, and grudgingly opened his door; peering down the hall and towards the main room. No weird sounds, no lights on either. Well, something had woken Raph up, and he wouldn’t be able to sleep until he knew what or who that had been.

Raph sighed under his breath, and started walking down the hall. All the doors were still closed, so that probably meant everyone else was still sleeping, lucky assholes, so who-

Raph tilted his head, listening for the sound again. There, a soft crunching noise, coming from…

Raph sighed again, and turned back around; he dropped off his sais in his room, because now he had a feeling of just what had woken him up.

Making his way through the darkened lair, Raph kept his footsteps soft, to avoid disturbing his father’s sleep, but not too quiet that the person in the kitchen didn’t hear him coming. Approaching the kitchen doorway, Raph stuck his hand into the blurry darkness and flicked on the light switch.

The bulbs lit up, and illuminated the kitchen interloper.

Mikey froze, hand halfway through dropping another bunch of cereal into his mouth. He was sitting on the table, dropped cereal bits all around him.

Raph rubbed his eyes, feeling even more exhausted now. “Seriously, Mikey? Its nine AM, why aren’t you sleeping.”

Mikey blinked, and started chewing his stolen Fruitloops again.

Raph closed his eyes, and briefly considered his options. One, he could tell Mikey to give back his Fruitloops, and kick his brother off the table. Two, he could scold his brother for both those things, still take back the Fruitloops, leave Mikey alone in the kitchen, and go the fuck back to sleep. Or three…

Raph grumbled under his breath, and went and got himself a bowl.

He took the box of cereal from Mikey just long enough to pour himself some, then handed it back to his brother and sat down to eat as well; on a stool, not the table. He let Mikey stay on the table though. If it made his weirdo younger brother happy, then why the fuck not. Mikey had had enough of a shitty night without Raph being a dick about table manners at an ungodly hour.

Raph sat and tiredly ate his share of Fruitloops, while Mikey continued stuffing handfuls into his mouth. Raph used an actual spoon; because he wasn’t a damn- he was more civilized than that. Yeah.

Raph shoved another spoonful into his mouth, crunching dry cereal; he refused to call his brother an animal, even if he technically was one. Even if Raph technically was one. It made him feel… uncomfortable.

Urgh. Too early for thoughts like that. Too early for anything.

“Is this gonna be a regular thing?” Raph asked, sounding grumpy, even though he wasn’t with
Mikey; just with everything else, especially himself.

Mikey shrugged, and shoved another couple bites into his mouth.

Raph dragged a hand over his eyes, and could almost feel the dark bags there. “Yeah, that’s kinda what I thought.”

When Raph finished his bowl of dry cereal, he shooed Mikey off the table and escorted his brother back to bed. He let Mikey keep the box, half empty already, because Mikey wanted to share with Donnie when he finally woke up again.

Raph had been slowly and carefully cherishing the sugary cereal, his private stock, but whatever. His brothers’ whole home had been burned down and they’d had to kill people to escape with their lives; they could keep all the cereal in the damn cupboard if it made them feel better.

“G’night, Mikey,” Raph said quietly, opening the door to Donnie and Mikey’s guest… their room. They weren’t guests anymore.

“Night,” Mikey chirped softly, slipping back into his new room, and shutting the door behind him.

Raph stepped backwards from the room, and went across the hall to his own. He took three steps into his room, door drifting shut behind him, and collapsed back onto his bed.

Fuck mornings. Fuck weirdo siblings and their lack of sleeping schedules. Especially, fuck god damn ninjas and their god damned vendettas.

Raph grumbled into his pillow, and rolled over to sleep another seven hours, at least.

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Assimilating their brothers into the lair was a lot harder than Leo thought it would be.

Last time they’d lived in the lair, Leo’s brothers had stayed mostly out of sight in their room, or stuck close to Raph’s side; sometimes their father’s, depending on what time of the evening it was. Now, with the established trust, and clarification that the lair was indeed their new home… well.

They were stretching themselves out, metaphorically speaking, and getting to know the place, less metaphorically speaking.

Examples of this were:

“Why is he even up there?” Leo asked in confusion.

“I have no clue. Maybe it’s warm?” Raph answered, scratching the back of his head.

“But… there’s no way that’s comfortable.”
“You wanna tell him that?”

“Well…”

Mikey was sleeping on top of the fridge, contorted into some kind of pretzel shape, and snoring softly.

Leo shrugged, mostly at himself. “At least… he’s not dirty this time?”

“You have any luck keeping him off the table yet?”

“No… ugh. I had to scrub foot prints off it this morning. Again, before Sensei saw. I don’t even know where he got the idea that was okay.”

“Yeah… wonder where…”

An explosion of commotion from Raph’s tinkering space, and just as Leo looked up, Donnie bursting out the door and running for the bedrooms. Raph skidded out the doors, chasing after his lanky brother across the living room and down the bedroom hall.

“GET BACK HERE THAT’S MY WRENCH-!”

The door to Mikey and Donnie’s room slammed shut, and Leo heard Raph’s strangled yell of frustration.

“Oh for- DONNIE WHY DO YOU EVEN NEED A WRENCH?!”

Leo sighed to himself, and turned the page of his vintage Space Heroes comic, ignoring the double languaged shriek fest that his brothers had started. Without looking up, he said, “I said no touching the game system, Mikey.”

A grumbling trill answered him, and the game system remained untouched. Mikey had almost broken it, getting a little too rough with playing games against Raph that morning. He wasn’t allowed to use it until he learned to be more careful with their very old piece of tech.

Leo woke up later that night, not long after they’d all been told to go to bed, and found his brother playing the device anyways. At a very high volume. A very high volume. Which not a moment later, had brought their very tired Sensei out of his room; fatherly annoyance clear on his face.

Stern, disappointed words later, Leo had sulked off to bed, copied by Mikey.

The game system was banned from use the whole next day, much to Leo’s annoyance.

“I do not understand why he’s under there,” Raph said.

“Maybe it’s warm?” Leo replied, feeling Déjà vu.

“How did Donnie even get that far back,” Raph muttered. “There’s like no space to crawl under
there in the first place, just how.”

Somehow, Donnie had gotten behind their furnace, and was currently lying flat on his stomach by the back wall.

“Donnie, Donnie, why are you back there,” Leo asked, trying to ignore how loose dirt dug into his cheek pressed against the concrete. “You have lessons with Sensei in less than ten minutes, get out from there.”

Donnie opened one eye, stared Leo dead in his, and then Donnie turned his head towards the wall.

“Oh come on Donnie. This isn’t the time for sleeping, no no, hey wait- aaaand he’s ignoring me by covering his ears. Real mature, Donnie, real mature.”

“I’ll get Sensei.”

Their father hadn’t been able to get Donnie back out either.

“How is he still awake,” Leo muttered, watching Mikey do his tenth exploration/running lap around the entirety of the lair. In the last twenty minutes no less. “I don’t think he’s stopped to breathe in last two hours.”

“Ugh, maybe we could drug him or something,” Raph grumbled, also watching their brother clamber up the walls. Again.

“I think Sensei’s actually considering that.”

“About time.”

“Why won’t you go to bed at a regular time,” Leo whispered hoarsely, finding Donnie fiddling in the kitchen with their appliances, for the second time that night/morning. “It’s seven AM. Go. To. Sleep.”

Leo yelped as a hand touched his shoulder. If he wasn’t in the shower, he would have made a more dignified sound, but he was in the shower and supposed to be alone.

“JEsUS- mIKEY GET OUT-!”


“Because this is my private time GET OUT.”

“But-”

“OUT OUT OUT OUT OUT-”
And those had been just a few of the moments they’d had trouble.

The big ones were Donnie and Mikey straight up ignoring rules, though Leo supposed that was partially because the rules hadn’t been explained to them in the first place.

Like leaving the lair without permission, or telling anyone they were.

Leo had had a near heart attack when he’d figured out not one, but both of his feral siblings were missing. They hadn’t gone far, just a little ways into the sewer tunnels; they’d been chattering back and forth, as well as playing on some of the pipes, when Leo had skidded to a halt in their chosen tunnel.

“Do. Not. Do that to me,” Leo had breathlessly gotten out.

They’d given him a vaguely annoyed look, but had let him lead them back to the lair regardless.

They did it again the next evening anyways.

There was also the taking things without permission situation, which happened multiple times.

“Donnie. Put the kitchen knife, back in the kitchen. Where it belongs.”

Donnie squinted at Leo, and did not remove the large knife from the newly fashioned belt around his waist. Made from his blankets actually, faded white sheet twisted around into a thick rope, and holding the five inch knife in place.

“Please, Donnie, it’s not safe.”

Donnie started backing away, still not giving back the knife.

“Donnie.”

Donnie bolted for his room.

“Donnie!”

When Leo had finally gotten his brother back out of his room, it’d taken firm negotiation to get the knife from him. Negotiation that turned into a trade.
A knife for a knife, or rather, a kunai for a knife.

Well, it was better than Donnie running around with their cutlery, even if Donnie having weaponry on him almost constantly made Leo slightly nervous.

And that was discounting all the odds and ends Mikey had taken, or the multiple times they’d slept through most of the night and stayed awake all day, keeping everyone else up as well, or the lessons they’d knowingly skipped out on with their father and really just. So many little things, all day every day, and then the following nights.

By day four, it hadn’t even been a week yet good grief, Leo was about ready to lock his siblings in their room. Or maybe lock himself in his own room, and let Raph deal with things.

…he couldn’t actually do that, unfortunately. Things would end up on fire if he did, he could just feel it.

“Please keep reminding me what Sensei said about grief and people working through it in their own ways,” Leo muttered to Raph, head in his hands.

“Keep reminding you? Keep reminding me. Donnie keeps stealing my tools and touching my bike!” Raph replied, slouched on the couch beside Leo.

“I’m fairly certain Mikey is eating my hard candies secretly, and using my tooth brush.”

“Oh, ew.”

“I don’t even know what he’s using it for, and I don’t want to know.”

“I believe…” Leo looked up, finding his father standing in front of them; hands folded formally, but a distinct twitch to his left eye. A crash from the bathroom, probably one of their siblings getting into something again. Splinter sighed, the twitch worsening, and rubbed his temples. “I believe, that it is time for you two to take your siblings for a… tour of our neighborhood. Help them get to know the area.” Splinter’s ear flickered as a loud exclamation of scolding trills came from the bathroom. “Now, if you do not mind. You are picking Miss O’Neil up from her aunt’s this evening already, are you not? Why don’t you head out a little early, and take Donatello and Michelangelo along with you.”

“Are you sure, Sensei? What if the Footclan attacks?” Leo asked doubtfully, he wasn’t sure about taking his siblings out while they were still untrained.

Donnie and Mikey started yelling at each other, interrupting his Sensei’s reply, and Leo turned his head to see why; they were play fighting in the hallways now, Mikey wrapped in toilet paper and Donnie holding him in a headlock.

“I am sure. Not just because they need the exercise, but also… if they can defend themselves against fully armed soldiers, all on their own…” Splinter trailed off, a hint of grief in his voice. “Then I believe they can handle a quick surface run with their elder brothers to guide and guard them.”

Donnie yelped loudly, as Mikey flipped their positions and switched the headlock Donnie’s end of things. Leo winced as their volume increased again, seeing his father’s point on both parts. “Hai, Sensei, we’ll go now.”
Leo stretched his warmed muscles, leaning into a light lunge; it felt good, since they’d been skimming both training and patrols lately. Partially to help Donnie and Mikey settle in, partially in case the Shredder decided to make his next move right off the bat.

Thankfully, the trip from the sewers up to the closest roof top had been quiet so far; excluding Mikey’s excited chatter of course.

Leo checked his younger brothers’ positions around the roof, switching legs and beginning another lunge. Donnie was sitting on an air conditioning unit, crouching and surveying the roofs around them; meanwhile, Mikey was darting from one side to the next, peering down at the streets and alleys below their chosen resting spot.

Raph though…

“What are you looking at?” Leo asked.

Raph was standing with one foot on the roof’s edge, leaning out enough to see the street below.

“Pizza guy.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yep. S’just some skinny dude.”

“…you’re not-?”

“Yeah I am,” Raph replied, shooting a smirk at Leo.

Leo rolled his eyes, already resigned to Raph’s plan. “Alright, go ahead. Be back in the next twenty or less though.”

“I’ll be back in five; it’s just one guy, how hard d’you think it could be?” Raph said confidently, jumping off the building and disappearing from sight.

“Hm, poor guy,” Leo said absently, finishing his stretches. Their Sensei would probably disapprove, but what he didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him. Leo and his brothers… procuring a pizza for a quick snack wasn’t that much of a crime; the pizza guy could just go get another pie from his work place, right?

Well. Leo wasn’t actually entirely sure how that worked. Vintage television didn’t really cover the ins and outs of a modern pizza place.

Irregardless, Raph would be back with a still warm meal for the four of them, and then they could start heading towards April’s apartment block. They weren’t due there for another hour just yet, but Leo liked to be early; plus, he expected bringing their siblings along would slow them down a fair amount. Though Donnie and Mikey had been proficient at clambering up the side of the building, Leo didn’t think his brothers could quite keep pace with him and Raph just yet; self-taught
Speaking of his brothers… Mikey seemed to be considering jumping off the building after Raph; Leo’s youngest brother crouching precariously on the edge.

“Ah, Mikey, could you step back? We’re waiting here for Raph until he returns,” Leo said walking over to his teetering brother and placing a hand on his shoulder. “Come on, it’s not safe for you to sit like that either.”

“Don’ wan’ wai’, s’no ffffun,” Mikey said petulantly, still keenly watching the direction Raph had gone. “Wan’ run, run, run, run an’ Raph… hmmmm… pizzazzz ‘lease? ‘lease??”

“Pizza’ll be here when Raph gets here, we just have to wait,” Leo replied, chuckling inwardly as Mikey stuck out his tongue and blew a raspberry. Thankfully, Mikey did step off the ledge, and switched to closely watching the streets by laying his head on his arms; tail twitching sharply back and forth in his excitement. Hm, they really did need to get around to teaching Donnie and Mikey to tuck their tails away; it was very improper, considering the… uses their tails came with.

Leo crossed his arms and settled into an easy stance to wait for Raph’s return; thinking languidly on the subject of teaching their brothers some more decorum and manners. It would be slow going, or so he feared; Mikey still had his bad habit of sitting on the table, and everything else really, and Donnie was just as bad, doing all that plus ignoring their father’s authority more often than not…

Leo hummed thoughtfully to himself; he wasn’t sure why Donnie kept doing that. Mikey seemed happy enough listening, kind of at least, to their father; but Donnie tended to act disinterested most of the time. Odd, since Donnie was the one who had been picking up his lessons best so far. Maybe it was because Splinter wasn’t a turtle?

Leo’s musing was interrupted by Mikey’s soft hissing, and Leo’s eyes flickered to the flurry of movement heading their way. A white van, followed by another, and another, and another...

Five white vans in all, heading at high speeds down the road, and past their roof top vantage point. The sync of the driving, the speed they drove at… Kraang vehicles, almost without a doubt. Leo had encountered enough of them in the last month to recognize them nearly on sight.

Looked like he had something to take care of too then; Raph would have to join him whenever he got back from nicking that pizza from the unfortunate delivery boy.

Leo shot a brief glance over his shoulder as he jumped off the building and onto the terrace of the one beside them; shouting at his two siblings to stay where they were until he or Raph got back.

Leo’s swords sang pleasantly as he leapt between buildings, the only noise he allowed himself to make as he drew them. Pavement flew beneath him, alleys and streets blurring meaninglessly as he followed the vans. They didn’t go far, just another couple blocks of twisting and turning; pulling to a stop in front of a large boarded up store.

As the vans opened, releasing five Kraang per vehicle, Leo smiled faintly.

He’d been needing a good outlet; the cold fury he held over Shredder’s attack on his siblings still lived in the back of his mind, seething and sharp. Leo might have been less prone to violence than Raph, but…

Leo jumped across the last alley, landing on the roof of the Kraang’s selected hide out, and made for the wide ventilation shafts coming up from it.
Silently crawling through the vents, listening as the monotone voices of the aliens echoed through them; Leo pinpointed a room filled with idling Kraang, most working at huge computers, or sorting through what looked like human guns.

Slipping out from the vent, dropping onto the floor in a dark corner, Leo swept through the room slicing off robotic heads left and right.

Six Kraang bots fell to the ground, and Leo made sure to stab them each through the stomach; just to ensure they couldn’t raise the alarm just yet.

Taking a deep breath, quieting the adrenaline in his system, Leo closed his third eyelids, and smirked to himself as he left the room.

Leo might not be as violent as Raph was, but not even he was immune to the need for a good fight.

*What Lee-oh say?* Donnie asked Mikey, looking after where their brother had gone.

Mikey shrugged, shaking his head. *Not knowing too quick not eeng-lish confusing and dumb, stupid Lee-oh*

*Stupid Lee-oh,* Donnie agreed, feeling annoyed by their brothers, both Raf and Lee-oh, once again not explaining exactly what they were doing. Ugh, now both of the other turtles were gone, and Mikey and he were left sitting on the top of a human nest, very much in the open and without clear reason.

Mikey obviously shared Donnie’s opinion, at least about the latter. *Bored bored bored booooooored want run to race exploring yes? No fun sitting not doing nothing none things, can leave please? Raf and Lee-oh left, so why not you me us?*

*Hmmmm*…. Donnie tapped his claws on the stone of the roof’s ledge, thinking Mikey’s suggestion over. Both Raf and Lee-oh had gone off on their own, seeking whatever had caught their eyes, so why not Donnie and Mikey do the same?

If Lee-oh and Raf were allowed to run off on their own, separated and without telling one another, then Donnie and Mikey would certainly be alright doing it together. They’d just make sure to be back in the Lay-err before the sun came up again.

*We go, searching looking exploring, need new things new fabrics new foods... new books,* Donnie added wistfully. He missed his books, their nice smelling insides, and clever things pictured on their pages. A new collection would be wonderful.

*Oh YES! OH YES YES YES!* Mikey exclaimed, leaping onto the metal climbing structure of the nest over; already rushing to clamber back up and repeat the process with the next nest from it. *Hurry hurry Donnie, running exploring FUN now yes?*
Hm, yes yes exploring finding fun, we go now, Donnie agreed, gracefully jumping the small-ish gap between nests.

Lee-oh and Raf could find them if they wanted, all they had to do was follow the scent trail. They had to be turtle enough to do that at least, they’d found Donnie and Mikey in the green place after all; following the clear trail Donnie had left in case their brothers had come for them.

Donnie briefly stopped between nests, to swipe a bit of his scent glands onto the stone; he’d done the same with some trees in the green place, to help his less-skilled trackers of brothers. Mikey had helped in his own way, rubbing against trees and leaving deep scuff marks every so often.

It should work again, just in case their brothers weren’t smart enough to follow the fainter scent trail of just their footsteps. Hopefully they would be, since Donnie felt he may forget after a while to leave scent markings; finding new things often distracted him, as well as Mikey.

Oh well, even if their brothers didn’t find or look for them, they’d be fine. They both had memorized the way to the Lay-err, and knew its scent well enough to find it even in the unfamiliar territory.

Donnie took another bit of scent from behind his knee and pressed it onto the stone again, just to make sure, and then rejoined Mikey in his running and leaping.

Raph could tell immediately, even before he actually landed back on the roof, that there was no one there.

Panting, he dropped the hard won pizza onto the air conditioner, and sat down against it. Alright, so the pizza guy had been a bit more of a challenge than he’d expected. But really, who expected random teenagers to know martial arts? Himself and Leo being exceptions to that rule…

He’d only been gone for what, twenty minutes? Less? Not long enough that his brothers were warranted to ditch him, and not long enough that Leo would have started looking for him.

So where the fuck were they?

An explosion echoed through the night air, and Raph stood up so fast he saw spots; in the distance, a small plume of smoke was wafting up into the air.

Ah. That’s where they were.

Grabbing the pizza as he did, Raph leapt off the building and over to the next; repeating the process until he reached the same block as the smoking structure the explosion had come from. The top level had smoke pouring out from the left windows, and the three levels downwards had pink lights flashing through the gaps in the boarded windows. What sealed the deal for Raph’s suspicions was a robot crashing through one of those windows, and landing in a jumble on top of a white van.
Raph spotted a glimpse of green through the broken mid-story window, and felt his expression turn gleeful.

That would be Leo, and that meant Raph was allowed to engage.

Raph dropped the pizza on the roof shingles, and using the lamp posts to do so, he jumped across the street. Raph expertly swung around the neck of the street light closest, and hurled himself through the broken window; tucking into a roll as he did, and coming up with his weapons ready.

With the first robot he impaled, Raph was already grinning maniacally. Then with a second, and a third, and fourth, and so on; Raph enthusiastically downed one robot after another.

Oh he’d needed this. He’d been needing this for days.

Raph kicked one Kraang in the stomach hard enough it flew across the room; and Leo’s swords finished the job with a criss cross slash.

Raph met eyes with Leo, and they fell into position together, back to back as they continued decimating the Kraang’s numbers.

Raph had been needing this; this fighting, the familiarity of putting his sais and rage to good use, the ease of knowing exactly what he was doing, and how to do it. Simple and straight forwards, unlike so many things in his life lately.

Trying to adjust to having two extra brothers in his home? That was hard. Keeping himself from running off and breaking down the doors of the Footclan hideout? That was harder. Figuring out how to be an older brother to two kids he barely knew? That was the hardest.

But this?

Raph stabbed a Kraang robot through its eye sockets, tearing the head away as he did.

This was easy.

Following Leo’s signal, they moved from the room and into the wide hallway; meeting the Kraang droids waiting there with blades and fury.

Ultimately, there was only about fifty Kraang bots inside the building, and they weren’t even that much of a challenge. Another few machines sabotaged, and the place went up in flames. Raph might’ve ended up coughing a bit as the smoke scratched his lungs, but as they escaped the building and re-entered the cool night air, he considered it worthwhile.

They might be a little late for April’s pickup though, if they didn’t hurry soon; with the delayed pizza snatching, and the unexpected Kraang fight, plus dragging their brothers along with them… yeah,
they needed to hurry up. Even without checking the wrist watch stored in his belt, Raph knew they were short on time now.

“Alright, so that was fun, but where’d you stash Donnie and Mikey?” Raph asked Leo. “We gotta get going here.”

“Back at the spot we agreed to meet up again,” Leo replied, obviously still riding the adrenaline high, since he was adding flips to his leaps between buildings.

“The building with the A.C. unit?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you sure.”

“Yes, Raph, I’m sure.”

“Well they aren’t there.”

Leo stumbled on his landing, shooting an annoyed look at Raph. “What? You better be kidding about that.”

“I’m not,” Raph said, just as annoyed at his brother for doubting him.

“But- no! I told them to stay there, I swear!”

“Well they weren’t there when I showed up.”

“Are you positive? Maybe they were hiding.”

“Why the hell would they hide from me?”

“I don’t know! They’re weird; maybe they were playing a game?”

“Are you sure you told them to stay there, like absolutely sure you said it clear enough they understood? They don’t speak English very well yet.”

“Yes I’m sure, I told them ‘stay here until Raph or I come back’. How much clearer could I be??”

“A lot, since they obviously didn’t understand!”

“They don’t listen to authority, this isn’t my fault!”

“You’re the one who was supposed to watch them, not run off to play the hero!”

“I was doing my civic duty!”

“Ugh, shut up, and help me start looking for them; they can’t have gotten far,” Raph started checking the alleys they passed over; making sure his siblings weren’t scavenging inside them. “We should do a radius or something; keep circling until we find them.”

“That’ll take all night, we might not find them before something happens,” Leo said, starting to get the harried look he’d had the night they were searching of Donnie and Mikey, after they’d discovered nest fire. “We should check all the hotspots for trash disposal, that’s where they’ll most likely be.”
“Fine, just hurry up. And put those damn swords away, we don’t wanna scare them,” Raph snapped, shoving away his own weapons as he did.

“I can’t believe- and after I told them specifically not to- just. Ugh!” Leo grumbled under his breath, sheathing his swords and matching pace with Raph. “I can’t believe they did this. Again.”

“Shove it and keep looking,” Raph grumbled back, crossing another empty alleyway.

Almost a full half hour later, and still no sign of their siblings, Raph kicked a satellite dish in frustration. They’d hit every nearby restaurant dumpster, every textiles store back alley, even the game stop where they thought maybe at least Donnie would’ve been. And nothing.

“I can’t believe you lost our little brothers,” Raph hissed, kicking the dish again. Maybe if he had a clearer head, he would’ve bit down on the instinct to hiss at his brother, but Raph furious and starting to really worry, so fuck decorum or whatever Leo called it lately. “There could be anyone out tonight, the Footclan is actively hunting us as far as we know, and you fucking lost them.”

“I told them to stay there, I know I did!” Leo shot back, glaring at Raph as he circled the water tower’s rim, checking all sides for even the slightest hint at their brothers’ location.

“Maybe you fucking didn’t, maybe you fucking did, it doesn’t matter; they’re still missing,” Raph said, and he only just avoided adding a drawn out hiss on the end.

Leo lapsed into Japanese, and Raph rolled his eyes at the threats thrown his way, as well their missing siblings’. Then, he still, a sinking feeling appearing in his stomach.

Raph pinched the bone between his eyes, and sighed. “Leo?”

“What?” Leo snapped, aiming another glare at Raph.

“What language did you use, when you told them to stay there?”

Leo opened his mouth, then closed it, and Raph could see his brother visibly paling.

“Oh. Oh.”

“You fucking idiot.”

“I didn’t mean to!”

“Alright you did.”

“You shut up! Just- Fucking- Let’s just find them already!”

“FINE.” Leo spat, jumping off the water tower and making for the next building.

“FINE.” Raph spat back, following his stupid, stupid, stupid older brother. Another few streets, still no luck, and Raph started berating Leo again.

“I can’t believe you Leo-”

“Shut up shut up shut up shut up-”

“-losing them because you can’t keep your fucking English and Japanese straight-”
"-shut UP Raph I KNOW-"

"-AND NOW WE’RE LOOKING ALL OVE R HELL’S HALF ACRE-"

"-SHUT UP I KNOW-"

"-BECAUSE YOU’RE A FUCKING MORON!"

"-I KNOW SO JUST SHUT UP ALREADY!"

"GOD. DAMN. IDIOT."

"FUCK OFF I KNOW OKAY?!"

Raph hissed at Leo, who hissed right back, and they continued their increasingly harried search for their siblings.

April tapped her foot against the cement, checking her phone’s clock for the fifth time in a row. Yep. The brothers were late. Very, very late.

It was almost half past the time they’d been scheduled to meet up, where the heck had they disappeared off to?

Leo and Raph, they knew damn well she had a curfew to keep. And school the next day too. She was doing this for them, handing over printed out chatter about weird gang activity in the area lately. Without her, it was unlikely they’d ever find the Footclan’s hide out; the least they could do is show up on time to pick her up.

Well, she couldn’t wait any longer. If she wanted to be back home by the agreed hour that her aunt Carol had set, then April would have to start heading out right away; otherwise, they wouldn’t have time to discuss more than a few pages of what she’d printed. In all likelihood, Leo and Raph had probably found a street fight to get into, maybe another Kraang hideout, and had been delayed because of that.

April hiked her side bag over her shoulder, and started walking down the sidewalk; she’d probably meet the brothers halfway, maybe sooner.

April hummed under her breath, keeping time with her steps as she walked through the empty streets. It was late enough now that everyone was home or already at the bar; and there was rarely more than one car every five or more minutes. For the most part, it was completely silent excluding April’s own sounds of life.

“…it’s off to work you go… but at least… the war is oooover…” April sang to herself, skimming her favorite chorus lines from ‘In Our Bedroom After the War by Stars’, but cut herself off. It wasn’t the
most sensitive of songs at the moment, since there was a very real war winding up in New York right that moment…

April sighed. She’d signed on to find her father, that was still her main goal over all, and now she was being drawn into age old feuds between ninjas right out of the feudal era. It’d already been over a month since her father was taken, and she was still no closer to getting him back; April sympathized with the Hamato family, she really did, but at the end of the day she really just wanted her dad back.

Her shoe scuffed a bit of loose concrete as she turned the corner, starting down a dimly lit street that would lead to the main road, and that one would lead to the alley that would lead to another road, and then that road led the one that led to turtles’ main access point… which was then more tunnels, more twists and turns, more walking…

A bit of a jog still, but nothing too bad; she’d done it a number of times lately, she was used to it.

Buses were easier though, cutting the forty minute walk in half. Too bad it was too late for them to run at a timely pace…

April wished she’d brought her bike, but she’d thought the boys would show up on time and carry her over the roof tops; which was a slightly terrifying experience, if a thrilling one.

Rounding another corner, three blocks down another ten on ten to go or so, and April’s hearing picked up voices. She glanced up, and felt her stomach drop out.

Eight college age men were walking around the corner of the street opposite, coming from the other direction. From the slightly wavering path they were walking, the noise level they were boasting, and the football jackets over their broad shoulders… April had to guess they were all sports players, or at least avid fans, out for the night and one too many beers into a party.

April ducked her head, sped up her walking, and tried to be inconspicuous despite being the only other individual on the street.

She just had to keep moving. She’d meet up with the boys soon and then she’d be safe. If she didn’t look at the men over there maybe they wouldn’t see her. Keep walking, keep walking, just keep walking-

“Hey!”

Dammnit.

“Hey, hey pretty gurl, why don’t you smile some? You’d looked nicer if you diiid…”

“s’nice pair of legs you got there, you work out honey? If you don’t, I could give you one…”

“What’s a nice thing like you doin’ out on a night like this, aaaaall alone an’ everything. Sh-should c’me over here, let us give you some company!”

April sped up her pace again, not responding to the hoots and whistles thrown her way. Her aunt had warned her about this sort of thing, April had experienced this sort of thing before, just- just keep walking. Don’t make eye contact, don’t acknowledge them, don’t look at them-

“S’not nice to ignore someone who’s complimentin’ you!”

April didn’t have to glance over her shoulder to know that the men had crossed the street, and were
April’s stomach clenched as she heard the footsteps getting closer, and her hand was already reaching into her side bag. Her hand grasped the cool metal cylinder inside it-

“-betcha I could get her to beg for it, who wants t’place bets here-”

“-HEY HONEY TURN AROUND, WANNA SEE THEM TITS T’GO WITH THAT ASS-”

“-wan’ a share of that, so no fucking hoggin’ this time, Steve-”

“-wait up girl, we jus’ wanna talk, I swear,” A deep male voice said with a chuckle, just as a hand came down on April’s shoulder.

April spun around and sprayed the guy right in the face, finally getting good use of her pepper spray.

“-SONOFABITCH MY FUCKING EYES-!!”

“Bitch got fire power-“

“-you fuckin’ COW, get over here-!”

April kept her finger on the button, spraying a wide cloud of the noxious burning liquid as all seven remaining men backed up fast as they could. Swearing and curses filled the air, and the one man on the ground had started screaming, and April dropped her side bag as she turned and-

She ran.

April ran like hell.

Streets and pavement and cement flew under her sneakers, and April ran faster than she had when actual aliens were chasing her.

Thundering footsteps followed her, and April panted as she poured all her energy into running faster faster faster-

“-get back here GET FUCKING BACK HERE-”

-faster faster faster, another corner turn, running faster and faster, she just had to reach the lair, just had to find somewhere to hide-

“- you fucking CUNT-”

-where was Leo and Raph they were supposed to find her, god damn it where were they-

-April skidded the corner, hurriedly running over instructions her aunt had always told her to follow. Disappear into the crowd; there were none. Hide inside a store, ask for help from the clerk; everything was closed. Run, scream, and attract attention-
But April was alone. There was no one out right that moment except her.

Just her, and the seven furious men on her tail.

“-grab her GRAB HER-”

April shrieked as something roughly snagged her ponytail, her momentum cut off by the stinging force the tug backwards held. Then hands, big rough strong hands, were grabbing her arms and legs and dragging her off the empty street.

April screamed, struggling in their grips; she shrieked and kicked and tried to break the bruising grips around her arms, but-

-someone hit her over the head, and April’s vision was clouded by black stars. Her screams were cut off by a punch to the stomach, and she wheezed brokenly for air.

April’s back met the dirty concrete of the alley, and she could hear the still furious conversation buzzing around her, the men discussing who’d go first as if she was some piece of meat and not a fucking person-

Two, four, maybe more, hands held her down, while the rest started tugging on her clothes. April heard something tear, as her shirt and jacket were pulled upwards her body, and the seam of her zipper creaked as she resisted whoever was trying to pull down her pants-

“I go first, ‘cause y’all got the last one before me, so it’s my turn this time…” A thickly built white man stood above her, and April’s stomach roiled with fear and disgust as his hands went to the crotch of his jeans.

April screamed again, but someone’s hand went over her mouth. She bit down on it, and tasted blood.

Her reward was another punch across her temple, alighting more stars in her vision.

The side of April’s face was shoved against the concrete, rough stone scraping the skin, and she felt someone’s hands creeping around her waist band and pulling down and she was going to die they were going to kill her and she going to die-

Hands went around her throat, squeezing steadily to cut off her breathing and April wheezed under their grip.

Why hadn’t she waited why hadn’t she just waited where she was safe why hadn’t she just stayed home-

Tears collected around April’s eyes, as hands tugged at her clothes, held her down, and slowly drained the life out of her.

She was going to die.

Then-

Something unholy, unearthly, inhuman, screamed in the dark of the alleyway.

The hands around April’s throat loosened slightly, as the men holding her down startled at the sound. She sucked in a small breath, grateful for another minute to live, to think, to escape-
“The fuck was that-”

That was as far as the questions got.

Something flew over April’s position on the ground, and lodged itself in the man holding April’s neck; black and deadly, a kunai stuck out of the man’s shoulder.

He screamed in pain, and released April’s throat, and April gasped greedily for fresh air.

Then he disappeared.

Or at least, he was gone so fast; it was like he’d simply vanished.

Another man, the one who’d been pulling on her ripped jeans, he was pulled away next. The rest holding her down, their grips disappeared right after, and April was left dazedly lying on the cold ground.

Screams and yelling and something like buzzing filled the alley around her, and April snapped out of her daze to sit up and start covering her body again. She scrambled back against the wall of the alleyway, knocking into garbage as she did, and she finally got a good look at who’d saved her.

One of the men flew across the alley, to April’s side of it, and he hit the dumpster there so hard, April could see a physical dent left by his body.

Donnie stood in the middle of the weakly lit alley, flexing his claws; he was the one who’d thrown the man. He turned and intercepted the sloppy punch from another of the men, grabbing the man by the arm and slamming him into the stone wall beside them.

April tugged her pants all the way back up, trying to ignore how the crotch was snapped now, and watched as Mikey kicked one of the remaining five men so hard he landed with an audible crack ten feet away.

April’s eyes flickered back to Donnie, who had switched to downing the last three men on his end; grabbing them one after another and either slamming his knee into their stomachs or heaving them into the walls-

-Mikey had one man’s skull in his hand, and he was smashing it repeatedly against the ragged concrete. April saw blood start to splash onto the ground with each rise and fall and-

-Donnie had grabbed another man by the throat, and he was just standing there, slowly tightening his grip as the man scratched desperately at Donnie’s scales-

-Mikey raised the man’s head again and April could actually see the blood making a puddle now-

“STOP IT!” April screamed, finding her voice again.

Both turtles froze, and turned their whitened stares onto her. The men they held continued struggling, while the still conscious few stared in blank horror. Neither of the feral brothers moved, utterly silent as they waited…

…waited for April to continue.

April sucked in a harsh breath, clenching her hands so tight her nails bit her skin. “St-stop it. There’s no killing, you’re not allowed to kill. Alright? S-so- so put them down. Just put them down!”

She didn’t want to see anyone else dead or dying. She still couldn’t stop seeing the Footclan ninja,
lying still and silent in the tunnels… throat gone, blood drained…

April felt her own blood freeze up, as both the brothers dropped their victims; so she’d stopped them from killing anyone, but now-

Now their attention was on her.

April shoved herself back against the wall, a useless action so completely useless, as the two ferals started to approach her. Fuck, fuck fuck fuck- they’d been about to kill people, they had killed people, and-

Donnie’s arms reached out, his tall form blocking what little light there was and casting his whole expression into shadow-

-they didn’t even like humans and April was a human and that meant they were-

-his hands went around her waist, picking her up before April could so much as try to run away; Donnie snared her with his long arms, holding her in an iron grip, and April couldn’t even start to break his grip around her.

-they were probably going to kill her instead.

The ground disappeared from underneath April, and she heard the sound of clanging metal, and then the wind was rushing past her face and she could see the pavement already too far below to jump; they were carrying her up to the roof, why were they taking her up to the roof, was it privacy? Did they want privacy of all things to do whatever they intended-?

Donnie set her down on the cold stone of the roof, and April’s body was completely frozen with fear and adrenaline. She couldn’t run, couldn’t fight back, who knew where her pepper spray had gone-

April closed her eyes as Donnie’s long claws neared her face, and she flinched back as much as she could, bracing herself for-

……

……

……

….nothing?

April felt a gentle trace of her scraped cheek, and she opened her eyes again.

Donnie’s bright red eyes were peering intently at her, and he cooed softly as he touched her injured cheek. He was still too close for comfort, but he wasn’t touching her legs or her upper body; the only part he was actually touching was her cheek, which ended as he dropped his hand.

Something brushed against April’s side, and she turned her head to meet… Mikey’s curious baby blues, the mutant crouching next to her and trilling with…
Concern.

Donnie’s hands drifted to the torn knee of her pants, his claws daintily pulling at the fabric just enough to see her raw knee underneath. Mikey bumped April’s shoulder again, and he gently started poking at the darkening bruises on her bare arms.

April sat there, feeling surprised, and more than a little in shock.

They were concerned about her well-being.

Two severely neglected, human hating mutant turtles, who couldn’t even understand English very well yet, were concerned about April.

“’kay, ‘kay A-April? Ssssafe, safe here. Hurt?” Donnie asked in stilted English, tilting his head as he lifted the arm with a still intact sleeve covering it. He rolled up the fabric, and grimaced at the red rings on her skin.

“Uh…” April found herself lost for words, especially since Mikey had started purring against her side. Donnie’s eyes flickered over to her again, and April swallowed as she read in his expression, true and genuine care for her.

And she’d thought they didn’t even like her, much less… whatever this had been.

It was hard, reconciling the two mutants from not moments ago; terrifying, inhuman, completely feral as they tore into the human men…

The two mutants checking her over for injuries, and trying to comfort her as they did, they were nothing like the ones who’d been in the alley; nothing like the ones she’d been quietly scared shitless of since she’d seen what they could do to a human.

“I’m. I’m not fine… but I don’t think I need a doctor,” April said, just above a whisper. The adrenaline was crashing now, and everything that had just happened was really starting to catch up with her. And shock too. She was getting familiar with shock.

Then, April gasped. “Ah! My bag, where did my bag go… it had all the papers for your brothers, we needed those; ink isn’t cheap these days, and my aunt doesn’t want me printing so much anymore… shoot. Shoot shoot shoot.”

Donnie tilted his head the other way, and squinted at her in confusion. Right, no Anglais quite to that level.

“My bag, like this?” April mimicked crossing her body with her bag, and carrying things in it. “Don’t you have one? I think I’ve seen you or maybe Mikey wearing bags. Across your chests…”?

“Oh, oh I know! Bag, yes. Finds yes? Me, I, go finds,” Donnie said, nodding sharply at her. He got up, standing at his considerable full height, and trilled something to Mikey quick and short; then took four long strides and disappeared over the edge of the roof.

April sat alone, with the other feral mutant beside her, and wondered what had just happened.

Not just the bag finding, but the two brothers defending her against her… attempted rapists.

Attempted rapists. Her attempted rape. She’d almost been raped.

April’s breath hitched, that would be the adrenaline ending she hysterically thought, and April
crumpled on herself.

Bent over her knees, April wheezed with stinging lungs, and held herself tightly as her emotions unravelled and tangled themselves up. Fear, disgust, terror, gratitude, *hysteria-*

A large weight went across her back, just as two more went around her waist, and another set pressed by her legs.

Vibrations traveled through April’s thin, dirty coat; and a chirpy voice started talking over her snarling thoughts.


Mikey had wrapped himself around April, and was still rumbling his soothing purr as he talked. April didn’t want to be held down- didn’t want to be forced into anything against her will *ever again*- but.

But Mikey wasn’t holding her down. He was just. Holding her. Gently, loosely, just enough she would know he was there.

“Is safe. Safe safe safe. Donnie back soons. We safe, you’s safe ‘pril. Shhhh… shhhh… safeses now…”

“Mikey, oh jeeze Mikey…” April chuckled, then laughed, then started to cry.

“Shhhh… shhh…. Safeses ‘pril, safeses…”

April sniffled wetly, clutching her knees still, and breathing in time with the slowly expanding and deflating chest against her back.

Mikey kept purring and whispering to her until Donnie got back with her bag, and by then, April had found enough self-control she’d stopped crying.

Leo skidded to a halt on the umpteenth random roof they’d been crossing.

Oh no.

*Oh no.*

“Why’d you stop?!” Raph exclaimed in frustration, stopping on the fire escape of the next building.
“WE FORGOT APRIL!” Leo nearly shrieked, losing what was left of his composure.

Raph’s expression shifted into a mirror of Leo’s, and he basically shouted his reply. “FUCK.”

"I KNOW."

"FUCK WE HAVE TO GO GET HER ITS LIKE ELEVEN AT NIGHT."

"BUT DONNIE AND MIKEY-

"THEY BEAT AN ENTIRE SQUAD OF NINJAS, APRIL’S LIKE FIVE FEET MAYBE AND THIN AS A TWIG WE HAVE TO GET HER FIRST!!"

"FINE!"

"JUST RUN!"

"I AM!"

"RUN FASTER!!"

Disturbing flocks of roosting pigeons, crows, and a single stray cat, Leo sped even faster than before over the streets of New York; Raph’s steps nearly in perfect sync with his.

He’d lost his brothers, and now he’d forgotten about April.

Leo hated swearing on principle, but fuck. FUCK.

There were alien robots looking for April, they knew she was a target for some reason, and she was a sitting duck without Leo and his brother.

There were ninjas probably hunting for their collective heads, maybe out tonight maybe not, but regardless, they were hunting Leo and his little brothers and he’d left them alone and vulnerable.

FUCK.

This was all his fault; if only he’d remembered which language he was speaking, if only he’d remembered they were supposed to pick up their human friend, if only he could’ve been a better brother and leader-

“There she is!” Raph yelled, veering off the side. Leo followed him, leaping off the building and sliding down the lamp post, to where April was walking alone on the sidewalk.

She had her bag, but-

Her coat was torn, the knee of her pants had holes, there was dirt up and down her whole outfit, and her hair was a mess.

Oh shit.

“Jesus Christ, what happened to you?!” Raph asked, dropping in front of April as he did.

“Are you alright April? Was it the Kraang? Or the Footclan? Did they attack you?!” Leo asked rapid fire, circling his human friend as he took stock of her injuries.

“And jeeze, where’d you sling go- is your arm alright? They didn’t break it again did they-?”
“-we’re so sorry, it’s just I lost our brothers and we were looking for them and we completely forgot and-”

“-if they did I swear to god I’m going to-”

“-orry, god, we should’ve remembered, I should’ve remembered-”

“-and then I’ll pull that out and shove it right up their metallic-”

“Guys, guys, I’m fine, really,” April said, cutting both Leo and Raph off. She grimaced though, clutching her formerly broken arm as she did. “Okay. Not fine. Definitely not fine. I kinda sorta almost got raped.”

“WHAT-” Leo gasped, slapping a hand over his mouth in horror; Raph’s muffled curses a testament of his feelings as well.

“-of a bitch, how’d you get away?!” Raph asked, hands darting out hovering over April’s ripped sleeve, wanting to comfort her but likely unsure how. “They didn’t-?”

“No. No they didn’t.” April said grimly, brushing Raph’s hands away. “Your brothers stopped them before it got that far.”

“…what?” Leo asked again, less horror, more confusion. What?!

Leo whipped his head around, and choked on a yelp.

Mikey was standing right behind him and Raph, blinking innocently at them both in the light of the lamp post.

“Yep. And Donnie’s right here.”

Leo whipped around again, and this time he did yelp, because Donnie was looming right behind April; his tall frame blocking the light from reaching their human friend. He nodded to Leo, then to Raph, and Leo felt a bit of vertigo slip him up.

“When the FUCK did he get there?!” Raph shouted, glancing back and forth at their materialized siblings.

“They’ve been following me the whole time, at least since we met up in the, ah, alleyway,” April shrugged again, looking tired and haggard. “They were making sure I got home safe, since I’m. I’m kind of jumpy right now. You said you were looking for them-?”

“WE’VE BEEN LOOKING EVERYWHERE!!” Leo exploded, losing every ounce of his self-control. He’d thought they might be dead, or that the Footclan had gotten them, or something worse like the Kraang or a gang of humans or- Leo sucked in a deep breath, and started berating both of his estranged siblings. “-almost over a whole hour, DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW WORRIED I WAS-?!”

“-left ussss, not fault, YOUR FAULT-!”

“I told you both to STAY THERE, you should have STAYED RIGHT THERE UNTIL WE GOT BACK-!”
“-it was your fault for not using the RIGHT FUCKING LANGUAGE, LEO, WHICH IS WHY THIS WHOLE FIASCO STARTED-”

“-IS WAS WE’S BOREDS YOU LEFT LEFT LEFT WAS AM BORED YOU LEFT-”

“-wasn’tsss fault NOT FAULT YOUR FAULT STUPID LEO, RAPH-”

“-AND YOU MIGHT’VE SAVED APRIL BUT THIS COULD’VE BEEN AVOIDED IF YOU’D JUST STAYED WHERE YOU WERE-”

“-IF LEO HAD USED BASIC FUCKING ENGLISH NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED-”

“-UP SHUT UP SHUT UP STUPID LEO STUPID RAPH STUPID-”

“-SHOUTSES NO SHOUTSES, LOUD LOUD LOUD-”

“WOULD YOU FREAKS IN THE FROG COSTUMES SHUT UP ALREADY?! A new voice hollered over their collective yelling.

All four mutant turtles looked up, and saw a very angry looking elderly woman leaning out her window. She had hair curlers in, and a sleep mask hanging off her neck. “YEAH YOU. GET THE FUCK OFF MY BLOCK. WE DON’T ALL HAVE FREE TIME TO RUN AROUND DRESSED LIKE IDIOTS; SOME OF US HAVE JOBS, SO SCRAM. Dumbass teenagers…”

She slammed the window loudly, and drew her curtains back over it.

Leo, his brothers, and April stood silently in the wake of their cussing out. Until finally-

“…want us to take you home?” Leo asked, putting his mostly baseless scolding on hold.

April sighed, rubbing a blooming bruise on her temple. “Yes please. I. I need some time to recover. Like, a lot. I don’t think you’ll be seeing me for… for a while at least. Just take me home already, okay?”

“C’mon then, let’s get you out of here,” Raph said, finally putting a hand on April’s shoulders and steering her down the block.

Leo looked at his other younger siblings, meeting Donnie’s slightly accusing stare, and Mikey’s absently apologetic one.

“I’m sorry guys, this is entirely my fault,” Leo admitted, his insides swelling with guilt. April had gotten hurt, almost irreparably, and his siblings could’ve had anything happen to them; and all because he hadn’t spoken the right language.

Donnie huffed, and pushed the back of Leo’s shell; shoving the same direction Raph and April were heading. “Firssst April, then lair an’ apologiesss. Is fault, but. Not blaming you. Apologies to April though, hurts by. By humans,” Donnie hissed the last part, fury creeping into his expression and voice. “Humans, fuck fucking humans. Hurt April, hurt our human. Not allowed.”

Mikey growled under his breath, and Leo shuddered slightly, because at this close a range, he could feel it in his plastron.

He chose to focus on other things though.

“I shouldn’t have let Raph teach you swear words,” Leo said, picking a safer topic than the apparent
murderous intent his siblings had for those unlucky, though deserving, humans, or their new protectiveness of April.

“What?”

“Never mind, it doesn’t matter right now. Let’s just get April back to her aunt’s, and go home,” Leo said, picking up the pace to catch up with Raph and April. “I’m too tired for anything else tonight.”

“Hm. ‘kay,” Donnie agreed, following Leo beside him.

“Pizzazzs?” Mikey asked hopefully, popping up opposite from Donnie.

“Ah, no, sorry Mikey; I’m pretty sure Raph lost it somewhere.”

“Awww…. No pizzazzs…”

Leo patted his disappointed brother’s shell, and silently promised he’d get Mikey and Donnie both a pizza, soon as he could. After tonight, and the days prior, they deserved it.

Carol clicked open a new link in her email, a potential desk trade for one in her shop below. With her niece out for the evening, another hour at least, she could listen to her Patsy Cline CD’s without the volume turned down.

Carol was humming softly to the tune of her favorite old CD, when the lock of her apartment door clicked open. She looked up, the questions of why April was home so early already on her tongue, but they died when she saw her niece’s appearance.

April’s coat hung in her hand, the thing covered in filth; her jeans were just as, fly broken and its zipper missing, one knee ripped completely open… and April’s usually neat hair was messy and loose, a bloody scrap on one cheek, and a purpling bruise on her temple….

“Aunt Carol… I… there were…” April said in a hoarse voice. “I’m fine but…”

Carol felt her heart break, seeing in her niece her own reflection thirty some years ago.

Carol abandoned her computer at the dining room table, and swept across the room to bundle her crumbling niece into a hug. “Oh April, kiddo-”

“I tried to do what you said, I-I used my pepper spray and everything, and I almost got away wi- without getting caught and-”

“Shh, shh honey, tell me everything,” Carol said, tightening her hug as April started crying into her
shoulder. Carol placed a hand on April’s back, and rubbed up and down her shaking niece’s spine. “Whatever happened, I’ve got you now. You’re so brave April, so, so brave; you got home and I-I can help you now. Tell me everything that happened, okay?”

“-there were eight of them and-and- they were so fast, and I just-” April sobbed, knees giving out and leaning heavily into Carol’s arms. “They didn’t. Didn’t actually- but I- they almost- they almost did and-”

Carol let April drag them both to the floor, and that’s where she held her shaking niece as April rode out the worst of the break down; rocking April back and forth like Carol had for her, back when April was small and prone to nightmares.

Carol abandoned her work completely for the rest of the night, tending instead to her niece; helping April get in and out of the shower, turning on some meaningless romantic comedy, and bundling April in the thickest blankets Carol owned.

She stayed up with April the whole night, and didn’t send her to school the next day.

While April dozed fitfully on the couch, Carol sat keyed up in the love seat of her living room; keeping an eye on April in case she needed anything.

Carol tapped her nails along the arm of her chair, and found herself craving a cigarette, even after ten years clean.

It wasn’t fair. April was barely over fifteen, missing her father, her mother long dead and gone… life couldn’t give Carol’s niece a break, could it?

Carol rubbed her stinging eyes, feeling ghost sensations over her body even after all these years, and started thinking about investing in a tazer for her niece, as well as herself.

Raph walked into his mechanics room, and sighed inwardly as well as outwardly. Donnie was crouched in front of Raph’s in-progress motorbike, once again poking at the exposed interior of it.

“You’re not gonna leave that alone until I let you monkey with it, aren’t you?” Raph said, startling Donnie away from the machine. Donnie ducked under a rickety table Raph had hauled into the room years ago, peeking from under it cautiously. He had Raph’s wrench again. Of course he did.

Raph weighed his options; he’d been looking forwards to some alone time, especially after hearing what had almost happened to April, and the shit-storm it’d been hunting down their siblings…

But, as he was starting to realize, brushing their siblings off constantly wasn’t going to help curb their curiosity or energy levels.
“You know what? Get over here, I’m gonna teach how to use that wrench correctly, and not whatever the fuck you have been doing with it,” Raph said, marching over to his long-term project, and dragging over his big box of tools. He glanced over his shoulder, and found Donnie watching him warily. “Well, what are you waiting for? I’m not gonna wait all fricking night.”

“….’kay,” Donnie mumbled, creeping over and settling next to Raph. He handed the wrench back to Raph, and Raph spun it like he would his sais.

“Right. So first things first, there’re different sizes of wrenches, and basically every other tool, and you can’t just use ‘em willy nilly for any damn thing. You have to match their sizes with the job, plus whatever screw or nut you’re working with… an’ screws are these things here…”

They stayed there until morning came, and their father kicked them into bed.

Leo took another deep, cleansing breath, and found himself struggling to find his inner balance.

He’d messed up, and he’d messed up badly.

Thankfully, his brothers hadn’t deemed to tell their father about that; making up a story with April’s help that they’d all spent the evening talking on top of April’s aunt’s shop, and that she’d been too tired to make the trip with them to the lair.

Leo breathed out slowly, and tried to shove his immense guilt down.

This all could’ve been avoided, if he hadn’t messed up, and why weren’t his brothers blaming him they really should have he was the one at fault here, not Donnie or Mikey or poor April-

“Leo?”

Leo opened his eyes.

Mikey was sitting in front of him, eyeing Leo’s lotus position with interest. “Wha’ssss… wha’s hapning? What doing?”

“…I’m meditating,” Leo answered automatically.

“Hmmmmm….” Mikey mumbled, before flopping onto to the tatami mats and huffing. “’Kay. Is fine, med… me-di-tay-ting keep hapning. Am sleep ’stead.”
Then Mikey closed his eyes, remaining spread out on his front, and started snoring softly.

Leo watched his brother breaths even out, slipping into full and actual sleep, and finally shrugged. It was nice to have a bit of company, he supposed; Raph didn’t like meditation much, and their father’s presence wasn’t something Leo could tolerate being in just yet.

Leo closed his eyes again, listening to the very faint breaths Mikey let out, and matched that rhythm

This time, he found he could sort through his thoughts without losing control of them, and Leo was able to find his inner balance again.

Splinter’s staff clacked on the stone of his home, following his steps as he surveyed the interior of his lair and its occupants.

He checked through the ajar door of Raphael’s garage, and found his third and second child bent over a booklet about motorcycle care and building. Splinter smiled to himself as Raphael explained enthusiastically the parts of his half done vehicle, pointing at each exterior piece and naming them off to his brother.

Another few steps to his dojo, Splinter silently looked in on his eldest and youngest; Leonardo meditating with perfect poise, while Michelangelo slept peacefully beside him.

Going and getting himself a cup of tea, Splinter sat down with a paper back novel in his favorite spot on the couch; savoring the increasingly rare tranquility of his home.

Whatever the cause of this sudden bonding, Splinter found himself disinclined to question it. Worries of any sort could wait another night; for now, he would enjoy his reading and black tea.

Splinter sipped the hot liquid, careful of his whiskers, and listened to the nearly stillness of his home as he turned the page.

Chapter End Notes

yo i'm a wee bit offended so few of you actually went and read the bonus one shot, but i can understand if some of the tags turned you off. i don't judge people for their thresh holds of literary disturbia and violence; we've all got limits.
god there's probs so many things i missed for editing, but i worked a nine hours shift today and it's like five AM now and you know what fuckit. i'll fix it all tomorrow when i go over the whole thing obsessively.

enjoy your day/evening respectively folks, hope i didn't turn too many of you off with my choice of content this time round. (i'm sorry april, you're really awesome, but i'm going to fuck you over so badly here, so sorry...)

yee, g'night everyone, i'm going to go collapse now. i think this is hour.... seventeen?? maybe? probably more, since i slept.
i'll shut up now.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

An interval, for apologies.

Chapter Notes

An unusually short chapter, to wrap some things up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Swaddled in her comforter, April blinked blearily at her laptop in front of her. It was late, and while her eyes ached from staring at the screen all day, she didn’t want to go to sleep.

April pulled the comforter tighter on herself, scrunching her toes so they didn’t dip off the edge of her spinning office chair; the one that had already been in her Aunt’s guest room when April had moved in. April’s laptop hummed quietly on the desk she sat at; the one the chair went with, since April’s guest room was originally for business partners staying at her Aunt’s apartment.

April absently clicked on another new message board, checking the posts there for authenticity. Nothing; the posts were fakes, she could already tell from the way the ‘robots’ in the giffed images moved. Likely, it was just a bunch of teens looking for some internet fame, hoping to ride the recent spike of sci-fi activity in the online community.

Another useless posting then; April closed the page, and sat back in her chair, sighing softly. She was tired, even though she hadn’t been to school that day or the last.

April stared blankly at the laptop screen, half waiting for something to leap out at her, half waiting for herself to figure out what the next step was. Two days of down time, and she still didn’t have any big leads. Just a couple ‘maybes’ for Kraang hideouts, and a handful of buzz about areas to avoid because of gang activity; since the arson master Splinter had committed a few days back, the Foot clan seemed to be laying low. Instead, other, smaller crime rings were acting up; probably posturing and trying to keep their claim of territory.

April couldn’t say that for sure though, since she really only had the word of the internet, and not from any concrete sources. People were only so truthful on online, so the posts could very well be fake.

April sighed less softly, adding a mumbled curse on the end.

She was tired of not being able to do anything. Tired of searching and searching, but still not finding anything about her dad’s whereabouts. Tired of having the same nightmares on and off almost every
night, now being fueled worse by her recent attack-

A rapping sound on her window startled April, and she almost reached for the sheathed dagger her aunt had left on the desk earlier that evening. But, before her arm had untangled itself from her blanket swath; April realized the figure crouching on her fire escape was waving three fingers at her, and had a blue mask over his green scales.

Ninjas. Honestly.

April unwrapped herself from her comforter, and got up to open the window. Cool evening air rushed in, making April’s bare arms prickle. She leaned on the window frame, letting the draft bluster her loose hair. “Hey Leo, what brings you around? Do you need something off the internet?”

“No, I actually… I actually just came to talk,” Leo replied, shifting backwards from the spill of light April’s window provided. “Is it safe for me to be here right now? I mean. Your Aunt is around still, right? I wasn’t even sure if you’d be awake, but since you are, then she might be too…”

April waved off his worries, shaking her head. “No, Aunt Carol went to sleep a few hours ago. She fell asleep watching the formerly-about-history channel on television; she’ll be out until tomorrow at least.”

“I… feel like that was a joke I don’t get, but alright,” Leo leaned his head to the side, peering around April; frowning slightly in confusion. “Is that a dagger on your desk?”

“My, um, ha, my Aunt has a strange sense of humor,” April chuckled, glancing back at the old thing. “I let slip I’ve been having trouble sleeping, and she gave me it to help keep bad dreams away. I’m fairly certain she was kidding, but who can tell. Aunt Carol’s a little weird.”

Leo chuckled as well, and seemed to have relaxed a smidge; probably because April had confirmed there’d be no other humans to find him. “Well, I think most guardians are like that. Or at least they are on television. I’ve only ever known my father, so… not the biggest pool of experience. Um. Anyways, do you have a moment? To talk?”

April thought for a moment; a very short moment, since she hadn’t really been doing anything else, other than feeling sorry for herself. “Yeah, I’ve got a lot of moments in fact. You wanna talk about whatever you need to on the fire escape? I feel like you’re more comfortable out here.”

“…yes please.”

“Gimme a sec to grab my comforter, I’ll be right out.”

Leo leaned on the black railing of the fire escape, listening to the rustle of April’s comforter dragging on the window frame. He looked out the alleyway’s end, towards the taller, brighter buildings of the
city’s center. He’d never been there, too dangerous to even consider.

April leaned on the railing beside him, her blanket wrapped over her shoulders like a puffy shawl. Leo hadn’t seen her with her hair down before; April’s short hair catching the draft from the street below. She looked tired.

“So. What did you want to talk about?” April asked, breaking the relative silence; the only noise up to that point the wind and the cars in the distance.

“I… I wanted to check up on you. It’s been a few days since we last saw each other. Since the…” Since the evening I almost got you killed, Leo didn’t say.

April nodded, and tightened her comforter shawl. “Yeah. My Aunt’s put me on lock down. Sorry for not being able to tell you guys, but you don’t exactly have a phone. I’m not allowed outside the apartment after dark for a while yet, and truthfully… I don’t mind. I- I don’t think I could handle being out right now anyways. Sorry, again.”

“Oh.” Leo replied shortly, unsure of what to say to that. April nodded again, and they lapsed into silence.

As the quiet stretched longer, Leo scrambled through his carefully prepared thoughts from earlier. He’d planned for this, his whole evening had been planning for this; but those carefully selected words and phrases had vanished when he’d seen how tired April looked, and how spooked she’d been just to hear a knock on her window.

What was he supposed to say to that; sorry we got you grounded, and sorry I messed up your whole evening and almost got you killed and worse?

Absolutely brilliant. And he called himself the strategist of his family. God, he’d planned for this conversation, he’d had a whole bullet point lineup in his head, where the heck did that go-?

“Where’s Raph?” April asked suddenly, dragging Leo’s mildly panicking thoughts back to the present. “You two splitting up tonight, or is he with Donnie and Mikey?”

“Um, both?” Leo replied, grateful he had something he knew exactly what to say to. “He’s taking our brothers scavenging; Donnie’s been wanting to try building things with Raph, and they needed the parts. I think Mikey went with them just because. Oh! And by the way,” Leo opened a pouch on his belt, and pulled out the small paper wrapped package he’d been given. “Mikey wanted me to give this to you.”

“Oh, wow, this is so sweet,” April said, peeling back the loose paper all the way. Inside it was a bracelet Mikey had braided, using some of the surviving ribbon ball he’d brought with him into the lair. The bracelet was thin, but made with soft blue fabric. April rubbed her fingers over the silky braid, smiling to herself. “It’s so cute, tell him I said thanks. Um, though, I think it’s a little long?”

“Ah, here, let me?” Leo took the too-long length of braid, made for turtle size and not human size, and started winding it around April’s thin wrist. “Just have to wrap it a few extra times. There, what do you think?”

April held up her newly accessorized wrist in the weak light of the alley, and she seemed pleased with it. “I like it a lot, thank you.”

“I’ll tell him you said so,” Leo replied. April settled back under her blanket, and then it was quiet again. As seconds ticked by, Leo could almost feel April’s patience aimed towards him; waiting for him to tell her what he’d wanted to talk about.
“So… how’ve you been?” Leo started, giving her an awkward smile.

April raised an eyebrow at him. “Told you already; bad sleeping, I’m off from school for the week, grounded with good reason…”

“Oh, right.”

April kept her eyebrow raised at him.

If Leo could sweat, he might’ve; who knew talking to someone who wasn’t his family could be so difficult? He sighed, and slumped his posture. “Okay, so I didn’t just come here to ask how you were.”

“No,” April said sarcastically, though she was grinning while she did.

“Shhhh, this is new for me, okay? I’m doing my best,” Leo grimaced, looking down at the alley below rather than at the human next to him. Why was this so hard? “I… I came here to apologize.”

“For what?”

“For messing up, and getting you hurt,” Leo said, and his eyes darted over to the still healing bruises on April’s neck and face; faded, but still mottled and obvious. He was responsible for that, and after him promising they’d keep her safe? “I made a mistake when I was talking with my brothers, which let them get lost and almost hurt, and that led to me and Raph forgetting to come pick you up, which actually did let you get hurt. I messed up really badly, in a really stupid way no less, and you almost paid the price for it. I can’t stress enough how sorry I am about that.

“We promised you, I promised you, that we’d keep you safe, and then… I almost let something irreparable happen to you. I keep messing up with my brothers, and now with you, and I’m just. I’m just so frustrated with myself for it. We haven’t found your dad, we haven’t found anything about him, and we’ve basically just been denting the Kraang’s hold on the city. What happened to you when the Kraang took your dad, and when we let you fall from that helicopter, and then the… assault on you, it’s all… it’s all inexcusable. I’ve been doing a lot of thinking on those things, and I really felt like I needed to formally apologize for it all, if only that.

Since you know… I can’t exactly make those things un-happen, no matter how much I want to,” Leo finished lamely, internally berating himself for going on so long, and completely forgetting to be concise and not embarrassingly confess-y with his words. “So yeah, I’m sorry for all that. Especially the, um, the thing that happened a few days ago. It’s my fault, and I’m owning up to it.”

“…oh. Thanks. For the apology I mean,” April’s hair blew across her eyes, and she brushed it away. “That was kind of intense sounding. Are you alright? I’ve never heard you talk so much all at once.”

“I’m as fine as I usually am lately,” Leo said wryly. “You know, with the whole restarted-blood-feud gang war thing and estranged non-English speaking brothers. Totally fine, that’s me. Not here to talk about me though, I’m here to talk about your issues, so… I don’t know. Talk about them? Or something.”

April stared at him for a moment, and then she made a sound like “snrk!” and covered her mouth as she smiled.

“What, I’m being completely honest and sincere here, don’t laugh at me.”

“Sorry, sorry, it’s just…” April shook her head at him, still smiling. “-those things weren’t your fault, not really. You didn’t make the Kraang kidnap me and my dad, and you aren’t the one who made
me make that stupid, brash headed decision to go walking in down-town New York on my own. I could’ve waited for you guys, could’ve gone back inside and just called it a night, but I didn’t; because, even though I mostly pretend I don’t... I can make some pretty bad choices, because I don’t think them through.”

“Sounds like my brothers,” Leo commented, relaxing slightly; because April wasn’t mad at him, and hadn’t been. “And I guess me too sometimes…”

“My dad said that teenagers make a lot of dumb decisions, because a part of our brains is still developing.” April tapped her forehead, smiling with a hint of nostalgia. “He also said a lot of parents called it the ‘duh stage’, because we do a lot of things that are stupid, and then think, “Well duh that was dumb, why didn’t I think of that earlier?” Ha, my dad would always tease me about that, saying eventually I’d start doing that too, but I always said I wouldn’t…” April’s smile slipped, and she shrunk into her blanket again. “…I miss my dad.”

Leo looked at her, waiting for April to snap back from her melancholy, but she didn’t. It was a little like whiplash, how strong and vibrant she’d be, and then suddenly, she’d be back to being small and frail seeming.

Occasionally, if only for a few moments each time, Leo would forget that April was just an ordinary girl, despite how well she’d been holding up under the everything of her situation.

“Are you alright?” Leo asked, glancing at April’s distant gaze.

“Mmm, I’m fine. Mostly. It’s just...” April shook her head, leaning heavily on the railing. The wind blew by again, catching her hair and Leo’s mask tails. “I think everything is catching up to me all at once right now. The Kraang, the ninjas in New York, my dad... those men, and I guess your brothers too. I mean, I saw a dead body for crying out loud.”

Leo flinched, because that’d slipped his mind too; that not only had his brothers killed people, but April had seen the evidence afterwards. She wasn’t a ninja, and she wasn’t a feral mutant; she wasn’t trained for that kind of thing.

April was still talking, so maybe she hadn’t seen Leo’s flinch. “I haven’t stopped being tired the last few nights; though I don’t think I’ve been at one hundred percent since this all started. It’s like, I’ve been fighting this sickness for so long, and my immune system just gave up. and let the germs take root.” She rubbed at her eyes, and hissed under her breath as she caught the edge of her temple bruise. “…everything just sucks right now, and I don’t feel like I’m making any headway to fixing it. Those’re my issues right now, Leo. Sorry for the vent.”

Leo waited for more, but April just kept staring into the distance instead. His eyes drifted to the dark strangulation bruises on her neck, and no matter what April said, he still felt guilty for that.

He felt guilty about a lot of things lately.

Licking his lips nervously, Leo tried something he’d seen his brothers do for each other, and something he’d only done a handful of times himself. He put an arm over April’s shoulders, and gave her a light squeeze. “I’m sorry. I promise we’ll fix all that. We’ll find a way.”

“I don’t think you can make me un-see a dead body, Leo, but the sentiment is sweet,” April laughed quietly. She turned her head towards Leo, and a bit of her sadness seemed to have receded. “Thanks for this. You’re kind of really awkward, but I get the meaning behind it.”

“I’m not awkward,” Leo defended.
“You kind of are, but it’s nice. You’re a good guy Leo, thanks,” April sighed, though this time it sounded like a relieved sigh rather than a sad one. “You guys all got pretty worked up about my assault; even Raph. I think he wanted to go back and finish the guys himself.”

“Well. Of course we would,” Leo said, vaguely offended that April sounded so surprised. “What those men tried to do, it had no honor. It was despicable, and they’re lucky they didn’t meet all four of us.”

“You really don’t get how unusual that is, do you?” April said. Leo looked questioningly at her, and she just shook her head. “Most people wouldn’t have even believed me if I told them. It’s part of why I’m staying here for the next while, until the bruises fade. Normal people don’t believe a woman when she says she’s been assaulted, let alone raped.”

Leo frowned, wrinkling his snout. “That’s ridiculous. You were clearly injured and in distress. Why wouldn’t they believe you?”

“Good question. Ask the rest of society,” April replied dryly.

Leo shook his head, grimacing. “My younger brothers are right. Humans are very strange, and kind of awful sounding. No offense, April.”

“None taken, and I have to agree,” April replied, shrugging as she did.

“…you going to be alright?” Leo asked, re-evaluating April’s mood. She seemed better now, and she’d relaxed in his one arm hold. Which, now that he thought about it, he should stop doing; when was it appropriate to end that kind of contact exactly? Or was this too short a time?

Leo removed his arm anyways, because better safe than sorry for how long it was before things got inappropriate.

“I’ll be fine, Leo. Thanks for stopping by to see me, I think I needed a little outside contact,” April adjusted her comforter, the cover having slipped slightly under Leo’s extra weight. “My Aunt’s been hovering around me; she’s really worried about how I’m doing. She, ah, she gave me a bit of a talking to about going out late at night. Also about blowing my money on stuff and not telling her what, and going places without informing her, and you know, acting like the classic troubled teen. I think she thinks I’m doing drugs.”

“Are you…?”

“God no. I wouldn’t touch that stuff with a ten foot pole. But that’s what she thinks I’m doing anyways; going out to bars, getting drunk or high or something. Coping badly with my dad’s disappearance, acting like a heroine from a bad YA novel. The like. She also asked me who I’d been hanging out with lately.”

“And what did you tell her?”

“That I’m friends with four teenage mutant turtles, two of which are bilingual ninjas, and the other two feral semi-bilinguals. Also that I’m running around chasing alien robots and modern day ninja crime rings. Of course I didn’t say that to her, stop looking at me like that.”

“Oh, okay,” Leo said sheepishly, un-tensing his body.

April rolled her eyes, but was smiling again. “I told her I met a couple students from gym class I thought were neat, and I’ve been trying urban-parkour with them. She told me off for doing that with my arm, but I made sure she understood that I’m not the one doing the stunts.”
“That’s a good excuse I guess,” Leo said, nodding along. “I suppose ninjutsu could count towards that.”

“It’ll work for now at least. I’m still grounded though,” April yawned, covering her mouth with one hand. “Jeeze, sorry, I just got really tired all of a sudden. That’s a welcome surprise; I haven’t been sleeping at all.”

“It is pretty late, you should go to bed I think; you’re still healing up,” Leo encouraged, looking pointedly at April’s bruises. “We’ll come by again in a few days if you don’t show up on your own, alright? Give you some down time. You look like you need it.”

“Thanks… yeah, I need it,” April yawned again, blinking sleepily. “Gosh. Yep, definitely time for bed.”

“I’ll get going then, have a good night April,” Leo said, hoisting himself up onto the railing. “See you around?”

“Yeah, I’ll see you later. And Leo?” April said, making Leo pause his preparation to leap. He looked back at her; and she seemed better than she’d looked when he’d gotten to her apartment, less defeated, more like the April he’d started to know. She smiled at him, and it had a bit of that vibrancy he’d come to expect from her. “Thanks for the apology, and for coming to see me. I really needed the talk.”

You and me both, Leo didn’t say. Instead, he nodded politely, and vanished up the fire escape to the roof.

He heard April’s window shut below, and then it was just him standing outside; only the city’s ambient noise, and his near silent breathing.

Leo closed his eyes, and took a deep breath in.

He’d accomplished what he needed to. He’s said sorry, and while he still felt badly, April had forgiven him. In a few days, she’d hopefully be back on her feet, and they could restart the search for her father.

Leo put a hand to the raised scars on his cheek, and opened his eyes. Under his breath, he counted off his responsibilities.

“Find her father, stop the Kraang, protect the lair, find the Shredder, stop him from finding master Splinter… protect Donnie and Mikey,” Leo said quietly, tracing the twin scar slashes. Reminders. They were his reminders to do all that and more.

One more responsibility.

“Give Shredder payback,” Leo said to himself, repeating the words he and Raph had exchanged in private. Payback for their siblings, and for their father. The Shredder was two decades overdue for his payback, and with the war beginning, he would get it soon.

Master Splinter was still recovering from his extensive physical activity, mostly restrained to the lair until he regained his full strength. Once Leo’s father was at his best again, and same to April, they would start to really comb the city for the Foot clan’s hideouts.

And for the Kraang. Whatever they were planning, they were getting braver with each lab or weapons cache set up. Leo and Raph had no idea what the labs were for, they contained nothing but mutagen and human weaponry; they didn’t have the skills to hack the computers, or examine the
April might. April was smart, really smart. She knew things Leo and Raph didn’t; like how to use the internet, and chemistry stuff. Maybe she’d have a better idea of what the Kraang were doing with the mutagen.

Leo would have to ask her, when she got better, if she would be up to the task of finding out.

He had a feeling she would be, recalling how determined she’d been the first night they’d found her again; how fiercely set she was on getting them to help her find Kirby, almost demanding their services.

Raph had been impressed with April fiery statement, and that had been part of why Leo had agreed as well. If Raph saw in April anything like Leo had, then their hunch probably wasn’t wrong; not if both of them agreed on it.

They needed to know who the Kraang were, and why the mutagen had transformed Leo and his brothers into mutants; same for their father. If they had similar goals, it made sense to use April’s sources as asset.

They’d accepted her offer, and even if she’d shied away momentarily from shaking Leo’s hand, her grip had been as firm as her expression.

Leo dropped his hand from his cheek, and set off to meet up with his siblings again.

Just as soon as April was better, just as soon as their father was rested, they’d restart the two searches they needed to.

For now though, he’d go find out what he needed to help haul home, and pray his siblings hadn’t found any trouble at the scrap yard Raph had taken them to.

Leo left April’s temporary home behind, and felt a lot lighter than he had in a while.

Chapter End Notes

Leo monologues a lot, if you haven't noticed. He's so dramatic at fifteen, what a cute kid. I miss season one him, compared to the current iteration. Also his original voice actor; I liked the first one better personally speaking.

Poor April, she might be needing some sleep medication soon here, maybe a heat-bag or something. Can't be easy, dealing with all this extra stress. But ah, she will arrive to the conclusion she needs to soon enough here; when in doubt of yourself, get ripped and kick ass. Soon April, soon.

Hope this satisfied you all, I had all sorts of warm fuzzies thinking up this particular scene. Leo and April never did get a lot of one on one interaction in canon; excluding that one harrowing experience in season two with the chimera. I aim to fix that. Really, I'm just going to write a lot more interactions in general; the five, and later six,
kids could be so close in canon, but they aren't written that way, and it vaguely frustrates me. (okay, not vaguely, it definitely bothers me. give me soft and fluffy moments between them all, they deserve it.)

Next chapter might happen soon, depends how long it takes me to write my other... three updates? Yeah, three. Two ongoing works, one one-shot for a monthly prompt. Yee.

Oh, and if anyone's interested, I've started another fairly long TMNT fic; as a collab with my friend Ivy. Her and another friend's idea originally, but they came to me for consultation on the B-team, my babes, and in the end gave the writing rights to me. Lol, its called "Two Sides of a Mirror" and its a Raph centric fic. Because ey, I'm disappointed in how short the dark Raph arc was, which was barely five minutes long, and wanted to give it a spin myself.

Like psychological torture, Stockholm syndrome, kidnapping/isolation, dysfunctional family drama, and self-hatred? Then head on over to my profile by clicking my author name above and go check it out. Next chapter is already in progress, because Ivy is a special friendo who deserves a good thing in her rather rough life right now.

Thanks for being patient ya'll, and for reading my stuff; have a good night!
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Misunderstandings, and dissonant clashes.

Chapter Notes

Hi I came back and with more turtles.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leo breathed out, sliding through the third step of his lunge, duck, sweep—completing the movement with only a whisper of sound. The mats beneath his feet, their worn softness muffled through his wrappings, made quiet rustles as he slid into another stance.

One, two, three—strike out with his hand, twist an imaginary arm, and snap it with his knee. Again. One, two, three—again. One, two, three—

Again.

Leo drifted through each kata, aiming for precise execution of each one. When he was with Raph, their movements together tended to be quick, often competitive. Alone though, Leo preferred to ease himself through the routine. One, two, three; one, two, three. Nice and slow, each shift of his position following the instructions perfectly.

Though he’d never tell his father, Leo found solo practice to be more meditative than actual meditation. He knew the kata steps almost as well as his own name; he could find tranquility in the dojo like nowhere else. Alone, in his increasingly crowded home, this was Leo’s sanctuary.

Leo wove into another turn, spinning in a drawn out motion; leg muscles tensing to strike out, arms positioned just so to balance himself, one, two—

Leo stopped, staring at the other individual in the dojo.

Frozen in the exact same position as Leo, Mikey stared right back.

Leo blinked. Mikey blinked.

Neither of them moved.

“…are you copying me?” Leo asked, breaking the silence.

Mikey mutely shrugged, remaining in his half turn like Leo was.
Leo glanced over his brother, automatically checking his form. Hm. Not bad actually, Mikey wasn’t wobbling at all despite being on one foot, and a complete beginner.

How long had he been there? How had Leo not noticed him sooner?

…how much could he copy exactly?

Donnie and Mikey had sat in on a couple practice spars; no weapons, because they were still skittish around them, but they’d seen a fair amount so far… Mikey in particular had seemed interested, observing Leo and Raph throughout their spars with rapt attention. For him at least, since Mikey’s attention did wander regardless…

Leo’s attention was wandering too.

Mikey still wasn’t wobbling; perfectly still, despite the dragging moment.

Interesting.

Leo decided to test just how closely Mikey could follow him.

Leo completed the movement he’d stalled, and Mikey did too. Leo’s younger brother, he mirrored Leo precisely as Leo stepped into the next set of katas.

Mikey’s eyes tracked every step that Leo took, mimicking them with his own limbs.

Leo finished the set, settling in a resting position with his legs apart and arms close. Mikey was still keeping up, grinning at Leo as he stood in an identical position.

Mikey’s mischievous smile spelled out exactly what he was doing.

He wanted to play a game.

Leo grinned, and started the next kata with a quicker pace.

If Mikey wanted to play this game, then Leo would be more than happy to play along.

Duck, weave, side-step; kick, punch, slice. Twist, slide, jab; retreat, avoid, attack.

Leo kept his eyes locked with Mikey, speeding each kata up a bit more each time they completed one. Mikey didn’t falter, giggling softly as he followed Leo’s lead. Just a mite slower, otherwise, they were in perfect sync.

Leo got caught up in the game, going faster and faster; adding more complex moves to the dance, just to see, could Mikey follow this? What about this?

Leo, forgetting himself for a moment, executed a blur of movements; one that ended with a spinning flip. He landed right side up again, panting as he grinned, about the same time Mikey made a quiet yelp. Leo looked over his shoulder, and found Mikey lying on the ground and clutching his face.

Leo was torn between apologizing or laughing, watching Mikey roll around with a hand pressed to his snout. He settled on doing both.

“Oh my god, I’m s-so sorry, Mikey,” Leo laughed, going over to his groaning brother. “I just got so caught up in things, I might’ve, ha ha, gotten a bit carried away. You alright?”

“Sssssssssss…” Mikey hissed, still rubbing his sore spots. “Mm, fine fine. Hurtses lil, but fine am
Leo settled on the mats beside Mikey, still catching his breath from all the excitement. He watched Mikey run his tongue over his teeth, probably checking in case he’d lost any. Leo waited another beat, and then started to speak. “…you were pretty good up to the flip part, where’d you learn all that? You couldn’t have… no way. Did you learn that all from watching? Just watching?”

Mikey sat up and shrugged. “Mm? Yes? …am trouble?”

“’Am trou’- oh, no, no Mikey you’re not in trouble. That was actually really impressive,” Leo found himself grinning again. “I mean, you learned all that- and it was sorta rough around the edges yes- but you did it by just watching us. That’s- that’s incredible!”

“Ssssooo… not trouble?” Mikey asked slowly, rocking back and forth in his crouch.

“Gosh no,” Leo said, shaking his head. He smiled widely, and if he’d had a mirror on hand, he’d have seen his own giddy expression. “I want you to do it again.”

Raph paused, hand on the sliding door’s grip, and listened to the odd laughter and grunts coming through the paper door.

Well. That was unusual. When Leo did his solo training, the room was typically dead quiet.

Donnie shifted behind Raph, reaching around him to tap impatiently at the door. Raph waved him off, getting the message to “move forwards already”. Sliding the door open, Raph stepped into the dojo, just in time to see-

Leo, grabbing Mikey by his outstretched arm, and throwing their youngest brother over his shoulder, and onto the ground. Mikey hit the mats and cement with a loud yelp, and curled in on himself.

Raph had exactly two seconds to realize what was about to happen.

“Aw shit.” Raph said shortly, just as Donnie blew past him, already in attack mode. Raph reached out, but had nothing to grasp as Donnie ran full speed at Leo. “Shit- Donnie, wait-!”

Mikey, thank god, popped up right then, and grabbed Donnie around the waist just as their tallest brother’s claws grazed Leo. In a flurry of hisses and sharp trills, Donnie and Mikey grappled around one another as Donnie continued to try and attack Leo.

Raph rushed in to help, grabbing Donnie by the armpits, and trying to drag him off Mikey and Leo. “Jesus Christ, CUT IT OUT DONNIE HE WASN’T HURTING HIM-” Raph turned his glare onto Leo. “-YOU BETTER NOT HAVE-!”

“ITwasjustsparring!!” Leo said in a rush, holding Donnie’s hands off his face. “I wasn’t doing anything- not the face not the face- fuck, Donnie, IT WAS MIKEY’S IDEA OKAY CUT IT OUT!”
“No no no no NO NO NO NO-!” Mikey was chanting, pushing at Donnie to get off their brother.

“-its fine HE’S FINE, Donnie let go of Leo’s stupid face- for chrisake’s-”

“-please stop, ow owowow, that’smylipowowow-”

“-NO NO NO NO STOP STOP STOP STOP-.”

Donnie made a confused sound, and then let go of Leo; which caused Leo to fall backwards with the sudden lack of resistance, which caused Mikey’s pushing force to topple Donnie, combined with Raph’s pulling, which resulted in Raph being dog piled on by his younger siblings.

Raph groaned, feeling a lump on the back of his skull, and not enjoying the impact vibrations still running through his shell. God damn did the floor hurt in an uncontrolled fall. Mikey rolled off the pile first, followed by Donnie, and then the four of them lay on the dojo floor in varying levels of pain.

“Leo?” Raph asked after a few beats of silence.

“Yeah?” Leo answered in a weak tone.

“What the fuck were you thinking?”

“…Mikey wanted to see some moves- and I asked him permission first, I’m not that big of an idiot- and you just, walked in at a bad time.”

Raph sucked in a deep breath, and sighed just as deeply.

They’d been in here, him and Donnie, to get Donnie a new kunai, on the account that he’d sacrificed his first one to save April. That’s what they’d been planning to do, not deal with fricking this.

“Mikey was safe the whole time, I swear,” Leo continued. “Right, Mikey?”

“Am fine,” Mikey replied, sounding just that, if a little winded.

Raph hauled himself upwards, and took stock of the situation. Mikey looked unscathed, despite the fall a few seconds earlier, and Leo looked partially dazed, just starting to sit up like Raph had. Donnie was starting to curl on himself.

He was mumbling something.

“What was that?” Raph asked.

“Sorry,” Donnie said quietly, shooting apologetic glances at everyone. “Sorry. Mikey- was scared, sorry, scared f-for Mikey. Sh-shouldn’ ‘ave- have, shouldn’ have. Sorry.”

“Its fine, it was just a misunderstanding,” Leo replied easily. “No harm done, and you were just looking out for Mikey, right? An understandable reaction, since I was kind of tossing him around.”

Donnie nodded vaguely, but still looked caught between frustration and shame.

Mikey cut in, not in English though, so Raph and Leo were excluded as their youngest brother rapidly trilled at Donnie. Whatever he’d said, Donnie released his tenseness, and shuffled over to the smallest turtle. The short conversation that followed was way too fast for Raph to even think of trying to translate, not that he knew much of turtle-ese to begin with, so he chose to focus on Leo instead.
“So, why exactly, did Mikey want to see some ninjutsu?”

Leo visibly perked up, and he started grinning. “Well, I was doing my katas, and I didn’t notice him enter, but Mikey showed up and started copying me! Raph you should have seen him, his form is a little loose and sort of sloppy, but he was doing really well up to a point and he barely missed any of the correct steps or positions- and he learned it all by just watching us!”

Raph glanced over at Mikey, who was chirping at Donnie as their tallest brother fussied over their smallest brother. Really? Their most distractible and playful brother? Admittedly, Mikey was very athletic and had good balance, and was no shrinking violet in a fight… but so was Donnie, and Mikey’s attention span wasn’t even a quarter of Donnie’s…

“You sure?” Raph asked skeptically, observing Mikey as he rambled on about something to Donnie. The kid might be able to flip from playful to deadly in a heartbeat, but martial arts? Without any prior experience?

“Definitely,” Leo said, nodding firmly even as he grinned excitedly. “I mean, I’m not as experienced as Sensei is so I could be wrong, but… I think Mikey might be a real life natural at martial arts, even without proper training.”

Raph narrowed his eyes at Mikey, who’d draped himself over a grumbling Donnie, and was chittering away something that sounded very much like a scolding.

Hm. Doubtful.

“I won’t believe it ‘til I see it.”

“Well… maybe we could show you? He was really into it a moment ago,” Leo turned to look at Mikey, smiling hopefully. “How about it Mikey, you up for another round?”

“Yes!” Mikey chirped enthusiastically, releasing Donnie from his octopus hold. However, Donnie’s long arms snaked around his middle, and pulled him back down. Mikey turned his head enough so he could frown at Donnie, who scowled stubbornly back. A short exchange between the two, and Mikey started sulking.

Raph caught the word, “no” being repeated over and over, enough that he could understand. Raph started tapping his fingers impatiently, as the private conversation dragged on.

“I don’t think Don’s on board with the idea,” Raph drawled, noting the stern tone Donnie had started using. Raph’s comment made Donnie glance at him, and nod an affirmative. So Raph ventured a question. “Is it ‘cause you don’t want Mikey getting hurt?”

“Yes. Not safe.” Donnie replied shortly, ignoring Mikey’s grumbles about that.

Well, that was true enough. Leo hadn’t had anyone around to spot him or Mikey, in case one of them got hurt. That was easily enough fixed.

“What if, we kept it to small stuff, and you an’ me supervised the whole time,” Raph suggested. “No throws, just easy katas. Sound good?”

Donnie frowned, weighing the options. Mikey seemed to tip the balance though, Donnie’s doubtful expression clearing as Mikey bumped his cheek against Donnie’s; soft coos combined with beguiling puppy-dog eyes.

Raph looked away, uncomfortable with the physical affection.
God his siblings were weird.

“We all good?” He asked, examining at the intricate carpet designs rather than his brothers.

“…’kay. Small time, but yes. Is fine.” Donnie conceded, his reply almost unheard with Mikey’s triumphant exclamation.

“Short, not small,” Leo corrected offhandedly.

“Short time.” Donnie repeated, a tinge of annoyance in his voice.

“…not quite grammatically correct, but close enough.”

Raph wasn’t looking, but he could almost feel Donnie’s willingness to compromise dropping. Time to change the subject. “So. How ’bout that demonstration?”

That successfully got both Mikey and Leo’s attention, and by extension, Donnie’s too. A quick shuffle of positions followed. Raph knelt like he would if this were a real training session, along with Donnie, beside the wall; while Leo and Mikey squared up for their… whatever it was they were going to do.

Leo assumed a basic kata stance, and Mikey did the same.

Then they started moving.

Well, moving wasn’t quite the right word. It was closer to mirrored dancing.

Raph’s surprise rose with each completed movement, Mikey near seamlessly keeping up with Leo. Their eldest brother had been right; about Mikey’s slightly sloppy footwork, but also about the natural talent there.

Color him impressed.

Raph glanced at Donnie, who was watching their siblings with something between fondness and exasperation. As Mikey stumbled and ran into Leo, the two of them dissolving into laughter; Donnie chuckled under his breath, soft and nearly soundless.

Raph’s attention to their siblings drifted, drawn to the tinge of sadness creeping into Donnie’s expression.

Shouldn’t he be happy? Leo and Mikey were getting along, and that probably meant a break for them both.

Raph started to ask what was bothering Donnie now, but the door sliding open drew everyone’s attention at once.

“Oh my, this is a surprise,” Splinter said, stepping into the room. “Leonardo, are you teaching your brother ninjutsu?”

“No Sensei, I know I’m not supposed to,” Leo replied sincerely. He kept his excited grin, slinging an arm around Mikey’s shoulders. “No, you see, Mikey learned that all himself. He’s been watching us a lot closer than I thought he was. Isn’t that incredible?”

Splinter’s whiskers twitched, and he glided closer to their assembled group. Raph felt their father’s gaze sweep over each of them, and waited for Splinter to reach whatever conclusion he would. A beat later, he spoke. “Raphael, Donatello, were you supervising and spotting your brothers?”
“Hai, Sensei,” Raph said, speaking for both him and Donnie. “Kept it to basic stuff too.”

They technically had, for the whole two minutes Raph and Donnie had been watching. Sensei didn’t need to know that though.

Raph ignored the look Donnie gave him, obviously choosing to not call the lie, but definitely noticing the detail fudging. For once, Donnie’s lack of respect for parental authority was a blessing. Ditto for Mikey’s poor translation skills.

“Hm, and has Michelangelo expressed desire to learn more?” Splinter asked, stroking his beard. He had a knowing glint in his eyes, like he already knew the answer. “Because as luck would have it, for the past few days, I have been debating Donatello and Michelangelo’s introduction to ninjutsu. Their English skills have grown the last while, and I feel they are advanced enough to begin training.”

“Really?” Leo asked, caught by surprise, but visibly happy for it. “You mean it, Sensei?”

Raph sat up straighter as their father nodded. “Yes. Our enemies are drawing nearer as time passes, and your brothers may not be so lucky in escaping next time they meet danger. Teaching them self-defence, disciplined self-defence, would see that they do not meet an untimely death. And…”

Splinter smiled at them all, warm and fatherly. “I have waited a long time, to see that all of my sons inherit our clan’s skills.”

“Did you hear that, Mikey? You’re going to start training, with me and Raph!” Leo exclaimed, tightening his arm around Mikey’s shoulders. “You’ll get to learn so much, I can’t wait to show you some of the stuff I know, you’re going to love it, I promise-”

Mikey equally excited chatter drowned out Leo’s words, but neither of them seemed bothered by it. Raph found himself slowly grinning, wider and wider. Wow, two more ninjas. And for once, Raph wasn’t the bottom ranked member.

He’d get to show Donnie and Mikey so much, like Leo was describing to Mikey. He’d start slow yeah, but as time went on and they caught up- he’d have more sparring partners, possible companions for bench pressing, a partner who wasn’t Leo for midnight runs above ground…

He’d get to teach them, even just by interacting with them in the dojo. Somehow, that was an even weightier task than showing Donnie the ins and outs of engine mechanics.

Raph grinned. He couldn’t wait. Raph got up from his kneel, joining the larger group. His father seemed to be emanating a calm happiness, watching Leo and Mikey talk so enthusiastically. “So when do we start, Sensei. Tomorrow? The weekend?”

“There is no time like the present, as the saying goes,” Splinter chuckled. His deep brown eyes flickered to Raph, and Splinter smiled fondly at him. “I can tell you are just as eager as your brothers, Raphael. Evening practice is only a few hours away, starting a bit early won’t hurt your schedules. What do you say, Michelangelo, Donatello? Are you ready to begin your introduction?”

Mikey nodded enthusiastically, bouncing from foot to foot. “Ooooh, yes yes yes-”

“No.”

Raph’s smile froze, chilled by the icy tone accompanying that word. He turned his head, and looked back at Donnie, who hadn’t moved from his crouch by the wall.

Donnie stood, slowly and carefully. He was looking at Splinter with a cold, and guarded expression.
“No. No training.”

Raph swallowed, the heavy tension suddenly filling the air.

Splinter stepped towards Donnie, soft confusion in his eyes. “Donatello, what-”

“Not name.” Donnie said quietly.

Splinter stopped walking towards him.

“Donnie-” Mikey started, slipping back into his and Donnie’s base language, but a sharp “No.” from Donnie cut him off. Raph glanced back and forth between the two feral brothers, seeing Mikey’s hopeful stubbornness, and Donnie’s firm denial. Mikey tried again. “‘lease? ‘lease?”

No, Donnie said again, this time in turtle. Raph grimaced, feeling caught between the two brothers, and their father.

The standoff was silent, and then—

A moment later, and Mikey’s eyes slid away. Hunching on himself in disappointment, and tilting his head downwards, Mikey bared the back of his neck. “‘kay, no trainin’.”

Donnie nodded, as though he considered the matter settled. But their father…

“Dona- Donnie, I am afraid… this is not a negotiable matter,” Splinter said, keeping his tone calm, even as Donnie’s cold gaze returned to him. “You and Michelangelo might have fought off the Foot clan before, but it is unlikely you would be so lucky again. You are untrained, and that makes you both vulnerable. You will need ninjutsu, if you have any hope of surviving the coming war. Please, let me teach you-”

“Said, no,” Donnie hissed. Raph tensed slightly, as Donnie did the same; his tallest brother slipping into a defensive posture. “Do not need ni-ninjtsssu. Said no.”

“I cannot allow you to continue without training, Donatello. It is my duty that you and your brother remain safe. You will not be able to hide forever in the sewers; the Shredder will find you again.”

No, ---- not -------- to you, not ----- am ---- we ----! Donnie trilled in a low, dangerous tone. Raph’s instincts flared, as Donnie’s third eyelids flickered down and he started circling Splinter.

Raph stepped back from the brewing fight, for once unwilling to get into the middle of one. Mikey’s tight whines edged on Raph’s hearing, same as Leo’s faint shuffling. Guess he wasn’t the only one feeling freaked out.

“I do not know what you’ve just said to me, but I will not back down on this subject,” Splinter said firmly, eyes following Donnie’s slow progression around their group.

Donnie stopped his pacing, still blank eyed as he looked at Splinter. He tilted his head, and rose from his slight hunch. “Fight, now. I-me, you, for right. To teach ninjutsssu. Only if win. If not win, no training.”

“I will not fight you, my son,” Splinter said, tail shifting across the mats. “But… I will not back down either.”

“No fight, no ‘gree.” Donnie said, words dipping into something closer to a growl.

Splinter’s ears flickered, and Raph’s fists clenched themselves as his father slid into a casual defense
Based on the provided text, it seems to be about a scenario involving two disputing individuals who are being influenced by an authority figure, likely a parent or mentor, to resolve their conflict peacefully. The tension and determination are palpable as they navigate through the complexities of family dynamics and individual beliefs.

The narrative shifts to a more introspective exploration of the characters' roles and responsibilities, particularly focusing on the protective instincts of a brother towards his younger sibling. The text highlights the importance of respecting one's own decisions while also recognizing the potential dangers of pushing certain boundaries. The language and syntax used are indicative of a narrative style, possibly meant to capture the essence of a personal or familial conflict.

The overall tone of the text is reflective and somewhat solemn, suggesting a deep consideration of the consequences of actions and decisions. It touches upon themes of protection, responsibility, and the importance of understanding one's own limits.

In summary, the text portrays a moment of decision-making, where the boundaries of self-respect and familial protection intersect. It invites the reader to ponder the nuances of individual autonomy within the framework of collective responsibility.

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stance. “Michelangelo should be allowed to make his own decisions. You are not his keeper.”

“No fight. No ‘gree.” Donnie said again.

A beat of tense silence, neither of the two disputing individuals backing down. Then-

“…if that is what it will take to convince you,” Splinter said in a blank, but subtly hurt, tone. Donnie jerked a nod, already slipping into his hunch again. Splinter turned his head, and spoke to Raph and his remaining brothers. “Leonardo, Raphael, please, take Michelangelo to the side of the dojo. I do not want him getting caught in the crossfires this time.”

“I-hai Sensei,” Leo replied, dragging Mikey off by the arm. Raph backed away slowly as well, trying to keep an eye on both his father and brother.

This’d been meant to be a good thing, their family getting closer through a bonding activity, not-

Not this.

Raph couldn’t un-tense himself enough to kneel, choosing to stand just on the sidelines as the fight began.

Donnie cautiously circled the tall rat in front of him, smelling the subtle ‘fight me’ scent the rat was making. Not quite as detectable as turtles’, but good enough that Donnie could tell.

The rat started to circle, like Donnie was; his long tail trailing along behind him, footsteps silent.

Donnie, hidden behind his eyelids, glanced over Splinter’s form. No tells to find, carefully hidden as the rat observed Donnie in turn. Splinter was old, according to Leo and Raph. Older than many, many, many turns of season.

Old meant clever, clever meant dangerous. Donnie was some of those, but not old. Splinter might have experience he did not; Donnie would admit that at least.

That didn’t mean the rat was allowed to force Donnie and Mikey into a dangerous venture, learning the skills Leo and Raph had.

Donnie saw the scars, saw the ferocity the two would fight with when pitted against each other. No, Donnie wouldn’t let Mikey be involved in that, it would lead to injury from sharp-cutting-tools and more fights with their brothers.

Donnie would protect Mikey, just like he always had.

He didn’t need nin-juutsu, neither of them did. They were fine, they were fine.

They didn’t need the rat’s protection.
Donnie growled under his breath, twitching his claws as he and the rat circled each other still. Donnie kept his body language ambiguous; so Splinter wouldn’t see if he tried to strike. Splinter had no tells though, no signs of where Donnie could strike, if he wanted.

Intimidation perhaps, would make an opening.

Donnie hissed long and slow, turning it into a growl. Splinter’s ears twitched as he eyed Donnie, and Donnie increased the deepness of his growl. Then-

He jumped forwards, a mock attack, snapping his teeth as he did. Donnie saw how Splinter stepped backwards, and retreated Donnie himself; returning to the circling. The rat was either afraid, or truly did not want to fight him.

Donnie didn’t care which.

He’d fight either way.

Splinter struck out suddenly, moving fast so fast- and Donnie barely dodged around the attack. Whirling to get behind the rat, Donnie evaded the long tail sweeping behind Splinter and slashed at his back.

His claws only grazed the fabric, Splinter already spinning to face him again. Donnie ducked another jabbed attack, but was caught by the second one he hadn’t seen coming. Wheezing, his side hurting, Donnie put some space between them both.

Donnie hissed at Splinter, starting their circling again. The rat was looking at him with pity. Donnie didn’t want that pity; the rat was supposed to look at him like a challenger, not like some juvenile acting out.

*Take me seriously,* Donnie trilled, though he knew it wouldn’t be understood. *See me FIGHT ME I am worthy fight me fight me!

Splinter’s steady gaze turned sadder, and Donnie’s anger swelled.

He attacked, yelling the echoing scream he and Mikey always used when fighting opponents that were truly dangerous. Splinter’s momentary shock at the sound made him freeze, just as it was supposed to make him, and Donnie landed a real blow in that short moment.

Splinter reeled only for a beat, and then turned his full strength onto Donnie; just like Donnie had wanted.

Donnie blocked Splinter’s harsh jabs, his arm scales stinging from the force, and dodged the sweeping tail whip that followed. Donnie attempted to return the blows, but the rat evaded them like nothing.

In a misstep, Donnie’s foot got caught on the edge of a floor fabric, and-

Splinter’s fist found his chest, and sent him flying backwards.

Donnie rolled, and found his footing again with all four limbs. His chest stung, but with a ragged intake of breath, he charged back into the fight.

The rat kept dodging, landing hits on Donnie that left throbbing bruises, avoiding every attack Donnie tried to return. Donnie growled, trying from every angle he could, but Splinter always blocked him.
No, no no no- Donnie was supposed to win. He needed to win, or else Mikey- Mikey would be-

Splinter’s tail coiled around Donnie’s legs, and dragged them from underneath him. Donnie’s temple met the floor, and his claws scratched along the fabric as Splinter used his tail to throw Donnie across the room.

Donnie’s shell met stone, and he brokenly gasped for air. Limbs burning, shell ringing with pain, Donnie stood again.

He couldn’t fail, he couldn’t.

Splinter stared at him, still with pity.

Stop it, STOP IT, Donnie shrieked, ignoring how his body ached. Stop staring stop pitying, NOT WEAK I AM NOT WEAK

The rat didn’t stop staring at him sadly.

Donnie howled. I CAN PROTECT HIM DON’T NEED YOU NEVER NEED YOU, YOU WON’T TAKE HIM FROM ME HE IS MINE

Splinter kept staring.

Donnie howled again, meaningless anger, and charged at the rat.

Splinter caught his outstretched arms, and used the throwing move Leo had done to Mikey. Donnie hit the floor, and lost his breath. Splinter ghosted away, still silent and unfettered, and left Donnie trying to pull himself together.

“Do not get up, my ---,” Splinter said.

Donnie got up, and glared at the rat.

He charged again, this time getting a glancing blow in before Splinter knocked him away. Donnie got up again, and attacked once more. Splinter evaded him, and threw Donnie onto the floor again. Donnie got up, again.

“Stop. You ---- lost.”

Lost nothing, Donnie growled, panting as he stood again.

Splinter knocked him back down, and heavy blow to Donnie’s scarred arm.

Donnie tried to stand, but had his legs whipped before he could.

He tried to rise, and felt Splinter’s tail smack him back onto the floor.


He stepped away, leaving Donnie on the ground.

Donnie pushed himself onto his feet, trying to stand up fully, to face Splinter again. He could do this, he would win and they’d be safe. Mikey would be safe.

Donnie’s eyes darted to the sidelines, where his brothers stood. He focused in on Mikey, who was…
Mikey was staring at him, wide blue eyes filled with sadness and… the message to give up. Splinter was too strong, too skilled. Donnie wouldn’t win, no matter how many times he got back up.

Donnie’s last amount of strength left him, and everything throbbed.

He’d lost. He’d have no say in the *tray-ning*. Mikey would get hurt.

He’d failed.

“Donatello.”

Donnie looked at the rat, who was still looking at him with pity.

“Do you --------- to your loss?” Splinter asked. He didn’t even look tired; Donnie hadn’t even managed to make him breathe faster.

Donnie snarled, flashing his teeth at the rat. *I submit to no one, not you never you, I lose but I do not submit*

*Donnie*… Mikey said, starting to move towards him.

Donnie hissed at his brother, at the rat, at everyone in the room- and turned away.

Before anyone, his brothers or the rat, could stop him, Donnie ran from the *tray-ning* room. Mikey, Raph as well, called out after him, but Donnie’s blood was still rushing, still singing with anger and fury and *shame*.

He jumped the obstacles in the *lay-err’s* entrance, and vaulted into the tunnels.

He’d lost. He’d *failed*.

He couldn’t stand to see the rat or his brothers right now.

Mikey would get hurt, would have scars and anger cover him like their brothers did.

Donnie ran, winding deep into the tunnels, ignoring the slick stones as he delved into the water ways. He ran, until he found a dry and cold spot inside a half-blocked tunnel.

In the darkness, Donnie curled on himself; berating himself for his failings, for being too weak to protect Mikey.

Filled with shame and regret and fury, Donnie wordlessly whined in the dark tunnel.

He’d failed.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, fluff fluff FEELS seems to be the theme lately. I’ve had this Donnie vs Splinter scene in my head since forever, and I’m so glad I got to finally write it out.
Apologies for the cliff hanger, you'll all have to wait until the next update for things to be wrapped up. inesis
(Tension is so much fun to write, and then FIGHT SCENES omg. I fricking love it.)

I have the next chapter already plotted out, I just have to update my other... three fictions that need updating?? Oh and post a one-shot, on the 28th, for the monthly prompt thing. Check them out if you all feel like it, they're all on my profile.

Thanks, as always, for being awesome readers; hope you enjoyed the chapter!
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Please remember & understand this.

Chapter Notes

Hey, its the actual chapter this time! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mikey padded through the tunnels, down on all fours so he could smell the scent trail better. The water had washed away most of it, but there was still enough that he could follow. The freshness helped, only a short while since Donnie had passed through.

Mikey whined deep in his throat, turning another corner into new tunnels. Donnie had looked so upset, and the things he’d said during his fight with the rat…

Maybe Donnie hadn’t been as fine as he’d said he was, moving to the lay-err and trying to build a new nest inside one that already belonged to others. But, Donnie had seemed okay; spending lots of time with Raf and building clever things together.

Was it because of the rat’s pushiness? Splin-terr did make them do things that weren’t much fun, eenglish and mah-th and other boring paper things. But the tray-ning had been fun, the game with Leo had been fun, so why was Donnie so upset about it?

Mikey jumped over a trench, avoiding the cold stream in it. The scent trail was getting stronger, so that meant he was getting close to Donnie. Good, then Mikey could find out what was bothering Donnie so much, and why he’d suddenly challenged the rat.

They’d agreed to not challenge Splin-terr, he was old and crafty, and it was his nest anyways. They were occupying the same territory as the rat, which meant they had to respect his rules. Mostly. Mikey didn’t like some of the rules, and didn’t follow them unless he absolutely had to.

Like tay-bell sitting. Why wasn’t he allowed to sit on it? It was very comfortable, and was a nice vantage point.

The lay-err’s rules were strange.

Mikey slowed his quick pace, entering the tunnel that smelled strongest of his brother. It had lots of other little tunnels connecting to it, and no water flows anywhere. A good place to hide, though Donnie’s angry-sad-furious scents made it very obvious he was here.
Mikey tiptoed to one of the smaller tunnels, and peered inside it. Donnie was folded on himself inside, curled all the way in the back where it ended in stone.

Donnie? Mikey clicked softly.

Go away, Donnie hissed back.

Mikey frowned, and ignored his brother’s refusal of company. He climbed inside the small tunnel, just big enough for their type of turtle, and crawled over to Donnie.

Said go away, Donnie grumbled, curling tighter into his ball.

Shh, not going anywhere staying here being with you, Mikey replied, pushing into the spot next to Donnie. His brother hissed, but only half-heartedly pushed at Mikey’s insistence. When they were settled again, Donnie still keeping to himself and Mikey leaned on his side, Mikey started talking again. You, you okay? No hurt smells no blood, but sad very sad, why sad?

Not telling, Donnie clicked, turning his head away.

Mikey scowled, because Donnie was breaking their rules. When someone was upset, they told the other. Simple. It kept them happy, and kept each other from ending up snarly and hurt inside.

Mikey turned his head to Donnie’s shoulder, and bit him.

Donnie whipped his head around, and snapped warningly.

Stop being dumb, Mikey scolded, ignoring his brother’s hisses.

Not being dumb you’re dumb, Donnie trilled shortly, turning his head away again. His scent was turning sour with sadness and anger, and Mikey didn’t like it.

Mikey’s scowl fell away, and he let his head drop onto Donnie’s shoulder again. He apologetically nuzzled the spot he’d bitten, starting a tentative purr. Sorry, just worried very worried, please tell why sad and upset don’t like you sad-upset-scared-angry

Donnie stayed silent, continuing to look away from Mikey.

Mikey’s concerned purr deepened, and he pushed his forehead against Donnie’s scales. Please please, you you know you can tell me anything everything, we promised no secrets no hidden sadness, tell tell me okay? I’m here for you I’m listening

...okay, Donnie said finally, his whole body losing the tension it’d held.

Mikey crawled under Donnie’s arm, and settled in his brother’s lap. Donnie’s arms wound around him, and Mikey tucked his head under Donnie’s chin. Mikey changed his purr’s tone, turning into a comforting one. Donnie’s own was small and stressed, but there.

Can talk now, Mikey prompted gently.

Donnie sighed, and sounded very tired.

Why attack Splin-terr why challenge rat? We agreed to not, no need for injuries for blood could live in same nest be peaceful, Mikey asked, because Donnie wasn’t talking still. No need to fight for top spot, could live without challenging, you said

I know I said, Donnie said, starting to tense up again. But would hurt you, trying to hurt you me us,
training is dangerous

Was fun with Lee-oh, Mikey said, because it had been.

Long-sharp-cutting tools, remember? Not training that wasn’t training that was playing, Donnie said, starting to growl his words. Training is fighting and challenging, sharp tools angry words, scars injuries blood, no not for you me us, no training

...have to though, lost you lost, Mikey reminded sadly. Donnie had never lost a fight before; it’d been strange and wrong to see that happen. Always too quick too smart, Donnie always won challenges.

The rat was smarter, had been quicker.

I lost, I failed, I’m sorry so sorry, Donnie mumbled, tightening his hug around Mikey. His purr stopped completely, and Donnie was shaking slightly. Precious-small-brother I’m sorry, I failed I lost I am shamed, I’m sorry sorry sorry-

shh, no crying, did best you did your best, Mikey said softly, tightening his own hug around Donnie.

Wasn’t enough, not enough never enough I was too weak not strong enough I lost, Donnie said, his tone caught between anger and sadness. Little droplets escaped his eyes, dripping down his cheeks. You you’ll get hurt be scarred bloody broken, me I lost am less now can’t protect you anymore, I’m sorry so sorry, I needed to be better but wasn’t better... you, you will change

How change? Mikey asked, rubbing soothing circles on Donnie’s shoulder as he let out everything he’d been hiding.

Like Raph like Leo, angry and strange and wrong, Donnie ducked his head, hiding his tears. ...you won’t need-want me anymore

WRONG! Mikey snapped, making Donnie’s head jerk upwards. Mikey moved his hands up to cup Donnie’s damp cheeks, and he held his brother so he couldn’t look away anymore. Always need you always want you, training would never can never change that, you me us we’re always together, kay okay? Lost or not lost you’re mine my brother my smart-clever-brother, losing to rat changes nothing training changes nothing... mine you’re mine, okay?

Donnie blinked, and then nodded as his red eyes clouded with tears again. Mikey grimaced, rubbing Donnie’s cheeks with his thumbs. This why so quiet past days? You you scared I was not needing you anymore?

Yes, sorry I’m sorry, Donnie said mournfully. Have Leo have Raph have Splinter, nest food protection... they know more more than me know words and books and tools, know fighting skills know human things... I know none of these any of this

Donnie leaned into Mikey’s palm, tears still sliding down his scales. Trying am trying to be better be smarter, protect you I have to protect you, but they... they can do it better keep you safe better... I’m useless so useless now

Shh, wrong too that’s wrong, Mikey cooed, brushing away the tears. Always need you always want you remember? Not useless never useless, smart and clever and kind and I love you, always have loved you always will love you; new brothers new nest new things not change that. You, you love me still even with Raf and new fun clever things right?

Yes, love you still always love you, Donnie said firmly.
Then same I feel the same, new nest new life not change you me us, Mikey leaned close, and licked a large droplet off Donnie’s cheek; nuzzling Donnie’s damp scales with his snout. And I protect me myself fine, am strong fierce worthy, you I protect you too. Stronger together always stronger together, we protect you me us together.

I know… Donnie said, nuzzling Mikey’s snout with his own. But my job my place I’m eldest I’m biggest I protect you.

Almost as big now, almost as strong, Mikey chided, reminding Donnie that they’d both had growth spurts this warm season. Not small or juvenile anymore, am smart and fast and strong just like you, you protect me I protect you. Not alone never alone, okay? Might be biggest might be eldest, but not alone in protecting or fighting, have me.

Have you, yes, Donnie said softly, warmth returning to his voice and replacing the self-pity and shame.

Mikey patted Donnie’s cheek, purring contently. No more sadness?

Mmm… little bit sadness, but better now, Donnie shrugged. Still… sad-upset I lost to rat-that-is-big.

Hm, no worrying we will deal with later, now though… shh resting time, you you fought hard, Mikey hummed, settling back into Donnie’s embrace. Were very smart using echo-scream, scared Lee-oh and Raf doing that and Splin-terr too. You you’ve gotten stronger again, one day might beat rat maybe a few turns of season from now?

Maybe… Donnie said thoughtfully. He poked Mikey’s side, making him giggle. You’ve also gotten stronger faster, can barely catch you past many days.

Aw thanks thank you, Mikey preened. So Donnie had noticed how quick Mikey could be lately. Mikey had barely noticed it himself, but their fight with the humans attacking April had really emphasized it. Maybe soon I’ll be fastest of all, even more than Lee-oh and Raf and rat.

Maybe maybe, Donnie chuckled. Would believe it know you can be, soon soon another turn of season perhaps? Getting very big like me.

Maybe bigger maybe taller? Mikey asked hopefully.

Mmmm… no, small brother stay small.

Mikey stuck his tongue out, but was only pretending to be mad with Donnie. His brother was laughing, and purring, and that meant he was okay now. Mikey sighed, and let their conversation die off. He knew Donnie wouldn’t want to go back to the lay-err for a while yet, so they could stay in the cozy dark until then. It was nice, since Mikey hadn’t had much time with Donnie lately; Donnie too busy with Raf and his clever things, and Mikey preoccupied by the tee-vee and Lee-oh’s company.

Mikey liked the tee-vee and Lee-oh, but… he’d been missing Donnie, just being with Donnie alone.

Having more kin was harder to adjust to than he’d thought, and less fun too. Everything was more complicated than he wanted it to be, and lately, the now familiar pang of loss would shoot through his chest when he thought too much on things.

He missed their home. The lay-err was big and interesting, but it smelled like Lee-oh and Raf and Splin-terr, and not like Mikey and Donnie’s combined scents. Their bed was nice, but nearly as comfortable as their last. They had privacy, but not enough; Mikey couldn’t wander around without
bumping into another person, and there were so many rules for everything. His brothers were great, but sometimes Mikey wanted alone time from them.

Mikey hadn’t ever wanted privacy before, not when it was just him and Donnie. Having a bigger family seemed to be changing him in that sense, despite what he’d told Donnie about not doing that.

Mikey, even though he liked his new brothers and sometimes the rat, sort of wished they could go back to how things had been. Simple and normal, no humans or sharp-cutting tools or hard to handle emotions anywhere.

Donnie had been happier in their nest.

Mikey wanted his brother to be happy again.

He’d have to figure out how to do that, later. Right now though…

Mikey purred gently, coaxing Donnie into it as well. No more bad emotions or worrying for now, just cuddling and enjoying the quiet.

Mikey adjusted his position, moving around so his head fell on the crook of Donnie’s neck, and Donnie could lean his cheek on Mikey’s top of skull. Donnie’s arms settled around Mikey, and they slipped one hand each into the other’s.

Better? Mikey asked quietly.

Better, Donnie agreed, purring peacefully.

Much better indeed. Mikey relaxed against his older brother, and let the stress from earlier slip away. He’d deal with those things later, along with Donnie. No more trying to do that alone, they did everything together after all; this was no different.

Raph trudged through the tunnels, checking each one leading from the main line for any sign of his brothers. After the fiasco had concluded back in the lair, Mikey had mumbled something to them all that wasn’t in English, and run off to find Donnie. It wasn’t much of an explanation, but Raph had understood the gesture. Donnie was priority, and Raph didn’t blame their youngest brother’s mindset on that.

A part of Raph was worried that Donnie was going to run off for good, and take Mikey with him; but a larger part said that wouldn’t happen. Donnie was logical, however feral that logic often was. The lair was defensible, hidden, and safe to inhabit. Donnie wouldn’t give that up, not with how insistent he was about Mikey’s safety. The fight wouldn’t matter enough that he’d leave.

Raph checked down another tunnel way, and saw no evidence of his brothers. He sighed, and kept walking. They had to be somewhere nearby, or at least he hoped they were.

Raph thought about how the fight had been, from the outside on the sidelines. Donnie, circling their
father- no, he’d been stalking Splinter, steps silent and slow until he struck out. Donnie moved like a predator, all claws and guttural snarls.

When he’d made that… that sound, it’d made Raph stop breathing for a moment; frozen by the echoing scream still ringing in the air. Donnie was smart and picking up human speech rapidly, but underneath that, Raph had almost forgotten just utterly feral his brother could be.

The fight had really highlighted that, especially the meaning behind the extended challenge. Raph had figured it out part ways, watching Mikey’s body language as well as Donnie’s. Their youngest brother hadn’t interfered, which had been the first tip off that this wasn’t just a disagreement. It’d been something a lot more important than just that.

Raph had understood that, after a bit of thinking.

Leo hadn’t, but their father had explained things a bit better.

(“Sensei... why did you do that?” Leo asked, glancing towards the door where Mikey had gone. “I mean, I know Donnie causes trouble sometimes, but did it really warrant that sort of punishment?”

“It was not punishment, Leonardo,” Splinter replied, sounding worn out and somehow... defeated, despite his overwhelming win. “Donatello would not have let me teach Michelangelo or him ninjutsu, unless I proved I was stronger. The past while, I have come to realize he does not respect my position as your father, and not simply because I am not a turtle. In his mind, I believe he sees me as a challenge to his authority. Leonardo, he has raised both himself and his brother all these years. I do not blame him for taking offence to my attempted influence, not when he is so used to being in charge.”

“Then... why’d you do it, if you knew he was gonna react like that,” Raph said, observing his father’s slightly limping gait. Donnie must've done more damage than Splinter was admitting to. “If you knew he wasn’t gonna listen to a demand, then why demand at all?”

“Because time is short, my sons. Soon, the Shredder and his men will become active again,” Splinter said grimly, settling into a kneel by the dojo tree. “Donatello would have taken days, if not weeks to win over unless I proved myself. We do not have that time. I did not want to hurt him, but it was for his own good. Perhaps though... I miscalculated how strongly he’d react to his loss.”)

“No fucking shit,” Raph muttered, stepping over a waterway trench. Good god, none of them knew how to interact with anyone without a big fight following. At least Raph and Leo had the excuse of never having had social contact, but Splinter really didn’t.

Raph felt like it was ironic somehow, that he was the only one aware of that.

He passed by another length of tunnel, heading into dryer areas now, and something caught the edge of his hearing. Raph stepped backwards a bit, and looked down the empty seeming tunnel. Again, he heard soft clicking from further inside, followed by something nearly inaudible that he felt more than heard.

Raph walked quietly into the tunnel, and found inside one of the adjacent pipes, his brothers hiding away.

As quickly as he caught sight of them, he averted his eyes. Donnie and Mikey were tangled together, shamelessly curled around one another in a very close hug. The sound he’d been feeling was their purring, broken only by soft trills to one another.

“'Oh for the love of god,”’ Raph said under his breath. “Again with the PDA.”
“Raph?” Mikey piped up, lifting his head from Donnie’s shoulder.

“Yeah, it’s me. You two doing alright?” Raph asked, leaning on the wall beside the large pipe. “That was a pretty intense fight you had, Donnie. You hurt anywhere?”

“…I’m fine,” Donnie said in a subdued voice, not looking at Raph.

Ah, well, not surprising. Raph understood how his brother was feeling right now, since he himself had felt like that a lot over the years.

Maybe…

“Hey Mikey, think me and Donnie could have a moment alone?” Raph asked. “I’d like to talk to him about some stuff.”

Mikey glanced up at Donnie, and Donnie shrugged. Another soft coo from Mikey, and a quick snout nuzzle, and their mutual brother extracted himself from Donnie’s hug. As he exited the large pipe though, Mikey looked at Raph with a very grave and serious expression.

“Be nice,” He said sternly, pointing a finger at Raph.

“I will,” Raph replied truthfully. This was a salvage mission; he wasn’t here to mess up Donnie any more than what’d already been done to him. Raph was actually sort of hoping he could undo some of that.

Mikey scrutinized Raph for a moment, narrowed eyes flicking up and down, but eventually he nodded and left. Nonsense singing followed his exit, Mikey’s half sung trills hanging in the air as he disappeared into the tunnel system.

They faded off, and then it was just Raph and Donnie. Who was still hiding inside his pipe.

Raph sat down on the edge of the huge thing, and tried to figure out how exactly he was going to put his thoughts.

“Why here,” Donnie asked before Raph could say anything, his suspicious tone clear.

“To talk, thought you could use someone after that…”


Raph nodded, but not to Donnie request to solitude. Mostly, he was nodding at his confirmed suspicions of how Donnie was feeling at the moment. Raph picked at his knee pads, finding loose threads he’d need to repair later. “You’re upset, and feeling like a sore loser.”

“Not hurt. Said so.”

“Lemme finish here, Don, I actually have something smart to say for once.”

“…fine.”

“And would you come out of that pipe? We can’t have a serious conversation if you’re hiding in it.” Raph heard grumbling behind him, and Donnie shuffled forwards to crouch beside Raph.

“There we go. See, you can probably hear me a lot better now.”
“Could hear fine,” Donnie muttered.

“But I couldn’t see you, and this is the face to face kinda conversation,” Raph pointed out. Donnie didn’t acknowledge the point, and stared at the blank concrete wall across from them. For a long moment, nothing but the far off sounds of water was heard. Until, Raph sighed, and tried talking again. “I know how you feel right now. You’re upset, and angry, and I’m guessin’ a little sorry for yourself. Is that right?”

Donnie shrugged.

“Yeah. Well. It sucks, I know that especially well. You’ve seen me and Leo sparring, right? You know how many times he beats me outta ten?” Raph nudged Donnie’s shoulder with his own, getting the turtle to look over at him. “Six, sometimes more if it’s a really bad week for me. I might be stronger than him physically, but Leo’s got a lot of hard earned skill and focus I don’t. Not that I remember that in the moment, losing my temper with him like I do. But that doesn’t matter right now; the point of this is that even though I lose more than I’d like, and get really angry for it, I still listen to our brother. He’s the leader, and while I really fuckin’ hate to admit it, he knows better sometimes. Sort of like how Splinter knows better than you right now, about the training.”

Donnie looked away, a small growl building in his throat. “Don’t need training. Am fine.”

“Yes, that’s where you’re wrong, an’ Splinter proved that by beating you,” Raph said. “You don’t wanna admit it, and I get why you don’t, but you do need the training. Mikey too. Shredder is going to come for us, and if you’re not ready, you won’t survive it. It sucks, it really fucking sucks, but sometimes you have to let things go and listen to people you don’t want to.”

“Like the rat,” Donnie mumbled, clacking his claws on the cement pipe.

Raph sighed, and nodded. “Yeah, like the rat. You understand now? Why this isn’t really a negotiable thing?”

“…mm,” Donnie shrugged again, glancing away.

Raph waited for more, but Donnie didn’t seem forth coming with any. A moment of consideration, and Raph slung an arm around Donnie’s shell. “I’m sorry you have to do this, especially since you don’t want to. Is it because of Mikey?”

“Yeah. I…” Donnie gestured around, obviously trying to translate his words. “…have to protect Mikey. Keep safe, keep from… from danger. Training isss dangerous.”

“How so, ‘cause I know we have accidents sometimes, but Sensei is always watching and-”

Donnie cut Raph off, tapping one of the deeper scars he had on his arms. “Dangerous. Seen Leo, seen you… angry, very angry. Don’t want thisss for Mikey.”

“…oh,” Raph said, rubbing the wide scar Donnie had indicated. “Yeah. I can see why you’re upset about the training then.”

Donnie clicked, mixing the sound with a rumble in his throat. Raph wasn’t entirely sure what that meant, but it didn’t sound angry at least.

Raph ran his hand up and down Donnie’s shell, doing it until Donnie relaxed again; his taller sibling leaning heavily against Raph’s side. It felt a bit weird, since he’d never gotten so close with Donnie before, but… it wasn’t a bad feeling either.
“You gonna do the training?” Raph asked after a while. “You’ll be stronger for it, and you can protect Mikey better if you do.”

“Mm, yes. Don’t want to…”

“…but you will. Good on you, bein’ the bigger turtle.”

“…I’m always bigger turtle.”

Raph paused, and then chuckled a bit. “Yeah. You’re the biggest one of us alright, lucky you. Ready to go back? Leo’s kinda worried about you two.”

Donnie huffed, and nodded once. Raph patted Donnie’s shell. “C’mon, we’ll start small with training, I promise. Stretches and stuff. You two are pretty stretchy, right?”

“What is ‘stretchy’?”

“I’ll show you back at the lair.”

Raph pulled Donnie out of his pipe, which was admittedly roomy, and led his brother out of the tunnel. Mikey was a little ways away, humming to himself while sitting against the wall. When he caught sight of Raph and Donnie, he chirped and scrambled to his feet. Raph rolled his eyes, and looked away while the two feral turtles exchanged their version of a standard greeting; chirpy coos and knocking foreheads.

Honestly. They had no shame.

But, seeing as they were happy like that, Raph wasn’t gonna say anything.

Splinter shifted his tail restlessly, ears keened for even the slightest sound coming from outside his home. He knelt in front of his dojo, just above the soothing pool below the ledge. The sounds of water did nothing for his nerves though, and Leonardo’s pacing around the media pit was no help either.

“Patience, my son. They will return in time.”

“I know, Sensei. I’m just a bit concerned that they ran off again,” Leonardo said, slowing his pacing.

Splinter twitched his whiskers, and found himself sharing that concern. Perhaps he’d been too harsh with Donatello, and had made the wrong choice in accepting his third child’s challenge. But that method of blunt confrontation had often worked well with Raphael, and Splinter had been hoping for similar results.

Footsteps pattered into his hearing range, and judging from how many there were, Splinter knew his plan had succeeded. Raphael, with his two brothers in tow, appeared in the entrance to the lair. Splinter stood as they approached, looking down at his assembled sons.
Donatello stepped forwards, releasing Michelangelo’s hand as he did. Splinter calmly met Donatello’s steady gaze, red eyes glinting in the dim lights of the lair.

A moment of staring, and Donatello slowly lowered his head, bowing similarly to how Raphael and Leonardo did.

“I’ll listen. Will train, will learn.” Donatello said, raising his head back up. Splinter heard the reluctance in his voice, but the agreement was enough for the moment.

“Thank you, Donatello. I am glad you’ve agreed to my mentorship,” Splinter said, choosing his words carefully. “Are you willing to begin tonight, as I first suggested?”

Donatello wrinkled his snout, but Raphael’s comforting shoulder pat made him relax again. “Don’t worry Sensei, I got him to agree to some stretches—”

“Don’t know what ‘stretches’ is.” Donatello muttered.

“-so we’re all set for the basics right now,” Raphael finished. “Think… think we could do it on our own for a bit? We’ll call you in for the harder stuff if we get to it.”

Splinter read the message behind Raphael’s suggestion, that giving Donatello and Michelangelo space to adjust would be a good plan of action. Unsurprising, considering Splinter’s interactions with them that evening.

Splinter nodded, and agreed to the idea.

Soon, while he remained outside the dojo, Splinter’s four sons were making noise as they tested out Donatello and Michelangelo’s base abilities.

It was, if he were honest with himself, a bit disheartening to be excluded like so. But… Splinter had chosen this path, and he would have to stick with it. Donatello’s respect would only come through show of strength, as Splinter had observed.

Raphael was Donatello’s preferred elder brother, partially for the machines they built together, partially because he likely viewed Raphael as an equal. Leonardo was slimmer than Raphael, and shorter than Donatello; it would make sense that Splinter’s third son would drift to the one he viewed as stronger.

Perhaps Splinter might have won Donatello’s respect given more time, but the war on the horizon was too close to afford that. A relationship beyond respect for strength would have to come at a later date.

Splinter sighed, listening to the playful voices behind him. Sometimes, in moments like this, his age felt very heavy. When he’d become a rat mutant, he was not a young man. A rat only lived for so long, and on the rare occasion he allowed himself to wonder, Splinter questioned how many more years he had left.

Just fifteen years later, and his joints had already begun to ache fiercely when he exerted himself too much. The fight Donatello, and the blows his son had landed, had left him feeling tired despite its swiftness.

With the war, and his oldest enemy, and his sons’ futures to consider… he couldn’t wait for Donatello to warm up to the idea of training. They needed to start as soon as possible, teach his two feral children skills that would keep them alive.
Splinter felt very tired, and very old.

But…

“Oh come on Mikey, is there any position you can’t do??” Leonardo’s petulant voice floated through the paper walls, followed by a round of laughter from his siblings.

Splinter smiled, and allowed his grievances to drift away for later.

For now at least, the choices he’d made were worthwhile.

His ears flickered, catching noise that wasn’t coming from his sons. Splinter turned his head to his home’s entrance, and watched as a petite young woman appeared through the turnstiles.

Splinter stood, picking up his cane as he did. “April, it has been a while. Are you well?”

“Hello master Splinter,” April said politely, approaching the stairway to the ledge Splinter stood on. “I’ve been better, but I’m alright. Have you all been doing okay since I last saw you?”

Splinter tilted his head towards the dojo beside them, listening to the sound of what was likely a play tussle. “We have had a… eventful day, but it has been solved for now. Have you come with new information on your father’s whereabouts?”

“Um, not exactly,” April said, shuffling her feet nervously.

“Then… it is something else,” Splinter said.

“Yes. I… I had a question for you,” April took a breath, and stood with a straight spine. “I’m here to ask if you’ll train me, like you trained Leo and Raph. I’m… I’m tired of sitting on the sidelines and waiting to hear if they’ve found anything about my father, and I’m tired of being scared to walk alone at night. I know it’s a lot to ask, and that it’s a clan secret, but I was really hoping you’d agree. You’re the only teacher I’d trust to give me the lessons I need, and… well. Seeing how strong your sons are… I want that. So, would you…? Please?”

Splinter considered the young woman in front of him; her determination, resilience, and perseverance. April O’Neil hadn’t run from her father’s kidnapping, and hadn’t shied away from meeting Splinter in his sewer home.

She, despite the option to leave, had stayed and was trying to attempt something near impossible. She was also, though his sons would never admit it, becoming a good friend to Leonardo and Raphael. Perhaps Donatello and Michelangelo too, given time.

April O’Neil had proven herself trustworthy, keeping their secret without complaint. Perhaps then, Splinter would give her this trust in return.

“I’ll pay you, if you want me too,” April added. “And I promise I won’t slack off, or complain. I’ll be the perfect student, if you’ll let me.”

Splinter raised his hand, stopping her there. “No need for payment further than the groceries you already give, Miss O’Neil. And I believe you when you say you will be an attentive pupil; I look forwards to having a student like that. As it happens, I have just begun training Donatello and Michelangelo today. If you would like, I could train you alongside them in the art of ninjutsu. Does this sound agreeable to you?”

April grinned, and nodded, ducking her head in a bow like Leonardo had taught her to during their
first meeting. “I’d be honored, master Splinter, if you’d let me be a part of that. Are they already training inside the dojo?”

“They are supposed to be, but I have a feeling that it is not the only thing they are doing,” Splinter chuckled, just as the voices inside the dojo rose in cacophony. The door beside them slid open suddenly, Michelangelo poking his head out, and quickly followed by Donatello, Raphael, and Leonardo.

Michelangelo’s expression lit up, and he excitedly exclaimed, “‘PRIL!’”

Splinter stepped out of the way, as his four sons poured from the dojo to swarm around April. He chuckled, watching as the four of them fussed over her. Donatello and Raphael circling April, while Leonardo and Michelangelo got close and peppered her with queries.

“I’m fine; really, I just came by to ask if I could train with you four,” April laughed, pushing Michelangelo’s hands away from her, and brushing off Leonardo’s concerned questions. “And, um, your Sensei said yes.”

“Oh my god, really? Dad, did you really?” Leonardo asked, sending a hopeful look at Splinter. “Can she really??”

“Yes, I have agreed to train Miss O’Neil. You will have three new students training with you now, Leonardo,” Splinter replied, enjoying his usually serious son’s enthusiasm.

Leonardo and Raphael exchanged looks; Raphael’s surprised, and Leonardo’s budding excitement. Michelangelo grabbed April around the waist, pushing her towards the dojo’s open doorway; telling her loudly in broken English about how much fun they’d all have. The rest were quick to follow, piling back into the dojo and joining the conversation; the enthusiasm catching among the three elder brothers.

Donatello paused for a moment though, glancing back at Splinter. He looked at Splinter, searching for something, or perhaps simply checking where Splinter was planning to go.

Splinter nodded to his estranged son, and started to leave them to their play. Donatello nodded once as well, and turned away completely. Splinter stopped just on the edge of the light from the doorway, watching his sons and their friend interact.

“Mmmmmnnope, nope nope nope, I absolutely cannot do that,” April said, backing away from Michelangelo. “Mikey I’m wearing jeans for goodness sake; I’m not trying the splits- okay now that’s just showing off. Stop that.”

“He’s been doing that the whole last hour,” Raphael commented dryly. “We’ve been trying to find one he can’t do, and we haven’t succeeded.”

“Can too,” Donatello added, sliding to the floor in a casual splits.

“Oh not you too. Stop it both of you.”

“Mikey, I will find something you cannot do if it’s the last thing I do.”

“April, place bets with me. Five on Leo not findin’ dick.”

“You’re on.”

“Guys, a little support here!”
“I put ten on Donnie finding a way to beat them both.”

“Shit, you’re so on for that.”

“Guys.”

Splinter smiled to himself, and left his boys, and their friend, to their fun. Serious training would come later, but a break from the tension would be good for them all.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so, idk if anyone was thinking this or not, but i feel like some people here were questioning how in-character this was for Splinter. But, it is my personal opinion, that he would do something like this. He can be, *ahem*, pretty 'hands on' about how he deals with his kids misbehavior. I mean, I forget which episode it was; but after they snuck out without permission one time, he beat them with a stick for it.

Training and stuff yeah, but its kinda really old school to use that approach. nnnnnnnot exactly A+ parenting methods.

Ninjas though, what're you gonna do.

Irregardless, we've got the ball really rolling now. One-shots are on the way, and the plot here is ready to really move onto the main events. (tbh I'm just really excited rn to get to Leatherhead, he is 100% my favorite secondary character in the series.)

I'm gonna re-watch all of season one before I come back and post again; I want to refresh all the details for myself so I don't create any plot holes too difficult to fill. (ah season one, my favorite season simply for the character dynamics. they were so pure back then.)

Anyways! Lemme know how you received this chapter, and I'll get back to ya'll with a one-shot p soon here. Thanks for dropping by, as always.
“So… you want me to tag along to a Kraang hideout?”

Leo nodded. That’s exactly what he’d been getting at. “Yeah. Me and Raph, we’re good for slicing and dicing, buuuut… not so much working with computers.” He waved his three fingered hands and smiled abashedly. “Plus, keys are a bit hard to work with these.”

April chuckled, shaking her head. “Yeah, I suppose so. You did alright with those phones you stole though.”

“You missed the five minutes it took me just to type in your number.”

April laughed again, her cheer adding to the flush across her cheeks. Leo smiled easily, lifted both by how well training was going, and his friend’s good mood.

While he and April took a breather, Raph and their father were going through steps to escape lock holds with Donnie and Mikey. It was a solid few hours into training, and April had just finished doing repeating katas with Leo. While Leo could’ve kept going for a fair while longer, April was a beginner and a human. She needed, and deserved, a break.

Leo’s attention flickered to his younger brothers, watching Mikey as he dodged out of Raph’s grip before the lock was even complete. Raph’s frustrated expletives earned him a smack on the back of his head from their father, while Splinter explained again to Mikey that he was supposed to let Raph lock him in.

It’d been… interesting, trying to teach their feral siblings martial arts.

Their base physical abilities were good- even great in some cases- but how they fought, how they moved… it just didn’t mesh quite right with the steps for ninjutsu.

The Hamato clan’s ninjutsu had been invented by humans, and thusly was made with human movements.
Donnie and Mikey, despite being relatively bipedal, did not have human like movements. It’d been about two weeks of nightly training, and Donnie and Mikey would still default to their instinctive and ingrained style of fighting. It’d presented a challenge, trying to break them out of that.

“Mikey’s getting good,” April commented, breaking into Leo’s thoughts.

Leo nodded, watching his youngest brother break Raph’s lock on his arm. Even if there were a lot of miscommunications, and the persisting relapses, Mikey soaked up everything he was shown. Now whether he actually used the moves as instructed… well, that varied every time.

“He’s having trouble with reading and math comprehension, but hey, at least he’s got talent for martial arts,” Leo said, a tinge of pride entering his voice. “He forgets things if he thinks too hard, but when he just… moves without thinking… it’s pretty impressive.”

April sighed, slumping against the wall of the dojo. “It’d be nice if I had some of that natural talent. This is a bit harder than I expected.”

“Well, I think you’re doing pretty okay,” Leo smirked mischievously. “For a human, that is.”

April smacked his shoulder, and Leo laughed.

“Whatever, it’s only been two weeks,” April huffed, brushing her sweaty bang from her face. “I’ll get it eventually.”

“Time and effort goes a long way,” Leo agreed, smiling at the potential future ahead of them. April, Mikey, and Donnie… a real team for him to lead, not just him and Raph in the field anymore…

He liked the sound of that.

“So, tagging along for a mission…?” He asked hopefully. “We tried to look at their computers one time, but we couldn’t make heads or tails of it. You’d probably have a much better chance of getting it to work, and maybe we’d get some valuable info out of it.”

April hummed, tapping her fingers on the knee of her workout pants. “Maybe… I’m not exactly eager to go running back into one of those places, but if it’ll get us information…” She looked over at Leo, determination set in her expression. “I’ll do it. If it’ll get us closer to finding my dad, then I’ll do anything.”

And that was one of the reasons Leo liked April. Her determination and perseverance reminded him a lot of heroines in his favorite movies. Steadfast and quick to recover from a blow; April just kept going, not matter what got in her way.

Leo grinned, and put a hand on April’s shoulder. He could feel the heat from her workout leaking through the fabric, and it warmed his palm. “We’ll find him, and I don’t doubt you’re going to have a big hand in that.”

April smiled warmly back. “Thanks Leo, I really appreciate the vote of confidence.”

Leo nodded again, let his hand slip off her shoulder, and settled back against the wall.

In all honesty though… how couldn’t he believe in her?

(“Hurt April, hurt our human. Not allowed.”)
Sometimes, that thought would float back to Leo. The claim Donnie put on April, and the one Mikey backed up. At what point did April become ‘theirs’ exactly?

All of theirs, Leo and Raph’s too. When had that happened?

Leo didn’t voice that portion of his thoughts though, and returned to watching and evaluating his younger brothers.

Donnie shifted his footing nervously, sizing up Raph as they faced off.

Locks, they were practicing locks. Locks and blocks. Nothing big, nothing dangerous. Mikey had done them easily, and seemed almost more cheerful for it.

Donnie took a soft breath, and nodded for Raph to begin.

*Training*- no, *training*, hadn’t been nearly as scary as Donnie had thought it would be. But it had only been a short while, and he couldn’t help but feel like there was going to be a negative side to things.

It hadn’t happened yet though, so he chose to focus on the spar at hand.

Donnie fought the urge to go low as Raph jabbed at him, ignoring the gut reflex to simply drop on all fours and off balance his brother that way. Splinter had instructed Donnie to try it the ‘ninja’ way, rather than the ‘feral’ way.

Donnie hadn’t caught what ‘feral’ meant exactly. He needed to find his thick book and look it up.

Raph’s fist glanced Donnie’s shoulder, and Donnie tried the block he was supposed to be practicing. He deflected the next two jabs Raph sent at him, knocking them off course from his chest.

Donnie grinned to himself, and tried a return blow.

He struck out, claws extended, and brushed Raph’s neck. Had Donnie been aiming to, and Raph been a human, he could have put his thick nails through Raph’s throat. As it stood though, Donnie wouldn’t ever do that. Not to Raph.

Donnie started to withdraw his arm, but Raph’s hands closed on it.

Before Donnie could process what was happening, Raph spun him around and-
- locked his arms around Donnie’s neck and-
- wouldn’t let go-

Panic seized Donnie.

He suddenly couldn’t breathe.
Donnie struggled in Raph’s grip, but his brother still wouldn’t let go-

- tightening, choking him, his nails scrabbling on the weird floor, no grip no traction- tightening tightening tightening

- tightening

-tightening

-tightening-

Donnie wheezed, scratching at Raph’s arms.

(-‘le’ go! Le’ go! LE’ ME GO-!)"

-Raph released him.

Donnie stumbled away, gasping for breath.

No cuts. No new scars. It didn’t even hurt. His neck was bare; excluding the necklace Mikey had gifted him with seasons ago.

Donnie sucked in a harsh breath, filling his stuttering lungs.

The dojo suddenly seemed too bright. Too loud. Too full of people. He felt exposed and achy and strikingly tired.

He wanted to go home.

“Donnie, hey Donnie,” Raph’s voice came, a light touch on the back of Donnie’s shell following it. “You okay? I didn’t hurt you, right-?”

Someone hissed warningly- the light touch vanishing- and then Mikey appeared in Donnie’s line of vision. Mikey’s hands cupped Donnie’s, and he pulled Donnie’s shaking hands off his neck.

Shhhh, is okay okay? You’re fine I’m fine we’re fine, shh shh shh, Mikey hushed gently, holding Donnie’s hands and squeezing them. Lost time yes? Seeing being there now? Shh not there never there, safe you’re safe

Donnie nodded numbly, trying to steady his breath rate.

Hiding now please, Donnie whispered, feeling the stares behind him. In dark in room, no more training family human-friend-April? No more now, tired

“-------…” Splinter’s green stick tapped along the floor, signalling his approach. “We have done enough training for the evening. Donatello, ----- you like to rest?”

Donnie nodded, choosing to ignore how the rat used the wrong name for him again. “Yes. Thanks.”

“Ah, Donnie wait, what just happened?” Leo asked, footsteps sounding his approach. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” Donnie said hoarsely, still not turning to face his younger brothers, and his body prickling with shame. It sounded like someone tried to get close again, but Mikey’s hiss deterred them. Donnie let his youngest brother tug him away, across the room and out the sliding doors.

Donnie heard Raph start to say something, but Splinter shushed him. No one called after them again.
Their room’s door was still opened, showing it’s invitingly dark inside. Mikey shuffled Donnie into the room, and Donnie let him. The door was shut, and then it was just them in the darkness of their sleeping room.

The shallow scars on Donnie’s neck itched. When he raised his hands to scratch at them, Mikey stopped him.

*Don’t do that,* Mikey chided quietly.

*Itches,* Donnie replied, tugging without effort at his captured hands. *Scratching makes it feel better stops itching stops hurting*

*Lies,* Mikey said, which was true. Scratching didn’t make the itching go away, no matter how much Donnie did it.


Donnie shrugged, letting Mikey pull him down to his knees on their bed. He wasn’t sure what he wanted to do right now, he was too… *everything* for that at the moment.

Donnie felt Mikey unwind the strips of bandages around his hands and wrists; collecting the thick white fabric into a ball and tossing it away. Then he pulled off Donnie’s elbow guards, similarly disposing of them.

Without the constricting sensation on his arms, the one on Donnie’s neck eased.

His eyes were still adjusting to the dark, and he could only see Mikey faintly in the blackness; but he had a feeling his brother was smiling at him.

Donnie felt a gentle hand on the side of his neck, tracing the faded scar there.

*Sor ry was not there, me I was not with you did not protect you,* Mikey said quietly, running a light thumb over Donnie’s seasons old scars.

Donnie put his hand over Mikey’s, and closed his eyes as he leaned into the touch. *Not your fault was far far from you and nest and tunnels, you you protect me now, thank you love you small-precious-brother-mine*

Mikey cooed softly, and slid his arms around Donnie to hug him.

The scars stopped itching, as Mikey pressed his snout against them. He kissed Donnie’s neck gently, same as he had when they’d first healed over.

*Love you love you,* Mikey sang, nuzzling Donnie.

*Love you,* Donnie sang back, pressing his snout against his brother’s shoulder.

In the dark of their room, and with Mikey’s purr vibrating through Donnie’s chest, he started to feel better.
“You’re sure you didn’t hurt him?”

Raph balled his fists, and rounded on his brother. “Yes Leo, I’m sure.”

Leo raised his hands defensively, giving Raph an unimpressed look. “Fine, but something definitely just happened, and you were the one sparring with him.”

Raph glanced away from Leo, grimacing.

Yeah. He’d been the one sparring with Donnie, but that didn’t mean he knew what’d set his brother off. It was just a lock, like they’d been practicing. Raph hadn’t even held on all that long; dropping Donnie as soon as his brother’s hands started clawing at Raph’s arms.

Raph rubbed the sore spots where Donnie had scratched him. Nothing torn, just lines that stung.

He growled under his breath, gripping a particularly big scratch.

He hadn’t done anything, and Donnie had just gone off. It wasn’t his fault.

“Raphael,” Splinter said, approaching Raph and placing a hand on his shoulder. “Would you like to tell us exactly what it is that happened?”

“I told you already,” Raph muttered, not meeting his father’s eyes. “I was doing the lock hold like you told me too, and then he just started freaking out. I dunno why.”

Splinter hummed thoughtfully. “You spoke of their fears, about storms? Perhaps… Donatello has more than one fear. Tell me, Raphael, what do you think of that possibility?”

Raph thought on that, vaguely listening as Leo whispered to April about their brothers’ fear of storms. Thinking back now, there’d been faded lines around Donnie’s neck.

He’d had scars on his neck, mostly on the back of it. So old and faded that Raph hadn’t really noticed them before.

“Donnie’s got old scars on his neck,” Raph said, rubbing his scratched arms again. “Something must’ve gotten him when he was younger, and I guess… now he’s got a phobia?”

Splinter nodded sagely, and patted Raph’s shoulder. “Likely, that is exactly why he reacted so badly. Good eye, Raphael.”

Raph shrugged. Just because he knew that, didn’t change that he’d unnecessarily freaked out his siblings. “So what, guess that means no more lock practice?”

“For the moment, yes, but I will need to speak with Donatello about his fears,” Splinter said seriously, nodding to himself. “An enemy who identifies this fear will use it against him. He must overcome it to avoid that. Though, I will not need you or Leonardo for this practice. I will work with him alone, while you two…” Splinter smiled, glancing at the clock on their dojo wall. “Are going to be leaving very soon. You would not want to miss your evening patrol, hm?”

Raph read the time, and felt relieved. Almost time to get the heck out of dodge, and just enjoy the night.
Also keep an eye out for Kraang and Foot clan activity, but that was beside the point.

“Oh yikes, it’s already that late?” April spoke up. She hurried over to her backpack, digging inside it. “I was supposed to call my Aunt at eight thirty, and it’s almost nine now!”

“Hey, does your Aunt still want to meet us?” Leo asked, drifting towards April and her speedy digging. “You figure out how to get around that yet? We can’t exactly introduce her to master Splinter.”

April groaned, finally pulling out her mobile, and furiously typing away on it. “No, I’m still trying to figure that one out. She’s really insistent that meets my self-defence instructor, and I’m only gonna be able to excuse master Splinter’s absence for so long…”

The conversation turned to how April was supposed to explain her unknown martial art’s teacher, and Raph zoned out.

He hadn’t done anything wrong, but was he supposed to apologize anyways? What part of Donnie’s panic attack was he supposed to take ownership of?

Donnie hadn’t told them about his issues with things around his neck; that was his fault. Or was it? Did he even know that was something that needed to be addressed?

And what’d happened to him anyways? Definitely something bad enough to leave trauma.

There were a lot of unanswered questions about the two feral mutants, about their lives and how they survived for so long on their own. Raph wasn’t even sure where to start with most of those questions.

Raph picked at his scales, feeling the scratches already starting to fade.

Maybe he should apologize anyways, even if he wasn’t completely responsible.

“Raphael?”

Raph glanced up, and found the other occupants of the room looking at him. Splinter gestured towards April, who’d gotten herself ready to leave. “Miss O’Neil is required to be home very soon, and has requested company for that journey.”

April flushed slightly, glancing at her shoes. “It’s stupid, I know, but I’d really like it if you guys could just… hang around until I got to my Aunt’s neighborhood? I promise I’ll keep a steady jog till I get there.”

Raph darted a glance at the dojo’s exit. Donnie and Mikey were long gone, and didn’t seem to be coming back.

He’d apologize later.

“Sure, I’m up for a good run.”

April smiled gratefully, and then they were off.
April adjusted her running shoes laces, making sure both sides were equal. Straightening up, she stretched her still warmed muscles from her evening training.

The last two weeks, it’d been on and off pain as she trained her body into a new routine. Learning ninjutsu was only one part of the equation; she’d had to take up jogging, as well as a number of other exercises. Steps to improve her over all stamina, speed, and strength. It was grueling work, paired with her school hours and time required for homework, plus doing deep net searches for information on the Kraang…

But, despite the aches from her legs and arms and essentially her whole body; April was feeling pretty good lately. Energy drinks were truly a miracle invention.

“Ready to go guys?” April asked the general area of the alleyway.

“Ready when you are,” Came Leo’s reply, from somewhere in the shadows.

“Make sure you stay out of sight, we’ve still got people on the streets right now,” April reminded, hiking her backpack into a comfortable position.

“April, please, we’re ninjas,” Raph scoffed somewhere nearby. “Can you even find us right now?”

April turned around, looking into the shadows of the alley. Her eyes jumped from hiding place to hiding place- until she raised her hand and pointed at the spot that felt right. “That’s Leo, and you’re-” She turned around again, and pointed at the other spot that felt right. “-right there, Raph.”

Leo emerged from behind the large dumpster to April’s right, and Raph materialized down the fire escape.

“Okay, so,” Raph said, nodding at her. “That was impressive.”

“How’d you do that?” Leo asked, eyes wide with astonishment.

April smirked, and tossed her ponytail over her shoulder. “I’ve always been good at that sort of thing. Just have to listen to my instincts.”

Leo and Raph exchanged glances, something April couldn’t decipher passing between the two of them.

April felt her phone buzz in her track jacket, and she unzipped the front pocket to check it. Shoot, her Aunt wanted her back in their neighborhood in the next while, and she wasn’t taking no as an answer.

“Boys, I really have to go,” April said, shoving her phone away and turning towards the end of the alley. “We can debate my sixth sense luck later on. C’mon now, I’ll see you two on the other side.”

She popped her ear buds in, and pressed play on her I-pod. With her running playlist starting up, April set off at a steady jog; trusting that her shadowy bodyguards would follow her every step.
Leo watched April from above, noting how her pace had already started to improve even with just two weeks of practice.

“She’s already getting stronger,” He commented, pausing on the lip of their current building. “How soon do you think it’ll be before she’s ready for a weapon, Raph?”

No response. Leo turned his head, looking at Raph.

His brother was staring off into the distance, and seemed to be brooding.

“**Raph,**” Leo said, snapping his fingers. Raph started, and turned his eyes on Leo. **“You’re spacing out. What’s on your mind?”**

Raph shrugged, looking away again. **“Just some stuff.”**

Leo frowned, and stepped towards his brother. He had a feeling what Raph was dwelling on. **“You thinking about Donnie?”**

Raph’s snout wrinkled as he grimaced, and that told Leo everything he needed to know.

**“That wasn’t your fault,”** Leo said, bumping Raph’s shoulder with his own. **“You didn’t know he’d react like that.”**

**“That’s not what I’m thinking about, I already knew that,”** Raph huffed, giving Leo an eye roll. **“I’m just trying to figure out how I’m supposed to… apologize, and stuff. Or something. I don’t know what I’m trying to do here.”**

Leo hummed sympathetically, patting Raph’s shell. **“I know that feeling. It’s just one thing after another with Donnie, and it’s hard to tell how you should approach those things.”**

Raph grunted, pushing past Leo and heading for the next rooftop. **“Come on, we’re losin’ April.”**

Leo took a turn rolling his eyes, and leapt after his brother.

**“You know, we’re lucky Mikey hasn’t done anything like this yet,”** Leo commented, weaving around satellite dishes as he ran. **“It feels like it’s only Donnie with all these problems.”**

**“Or, we just haven’t figured out what Mikey’s problems are yet,”** Raph said, using a ‘*duh*’ sort of tone. Leo grimaced, thinking about what it’d be like to deal with not one, but two brothers with hidden triggers.

**“Here’s to hoping he doesn’t have any,”** Leo said, jumping past Raph.

**“That’s kind of dickish to say, Leo,”** Raph said as Leo passed him by. **“It’s not their fault they got washed away and fucked up.”**

**“Hm, true, but do you want to deal with anymore of that sort of thing?”** Leo asked pointedly. Raph’s silence answered his question. **“I rest my case.”**

**“Fuck off.”**

**“I’m not wrong though.”**

**“Fuck off. We’re doin’ the best we can.”**
Leo paused on that. There it was again, the general claim they’d put on each other.

He wondered how April felt about them, seeing as his younger brothers had already started to really tighten their relationships…

“Sorry, I’m being too harsh again, aren’t I?” Leo said in a softer tone.

“Just a little.”

Leo sighed, and slowed his run as April below took a breather. “I’m trying my best too. I’ve been doing this basically blind folded; I never know what’s inappropriate or not. They’re just—” He gestured at nothing, attempting to show his struggle. “—so complicated? I don’t understand half the things they do, and then the language barrier makes the other half almost as confusing.”

Raph scoffed, crossing his arms. “You and me both. But hey, at least you got a little experience before all this; dealin’ with me as a brother and all. I’m probably twice as lost here.”

“I don’t know, you’ve been doing alright with Donnie till now.”

“Yeah, till now. Then I fucked it up without even meaning to.”

Leo sighed, and crossed his own arms. Donnie was just a bundle of triggers, wasn’t he? “Sensei’ll probably help him out with his phobia, you just have to apologize.”

“Which brings us back to how I’m supposed to do that,” Raph grumbled.

They both sighed, and settled into silence.

April, down on the street sidewalk, started running again.

Leo and Raph followed her steps, dropping the conversation for the moment.

Splinter walked slowly through his home, approaching the closed door of his youngest sons’ room. His sensitive ears could hear soft conversation through the wood, and he was pleased that it sounded amicable.

He’d waited long enough for Donatello to calm down, and now it was time to call him out of his hiding place.

Splinter knocked twice, and waited for a response. The conversation inside halted, and after a momentary pause, the door opened. Michelangelo stared up at Splinter, deceivingly careful eyes glancing him up and down.

“What want?” He asked, still eyeing Splinter.

“It is time for your school work, Michelangelo, and I wish to speak with Donatello,” Splinter replied smoothly, stooping slightly to be closer to Michelangelo’s eye level. “He gave us a very bad scare this evening, and I believe a discussion is needed.”
Michelangelo looked at him, visibly considering how to respond. Donatello’s quiet voice though, delivered in the form of a rolling trill, decided things. Michelangelo stepped away from the door, and allowed Donatello to take his place.

“Yes?” Donatello asked, voice steady and much unlike himself twenty minutes ago. Ah, he’d recollected himself then, as Splinter knew he would.

“If you would, join me in the dojo for a conversation. Michelangelo can do his homework while we talk,” Splinter offered, knowing how much his two sons hated being separated.

Donatello turned his head, whispering something to his younger brother in their private language. Then, he turned back and nodded once.

While Michelangelo retrieved his scattered work books—tossed about the lair without much regard to whether or not he’d remember their location—Splinter sat down with his third eldest.

Donatello seemed steady and carefully blank, his earlier panic completely erased. Though, in his stillness, Splinter found opportunity to take a look at his neck.

Indeed there were scars there, so faint and old that Splinter could barely see them. But, none the less, they were very much there.

Splinter’s heart ached, seeing the obvious damage his son had survived. All alone, just himself and his youngest brother, with no one to care for the injuries. How deeply Splinter regretted, never going after his sons that terrible night.

“Do you know why we are having this conversation?” Splinter asked, pushing aside his regrets for later meditation.

His son regarded him with something like wariness, which somewhat hurt Splinter. “Because… I did not… compete- *complete* training?”

“No, but it does have something to do with that subject,” Splinter put his hands in his lap, leaning forwards. “Donatello, I’d like to discuss your reaction to Raphael holding your neck.”

Donatello’s left hand went to his neck, covering the most obvious portion of his scars. “Why? Not matter.”

“Because, during a battle, your enemy may use your phobia as an advantage,” Splinter explained. “If you cannot control your fears, then they will be used against you, Donatello. We must work on this, and help you to overcome this fear.”

Donatello glanced away, rubbing his scars still.

“Donatello, if I may ask…?” Splinter paused, waiting for his son to return his focus to him. Donatello’s deep red eyes flickered back to him, and Splinter asked his question. “What, or who, gave you those scars?”

Donatello sneered, and seemed to tighten his grip on his scars.

“*Humans.*” He hissed, venom filling his voice.

Ah. Of course.

Splinter sighed under his breath. His sons, their hatred of humanity was all too clear at times. Though
he and his elder sons had explained so, the message that martial arts were not to be used for cruelty may not have gotten through to them. Splinter felt he would have to remind them, and perhaps work to help them overcome the hatred they’d developed.

But, that was not the goal of tonight. Tonight, Splinter would help his third son patch a potentially deadly weakness in his defense.

“Are you ready then?” Splinter asked, saving his other thoughts again for later. “We have much work ahead of us.”

Donatello thought over Splinter’s words for a long moment, and then spoke again. “How? How work on this?”

Splinter smiled kindly, and stood up from his kneel. “Simple; through careful training and some techniques to control your anxiety. Stand up Donatello, and we shall begin. When we are done, not only will you be able to control your reactions to a choke hold, but be able to escape one no matter what.”

Donatello looked up at Splinter, his lips in a thin line. He was still covering his scars.

Splinter extended his arm, holding out a hand for his son to take. “Trust me, Donatello. I have only your best interests at heart.”

Donatello stared at the hand for a long moment, then—releasing his scars as he did—he reached out and took Splinter’s offered help.

April slowed, stopping in front of the restaurant near her Aunt’s home. Her breath was coming in short pants, and her legs burned with exertion. Good jog then, and it wasn’t even as bad as the last few. The first time she’d tried the warm down jog, she’d had to stop almost every few blocks just to find her bearings.

Now though, she was winded, but still standing. And she’d only had to pause five times the whole way. Nice.

She pulled her ear buds out, and shoved them into her coat’s pocket. “You guys still around?”

“We’re here,” Leo answered, somewhere outside her sight line.

“What’s with the stopping? You were doing really well there,” Raph asked, April catching just the edge of his shifting feet somewhere nearby.

“I’m hungry, and there’s enough time for me to stop in and eat,” April said, gesturing towards the Japanese restaurant beside her. “I’ll text Aunt Carol where I am, and I’ll probably be okay from here. I’m just two blocks from her place anyways, so I think I’m allowed to stop for dinner.”

“If you’re sure…” Leo said cautiously.

“I’m sure. You two can head out now, thanks for hanging around for my jog home.”
“Any time April, just ask if you need us to do this again.”

“Just don’t ask too often, alright? We got lives too.”

“Raph, don’t be rude.”

“I’m not! I’m being truthful.”

April rolled her eyes at their bickering. “See you tomorrow night; don’t fight too loudly on your way back.”

“Good night April, see you later.”

“G’night, don’t do anything stupid till we’re around again.”

“Raph.”

“What?”

“You’re being rude again!”

“No I’m not. I’m just telling her to keep safe.”

“That’s not at all what you said.”

And that was the last of their conversation, what April could hear of it at least. The two brothers vanished twice over, and then April was alone on the street.

She unzipped her coat, letting fresh air get at the workout shirt she’d worn for the evening. Ah, a cool evening breeze, just what she needed.

She pushed through the doors of the restaurant, and found it nearly empty. She’d only been to Murakami’s a few times since she’d moved into her Aunt’s home, but those few times had been very enjoyable.

Murakami was standing behind the counters, as he usually was, and sharpening a knife. April waved to him, even though she knew he wouldn’t see the gesture. “Evening Murakami-san, how’re you tonight?”

“Ah, April-chan,” Murakami greeted her warmly, placing his knife work behind the counter as she approached. “Welcome. It’s very late for a young woman to be out and about, am I to guess you’re here for dinner?”

“Yep, to stay and to go,” April said, sliding onto one of the bar stools. She pulled out her phone, and quickly texted her Aunt that she’d be bringing home a late dinner. “I’m eating here, and taking a meal back home for my Aunt.”

“Your usual then?” Murakami asked, washing his hands in the small sink nearby.

“Yes please,” April said gratefully. Her stomach felt hollowed out, with all the calories she’d burned that evening. She’d been increasing her meal portions to keep up with the exertion, and had switched to a healthier diet like her Sensei instructed. Or rather, he suggested, and April took to heart.

She didn’t do things half ways, especially not lately. It was all or nothing, what with her father on the line.
She sighed, leaning on her palm. Thinking of her father simultaneously made her more determined, and more stressed. It’d been so long now, and she still hadn’t found anything. Just one dead end after another and the days just kept piling up; her calendar getting another black X with every passing day…

At least she was getting self-defence lessons now. The extra insurance had already made sleeping easier, thanks to the comforting thought that soon she’d be able to defend herself against anyone.

Didn’t erase what’d happened to her already, but at least it’d made those things less oppressive feeling.

Now how to explain her mystery martial arts teacher to her Aunt, and why he couldn’t meet her even just for coffee…

April let her head slide down her arm, and thunk pathetically on the counter.

She loved her Aunt Carol, and was touched by how concerned she’d gotten about April’s life. But honestly, how exactly was she going to get out of this one? She couldn’t out her friends, and even if she did and they agreed to it, there was no way her Aunt would accept the idea.

April sighed long and hard, covering her head with her arms.

“What troubles you?” Murakami asked.

April looked up, watching as the chef continued his work. “I’ve… well, it’s a bit hard to explain.”

“Please, tell me about your problems. It is one of the things my customers do most,” Murakami looked over at her, peering over the tops of his black lenses to wink one milky eye at her. “A chef’s second job is to be a confident for his customers. So please, confide in me. I won’t tell a soul.”

April smiled, and considered the offer.

Murakami was a kind individual, and hadn’t been anything but wonderful to her since she’d first set foot in his restaurant.

He felt trustworthy.

“So, I’ve got these friends…” April started, picking her words carefully so as to stay vague. “And their dad has been giving me self-defence lessons lately.”

“Ah, those are good skills to possess.”

April nodded, and then remembered he wouldn’t see. “Right. And they’ve been going great so far. I’ve enjoyed every session, even if it gets a bit tiring doing the same things over and over. Though I suppose starting from the bottom is what you do as a beginner.”

“And are these friends of yours good ones?”

April smiled warmly, thinking of the once two now four brothers that she’d befriended. “Yeah, they’re all really great guys. A little… lot weird, but once you get past that, I don’t think you’ll find better people.”

Ignoring the fact that two, if not all of them, were the most terrifying people you could meet in a dark alleyway.

“They sound like good people,” Murakami agreed, turning the burners up on his stove. “This does
not explain your troubles though, if things are going so well.”

April sighed again, remembering her original cause of stress that evening. “My Aunt wants to meet
them. And they can’t meet her.”

“Oh? Why not?”

“Well… it’s complicated. Long story short, they can’t exactly be around normal people,” April
tapped her fingers, thinking of the sewer home beneath the streets of New York. “It’s not fair, but
they just can’t, no matter what. Which means… they can’t meet my Aunt, and prove to her I’m not
getting lessons from someone dangerous.”

Though, honestly speaking, master Splinter was likely a different sort of dangerous from what her
Aunt was imagining.

“Ah, now that is a dilemma,” Murakami said sympathetically. He turned, and slid a piping hot bowl
of soup towards her, followed by a tray of vegetarian sushi. “And you are certain there is no way for
them to meet face to face?”

“Positive,” April said, picking up her spoon and stirring the broth of her soup. “It wouldn’t go well
for anyone.”

She sipped moodily at her dish, while Murakami hummed thoughtfully under his breath.

“Here’s an idea,” Murakami said, leaning onto the counter. “I know a dojo that teaches a younger
cousin of mine. I am old friends with the owner, and I could convince him to speak with your Aunt
in the place of your true Sensei.”

“Really?” April blinked, surprised by the offer. “You’d do that? He’d do that??”

“My friend is very understanding, he’ll certainly agree to the idea,” Murakami gave a smile, his black
glasses shining in the overhead lights. “Though, I am very curious; exactly who are these people you
can tell no one about?”

April grinned wryly, picking up one of her sushi bundles with her chopsticks. “You wouldn’t believe
me even if I was allowed to tell you.”

Murakami only laughed at that, and April was inclined to agree.

Well, that was one problem solved. Just another hundred and some to go.

“How about… more scrap technology?” Raph suggested.

“You sure? He’s already got a huge pile of that in your garage.”

Raph grumbled, because Leo was right. “Okay, so not tech. Do you have any more ideas what to get
him?”
“Mmm, not really? I haven’t spent a lot of time with him,” Leo answered uselessly.

Raph groaned, kicking the roof tar he stood on. They’d been talking about this since they’d dropped off April, and hadn’t gotten anywhere.

In the end, they’d agreed that an apology gift would be a good way to patch things up. It was also easier than Raph having to give a big heartfelt apology; since a gift and a simple ‘sorry’ would work a lot better, what with the language barrier.

Though, Donnie had been getting better and better with his language skills. He’d been pouring over the mechanical guides Raph had, and snatching any other book he could find in the lair. Beside his junk pile, in the corner of Raph’s garage, Donnie had started towers of books that he’d read, or was reading.

There were quite a few towers now, some of them looking ready to fall.

“Maybe a new book to read?” Raph suggested.

“Again, I wouldn’t know. You spend more time with him than me.”

“You know, you’re really fucking useless as a shopping buddy.”

“I’ll let you figure this one out on your own, it’ll be good exercise for that small brain of yours.”

Raph glared at his brother, and debated how worth it it’d be to shove him off the building.

…but not worth it. Patrol would be unbearable with Leo if Raph did that. Plus, giving into his brother’s teasing would mean less time to puzzle out what to get Donnie.

“You’re lucky I’m busy right now.”

“Hm, yes, I suppose so,” Leo said airily.

For someone who claimed to be the most mature of them, Leo sure was a little shit sometimes.

Flickering lights caught Raph’s eye, and he glanced at an apartment window. A wide television was inside some human’s living room, with a show playing on it in HD.

It looked like it was about space.

Raph thought for a moment.

“Hey, Donnie really liked that one documentary video we have, right?”

“The ocean one? Yeah, he kept rewinding it all night. What about it?”

Raph grinned. “Think we can swing by that video store? I think I got an idea of what I can get ‘im.”

“Focus, Donatello. Breathe. I am not holding you down.”
Donnie sucked in another breath, and fought back the wave of panic at being held around the throat.

The rat’s arm shifted, just brushing the scars on Donnie’s neck.

“Concentrate. Break free, and return the attack.”

Donnie forced his nerves to be calm, and slowly moved through the steps Splinter had shown him.

Another beat, twisting himself and the rat’s arm, and Donnie was free. Air returned to his lungs with a swift whoosh, and he felt light headed.

But. He hadn’t panicked. He’d finished the technique, and was still standing.

“---------, Donatello,” Splinter said, stepping close and putting a praising hand on Donnie’s shell. “You’ve improved -----------, and with only a single session. I expect that you’ll soon ------- your fear completely.”

“Ah, thanks,” Donnie said, nodding. Splinter smiled warmly, and patted his shell again. Looking up at the tall rat, something in the back of Donnie’s mind stirred.

Where had he seen this before?

Before he could think any longer on that thought, Mikey interrupted; presenting his finished papers, full of loopy scribbles and messy words. Splinter took the papers, and started to flick through them.

“Ah, Michelangelo, you have drawn almost everything backwards,” Splinter chided gently. “You needed to follow the lines on the paper, not write as you pleased.”

Mikey frowned, looking at his papers. *Looks fine is fine to me*

“My son, I do not know what you have just said, but…” Splinter placed a hand on Mikey’s shell, and pushed him back towards the short *tay-bel*- no, *table* that he’d dragged out for Mikey’s homework. “…we shall try them again, together. How does that sound?”

“M’kay,” Mikey agreed sulkily, obviously annoyed that he was right back to work. Donnie chuckled, and shook his head.

He wasn’t sure why Mikey was having so much trouble with their papers and learning. Donnie had already started reading big books with many hundreds of words in them, while Mikey was still struggling with the pictured ones of few words.

With time and practice, maybe he’d figure it out.

Donnie rubbed his neck, his scales warm where Splinter had held him. His scars… they didn’t itch, oddly enough.

Interesting.

He’d have to put more thought to that later.

Now though, he was tired. Dealing with someone touching his neck, and learning to control his anxiety like he had, it had been exhausting to experience.

Donnie left the dojo briefly, and returned with one of the books he’d borrowed from Leo. He settled down next to Mikey, and started reading again about humans from hundreds of years before.
War, death, and battle. Leo seemed to think about those things a lot, for whatever reason. Donnie had only learned about two of those things recently, and they seemed horrible. Humans were truly terrible, spending so much time and effort trying to kill each other like they did.

Donnie quieted his mind, similarly to how Splinter had taught him to that evening, and lost himself inside the thick book.

Leo listened intently, straining to hear how Raph and Donnie’s conversation was going.

He and Mikey sat outside the dojo’s thin walls, waiting for their brothers to finish their talk. Leo heard Raph roughly shove a plastic bag at Donnie-the crinkly plastic sounding the motion. A soft gasp of surprise, and then Donnie started chirping excitedly.

Leo smiled to himself. After digging through the movie store’s dumpster for a good long while, he and Raph had retrieved a collection of older documentaries; varying in titles and content. That would probably keep Donnie busy for the next… three days? Maybe. It was like their brother consumed knowledge, grabbing everything in sight and hoarding it inside his mind.

Meanwhile though…

Leo glanced at his youngest brother, who was again drawing nonsense scribbles across the page of his arithmetic notebook.

Leo grimaced. That was a bit worrying, how much difficulty Mikey was having with his school work. While he picked up martial arts like a breeze, it took Mikey twice if not thrice as long to write simple sentences that Donnie would whip out like nothing.

Concerning, since the gap between Mikey and Donnie’s grades had begun to widen drastically.

Was there something wrong with Mikey’s brain? Leo was scared there would be, and they wouldn’t be able to do anything to help him.

Leo shook his head, chiding himself. No, Mikey just needed some more time. So he was a bit slower than Donnie, but that didn’t mean anything. He was trying to learn years of schooling that he’d missed his whole life; there was going to be an adjustment period.

Leo just needed to be patient.

“Hey Mikey?” Leo asked, trying to distract himself from his thoughts.

“Mmhmm?” Mikey answered, still focused on his scribbling.

“What would you do… if you found the humans who’d hurt Donnie?” Leo questioned. Mikey stilled, his pencil pausing on the paper.

Leo had only found out that evening. When he’d come home, his father had pulled him and Raph aside to explain the truth behind Donnie’s phobia. Though Donnie had been unwilling to disclose the full details, he’d admitted that he’d been taken in a car once, and hurt by humans during the time he was lost in the city.
It explained why he hated cars so much, and probably a big portion of his animosity towards humanity.

Apparently, Mikey had been left behind during that misadventure.

Leo was curious, what his brother would do if he ever found those people.

Leo himself still wanted payback to the Shredder, for his attempt at Donnie and Mikey’s lives. Did Mikey share that sort of feeling, even though the event they were talking about had happened far in the past?

Mikey glanced up from his papers, a confused smile on his face. “Which humans?”

“The ones that, you know—” Leo pointed at his own neck. “-did that to him?”

Mikey’s smile faltered for a moment, then—

He smiled widely, all teeth and too sharp to be nice.

“Kill ‘em,” He said brightly, blue eyes just as sharp as his smile. “Me, I’d kill ‘em.”

Leo stared at his brother for a moment, reading the quiet fury in Mikey’s posture and words.

Then, it vanished, and Mikey went back to doodling meaningless shapes over his math homework.

Leo’s lip formed a thin line.

Well. He had asked after all. And he sure got his answer.

He’d have to speak with their father about that. Putting real weapons into Donnie and Mikey’s hands seemed more and more terrifying all the time.

A talk about morals was probably in order again.

But… Leo could see at least some of Mikey’s point.

After they’d brought Mikey and Donnie into the lair, for good, Leo hadn’t exactly been feeling warmly towards the Shredder for what he’d done.

But at the same time, while Leo wanted the Shredder gone, he also didn’t want to… kill him. That felt too far, and made Leo’s insides twist.

Obviously speaking though, Mikey would have no problem with that.

A worrying thought.

Leo sighed, leaning his head back against the paper and wood walls. He had too many worries lately.

The doors to the dojo suddenly slid open- startling both Leo and Mikey- and Donnie rushed past, arms full of DVD’s. Raph emerged next, looking satisfied with himself.

“He liked them?” Leo asked, watching as Donnie ran for their television set.

“Yup, happiest he’s been since we finished my motorbike,” Raph replied. He chuckled, and sat down next to Leo. “I don’t think we’re gettin’ the television back tonight.”
“You’re probably right about that,” Leo agreed. Donnie was already pushing in the first DVD, and practically bouncing on the balls of his feet.

*What? what??* Mikey asked, calling to Donnie across the room.

Leo couldn’t translate Donnie’s rushed answer, but Mikey obviously understood. Abandoning his homework, Mikey took two steps and hurled himself across the pool below the dojo.

For a split second, Leo thought Mikey was going to wipe out, but his brother ducked into a roll as he landed, and scurried off without stopping. Leo sighed in relief; gratefully he didn’t have to give first aid for a bloody snout.

Raph picked up Mikey’s homework, flipping through the heavily doodled pages. “What’s all this crap? It doesn’t even look like anything.”

“That would be Mikey’s math notebook,” Leo explained dryly.

“Seriously? I can barely see any numbers on this thing. It’s all scribbles.”

“That’s the gist of it.”

“Damn.”

“Yup.”

They sat in silence for a while, watching Donnie and Mikey fuss with the TV as they queued up a movie.

“Not our problem,” Raph eventually said.

“Nope,” Leo agreed.

“Sensei’ll deal with it.”

“Probably.”

“Wanna watch the movie with them?”

“Sounds good to me.”

And they left it at that.

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Chapter End Notes

Soft world building yes. Also character development, and placing for future plot. Perfect.

Howdy folks, sorry for leaving you hanging for so long. I’ve been really busy lately, and it’s taken a long while to finish watching the first season again. But! I have finished that
now, and thus we can move forwards!

A very gentle chapter, all things considering. Though the next one will be very adventurous, can't wait for that.

You're all wonderful and very patient, thanks for waiting for long. I'll have the next chapter up soon as I can!
Leo tightened the straps of his new arm guards, watching out of the corner of his eye as his brothers did the same.

He felt oddly nervous. He never felt nervous before a mission or patrol; they were routine and normal now days.

It was probably because it wasn’t just him and Raph this time.

Donnie and Mikey, and even April- they were all gearing up as well.

Leo thought he would have been excited, to have a full team to lead into battle.

Instead, he found himself feeling a little sick to his stomach.

Being the leader suddenly felt a lot heavier on his shoulders, taking his still in-training brothers and friend directly into enemy territory.

Leo laughed under his breath, soft and slightly choked.

He hadn’t experienced this much pressure before. It was certainly… a thing.

“You doin’ alright?” Raph asked, glancing over at Leo’s quiet expression of wry humor.

“I’m fine, juuuust fine,” Leo mumbled in return, retightening his straps again. At least his brothers and friend would have some armor, the new additions to his and their arsenal being the arm guards. Half of Leo wondered why his father hadn’t given them armor earlier, when they’d first started to meet dangerous enemies. But… his father’s explanation ten minutes prior gave enough of an answer to that.

(“I had hoped…” Splinter sighed, running a hand over the shiny metal of the arm plates. “I had
hoped that if I did not prepare you for war, then there would not be one. ” He looked up, and held out the perfectly sized guard to Leo. “I see now, that those hopes are just an old rat’s wishes.”)

Leo flexed his arm, testing the new weight to the movements. The plates weren’t heavy, not with his strength; but they added enough difference that he would need an adjustment period.

Held mainly by multiple straps, and then covered again by wrappings, Leo’s new arm guards stood out against his overall appearance. He’d never worn armor before, the toughness of his scales and carapace saving him from that need.

However, it was reassuring- the feeling of extra protection. Down the length of his forearms, and over the top of his hands; silver plates placed in strategic positions for blocking attacks, held together by strong fabric. Not quite thin, and very durable. Even if the silver wasn’t polished to the point it shone, the metal glinted in the soft lighting of the dojo.

Leo clenched his fists, and then unclenched them. It wasn’t too constricting, he would adjust in just a short while.

Donnie and Mikey, plus Raph, all had identical ones; black fabric and silver plates standing out on their green scales. The only one with a variation was April, her armor sized down significantly to fit her humanly thin arms.

Leo looked around the room, evaluating his team.

Donnie- still experimenting and stretching with the new gear additions. Mikey- practicing a block with Raph, deflecting the blows with his guards. April- shrugging on her light evening jacket, and hiding her arm protection almost completely from sight.

Leo took a slow inhale, and closed his eyes. He centered himself, and mentally reviewed his carefully made battle plans.

Nothing could go wrong. It’d only been a few weeks of training for his brothers and friend. But even so, they couldn’t wait any longer. April’s father was still missing, and Kraang activity was still slowly increasing. They needed information, and the only way to get it was by force.

He just hoped they were ready. That he was ready.

“You ready, Leo?” April asked.

Leo opened his eyes, and breathed out.

All eyes were on him.

“Ready when you are,” He replied, giving a smile he hoped was confident.

Mikey hummed nervously under his breath, looking at the big nest across the way.
It was huge and dark and he wasn’t completely comfortable about going in there, not when he knew *a-leeans* were inside.

But… Donnie said it would be okay, and so had *Raf* and *Lee-oh* and *’pril*.

Mikey squirmed, half hearing his older brothers as they talked. He hadn’t caught the whole plan from *Lee-oh*, but Donnie had translated all the parts he needed to know.

Mikey’s eyes darted to movement in one of windows, catching something walking past it. One of the *Kraang* then.

*Don’t know don’t know seems dangerous-scary-harmful*, Mikey muttered to himself, twitching his perch on the lip of the nest’s roof again.

“Get down from there, Mikey. It’s not safe,” *Lee-oh* scolded, tapping Mikey’s shell. “We’re going in now, are you ready?”

Mikey debated saying no, and asking if they could go do something less dangerous and more fun. But, *’pril* needed to find her *cares-for-small-young*, and this was apparently a place they could maybe find him. Or something like that? Mikey hadn’t quite gotten what was happening.

“M’kay,” He said, opting to neither agree nor disagree with the plan. Just acknowledging that it was happening, and he would follow. “Am follow, can go.”

*Lee-oh* patted his shell again, and then jumped off the nest’s roof. *Raf* followed, carrying *’pril* with him. Donnie paused for a moment, giving Mikey a soft snout bump on the cheek, and then he jumped too. Mikey watched his family, plus their human friend, jump from ledge to ledge down the tall nest.

Well, guess that meant he had to follow now, like he said he would.

On ground level, *’pril* was put on her feet, and *Lee-oh* and *Raf* separated from their group. Mikey’s two brothers darted across the street to the huge nest, and disappeared around the side of it.

Mikey stepped close to *’pril*, same as Donnie was, and waited in the back street with them for the signal.

Soon as *Raf* or *Lee-oh* waved them over, they were supposed to take *’pril* into the big nest, and keep her safe while she… worked with *com-puu-terrs?* Like the *ff-own*. Complicated human things.

Mikey touched the metal that he’d strapped to his arms, and tapped his nail against the plates there. He sort of liked the *arrmore*, it was like the bracelets he used to have. But hard, and good for blocking things.

He’d had to cut off all of them, his bracelets, when he and Donnie came to the *lay-err*. Too bloody to be saved. Donnie’s too, only his necklace escaping the process.

Mikey missed his bracelets. Missed his home and all his nice things.

*Raf* appeared across the street, waving to them.

Time to go then.

“I can walk you know,” *’pril* grumbled, as Donnie picked her up and ran across the street.

“Is easier this way, faster,” Donnie replied with a short laugh.
“I feel -----------.”

“Hm?” Donnie tilted his head, same time as Mikey. What was pay-tron-nized?

“Nothing, keep going,” ’pril sighed.

Raf met them on the other side, leading them down the back street and to an open door. The inside of the nest was dark, and it looked like there were lots of dead humans lying around the entrance they’d come from. But-

Mikey scented the air, and didn’t smell any human except for ’pril. Just lots of metal and the stuff Raf and Donnie used for their bikes. Also… something he couldn’t place, but definitely didn’t like.

He touched something with his foot, and the wetness soaked through the wrappings he’d been told to put there. While his brothers and ’pril kept talking, Mikey looked down.

Something not quite like blood was spreading from the human’s corpse beside him. There was a pink floppy limb sticking out of his stomach. Guts?

Mikey knelt, and poked it. The pink thing didn’t feel like guts, too cool and all the wrong colors.

He yanked his hand away as the thing twitched. It made a horrible screaming sound, and more pink things thrashed free of the human’s stomach.

Mikey made it stop, putting one of his black knives into it. The pink things flopped lifelessly again, and more not-blood flowed out of the human’s stomach.

He narrowed his eyes, and wrinkled his snout at the unpleasant smell of the dying creature. A-leeans, it had to be.

“Oh jeez, don’t touch it Mikey,” Raf said in an annoyed tone. Mikey turned his head, looking up at his brother. Raf rolled his eyes, and gestured for Mikey to get back up. “C’mon, lee-oh’s ------- waiting.”

Mikey glanced at the not-human and not-blood on more time, then shrugged and got up. If it was important, Donnie would explain to him.

Raf led them all deep into the nest, weaving around corners and up going up a level. ’pril kept closest to Raf, while Donnie and Mikey guarded their backs. That was their job, being the extra protection while ’pril did her work. Lee-oh and Raf would keep the a-leeans busy, and warn them if they needed to leave.

Donnie stilled, his steps pausing as they neared another corner. Raf stopped as well, putting one arm out to hold ’pril back.

Something very, very wrong looking stepped around the corner.

Mikey had been told, been prepared for the a-leeans to be strange and scary, but-

Looking at one, with its not quite human face made of metal, and encased in clear blue something-

Mikey found himself feeling less prepared than he’d thought.

More Kraang stepped around the corner, and they stared at Mikey and his family.

Raf moved first, knocking the a-leeans down all at once. Their horrible screams were not something
Mikey had ever wanted to hear, and definitely wanted to un-hear.

“Go! I have them!” Raf yelled over the metal creatures thrashing. “April, you know where the -------- is, right?!”

“Yes!” ’pril shouted, hiding mostly behind Donnie as limbs started to detached themselves from the a-leeans.

Donnie took it upon himself, and scooped ’pril off the floor. With her in his arms, he vaulted over Raf and the fighting, and Mikey followed.

’pril might’ve screamed a little when they did that, but she recovered quickly enough.

Mikey didn’t bother trying to translate what ’pril said to Donnie, opting to instead follow his brother and keep an eye out for more Kraang. They didn’t meet any others, and after another few doors kicked down, they found themselves in a large room.

Mikey leaned onto the metal bars, looking down and up around the huge space. It wasn’t as big as the lay-err, but it almost felt like it. Lots of metal, lots of boxes, and… lots of Kraang walking around down below. Also, on the odd walking space they stood on.

Three of them, holding-

Mikey’s heart stuttered.

They were holding big metal things, dark black and glowing pink, and the way they held them reminded Mikey too much of the thing a human had once-

The Kraang raised their weapons.

Mikey didn’t give them a chance to use them.

He ducked around Donnie; pouring every ounce of his energy into the burst of speed, and executed a move Lee-oh had helped him perfect.

He grabbed the metal bars, and swung his feet together at the three a-leeans. It hurt, kicking three very sturdy metal things all at once- but making the Kraang topple over the edge was worth it. They fell to the ground, and made a very metallic crash.

Mikey twisted himself, continuing the swing movement, and landed back on the walkway unharmed. Other than his toes. His toes sort of hurt.

Donnie grinned at him. Nice very nice good job small-precious-brother-mine

“Yes yes very good job Mikey, can we please hurry up?” ’pril said impatiently, twisting in Donnie’s arms and glancing down at the other Kraang below. “They gotta have ------ us now.”

Mikey exchanged a glance with Donnie, who shrugged. Their human was a little bossy sometimes, but that’s just how ’pril was.

’pril directed them forwards, and forwards they went. Following the odd walkway, so high in the air from the ground, they kept going until the turned and started along the next wall. From there, they kept running until they got to a wider part of the walkway. It had stairs leading down one part of it, towards the ground below.

Mikey could hear Kraang starting up those stairs, bringing with them their weapons. He pulled out
his knives from his belt, one per hand, and got ready.

However-

An explosion came from below, making Mikey yelp and press close to Donnie and ’pril. Following the heart stopping sound, Mikey heard Raf’s battle cry. Lee-oh’s joined in a moment later, and then there were sounds of fighting everywhere.

He looked at Donnie, silently asking what to do now.

Donnie had put ’pril back down, and she had rushed over to the huge machine attached to the wall. Donnie stretched his arms, his new arrmore shining in the weak light, and he withdrew two knives as well.

Be ready be careful, Donnie warned quietly, taking his place watching the stairs. Stay near April protect her defend her keep safe yes?

I have her will protect her, Mikey promised, standing straighter and nodding. Will be fine but you you be careful too?

Am always careful, Donnie chuckled, even if that wasn’t entirely true. Mikey rolled his eyes, and left his brother to watch for enemies.

Taking his position beside ’pril, Mikey watched, and waited, for the Kraang to come.

April stared at the computer screen.

She blinked, rubbed her eyes, and looked again.

Nope. Still didn’t make any sense.

“Well fuck,” April said aloud, getting a weird look from Mikey beside her. April grumbled under her breath, and rubbed her temples.

This wasn’t a computer; this was utterly alien technology hundreds of years beyond human capabilities.

“Come with us on a mission, April. It’ll be easy, April. It'll be a breeze, April,” April muttered, increasingly frustrated as she tapped parts of the touch screen. Nothing, just angry buzzes from the lights across the machine. “That’s the last time I believe Leo about anything concerning something more technologically advanced than a Gameboy consol.”

The large touch screen under her palms had floating shapes all over it, and something that vaguely resembled symbols that appeared and disappeared at random. Good god she had no idea what she was doing.
April tapped another few symbols, and prayed it would give her something like a menu screen. All it did was make a hundred new symbols pop up, and start spinning around the screen. Nothing was in English, or any other earth language.

Well this had gone completely fucking pear shaped. What the hell was she supposed to do now?

April poked the middle of the screen, hitting the largest symbol there. It divided and turned into three spinning wheels of symbols.

April screamed wordlessly, tugging at her hair.

"IS THERE A PROBLEM?" Leo yelled up at her, over the sound of the guns and fighting.

"YES! YES THERE IS A PROBLEM!" April hollered back.

"THIS IS A BAD TIME FOR THERE TO BE A PROBLEM!"

"I KNOW! I'M WORKING ON IT!"

Mikey pushed closer, giving her concerned looks. "You 'kay 'pril?"

"Nope, no I am not okay," April randomly tapped different portions of the rotating symbols, and got nothing again. "I have no idea what I’m doing here or why I ever thought this was a good plan."

"Hmmm..."

Mikey bumped her shoulder with his head, and April shrugged him off. "Not the time for that Mikey, I need to keep working."

April stopped tapping things, and started watching how the patterns on screen moved. There had to be a method to how this machine worked, all she had to do was find it. Maybe then she could at least get it to start showing things on the blank screen mounted on the wall...

April was so focused on watching the dizzying patterns across the touch pad, that she almost missed Mikey reaching out and starting to press symbols.

A split second a pure horror- that he was messing with highly advanced technology and had no idea what he was doing- and April slapped Mikey’s hand away. "No! Don’t touch that, I swear to god Mikey- we’re pressed for time here and I don’t need you screwing around with this-"

The wall mounted screen lit up.

April stopped her scolding, and stared.

The screen filled with icons, and digital images that resembled computer program folders.

April stared some more.

Mikey reached out, and tapped the touch pad again.

The program folders opened themselves on screen, and started displaying documents and photos.

He chirped excitedly, and gave April a wide smile.

April stared a moment longer, and then-
“Well. Alright then.” She said, shrugging off her shock. The feral mutant beside her knew how to use alien technology, why not.

April took her phone out of its protective pocket, and started taking pictures of the information on screen. She’d take as much of it as she could, and decipher it later. When there wasn’t a gun fight going on a floor below her, and they weren’t inside a base for creatures from her nightmares.

She’d also ask Mikey how he knew what to do later on, too.

Mikey shifted nervously, half watching ‘pril while she did… something, and half watching his brother as he stood guard.

There was a lot of yelling and fighting happening down below. He was worried about Lee-oh and Raf. They had their weapons and train-ing, but Mikey had seen the things the Kraang were carrying. A long-sharp-cutting tool wouldn’t stop those, no matter how fast and strong the wielder was.

‘pril’s little ff-own was making clicking sounds, and Mikey’s fingers twitched to touch it. He also wanted to keep touching the big thing that looked sort of like the tee-vee, since it’d made a lot of images pop up and ‘pril happy when they had.

Mikey restrained himself though, since he had a feeling that ‘pril wouldn’t want him interrupting at the moment.

Suddenly, Donnie shouted a warning, and Mikey jerked his head up.

Four Kraang were heading towards them, following the same walkway they’d used to get to the com-puu-terr.

They had their weapons.

Mikey froze for a moment, staring at the weapons pointed at him and his family.

Then-

He grabbed ‘pril around the waist- ignoring her outcry of annoyance- and pulled her behind the machine. He heard the weapons start making blasting sounds, and the cry of his older brother charging into a fight.

This had been a bad idea. He should have said something, complained until his brothers agreed they should all go home and not straight into an enemy’s nest.

‘pril squirmed in Mikey’s arms, apparently unhappy about being crouched over and pressed against the metal they hid behind.

Quiet quiet ‘pril will give us away will attract attention, Mikey hissed, keeping his human friend out
of sight still. ‘pril obviously didn’t understand him, and Mikey reprimanded himself for forgetting that. “Shh shh ‘pril, hiding ‘kay? Safes here.”

“No, let me go, I wasn’t done-”

“Shh!” Mikey hissed again, covering her mouth. Which, as it turned out, wasn’t a good move.

‘pril kicked her legs, knocking against Mikey’s bent ones, and dislodged his gentle grip on her face by forcing him to rebalance. She glared at him, and he glared back.

He was just trying to keep her safe, like he’d been told to. Why couldn’t she understand that?

Humans were so difficult.

Catching movement passing by, Mikey’s head whipped around just in time to see his brother leap down the stairs and disappear; pursued by two of the four Kraang.

Caught between relief that the Kraang were gone, and concern for his brother, Mikey peeked around the corner to see if the other two Kraang were dead yet.

They were struggling to their feet, were Donnie had thrown then to the ground.

They noticed Mikey’s staring.

They raised their weapons.

Mikey ducked back down, crouching tightly over ‘pril as the a-leeans fired.

Terrible idea, terrible terrible terrible, He trilled anxiously, ignoring how ‘pril was muttering angrily about being in such close quarters.

It was only a matter of time before the Kraang decided to march over, probably just a few seconds from now. There was no way Mikey would be able to run with ‘pril fast enough to get away, which left only one option…

Mikey leaned back from ‘pril, and pressed a finger to his lips.

“Shh, no talking be quiet. Me, I’ll be back, stay hiding,” He whispered to her. ‘pril was shaking slightly, mostly her hands clenched in her coat fabric, but her eyes were steady.

She nodded once. “Alright. Be careful.”

Mikey laughed quietly, stepping back onto all fours, and getting ready to run. He was always careful; he didn’t know what she was talking about.

Footsteps coming closer, no more flying pink lights, just a little… bit… closer…

Mikey sprang, and threw himself at the Kraang; screaming his loudest echo-screams possible.

The a-leeans froze, limbs locking up under Mikey’s vocal attack. In the moment of hesitation, the grabbed them both by their heads and threw them away. Away from ‘pril, his very strange human friend, and away from her hiding spot.

He was supposed to protect her, so he would.

Mikey withdrew a knife, sliding it from the collection in his belt, and went for the Kraang’s
stomachs.

Their scrambling limbs, bent in wrong angles, couldn’t do anything before Mikey landed on them. Their weapons were kicked away easily, skidding to the edge of the platform and falling.

Mikey drove his knife into one, pulled it free with a squelch, and repeated the effort to the next.

The metal bodies of the kraang stopped thrashing, and lay still. Not-blood started to pool underneath them, and Mikey got off the a-leeans before the liquid could soak his wrappings.

There. He’d protected ‘pril, just like he’d been supposed to. Even if the weapons the Kraang carried had made him feel twisty inside and want to hide himself. Calling on the echoing pain along his shell’s edge, and bringing back memories of a friend from long ago…

Mikey shook off the bitter memories, and refocused on the situation around him.

Now where had Donnie gone?

As though summoned, Donnie appeared up the stairs again. He was panting, and was holding one of his shoulders, but he didn’t seem too hurt. Just tired. Mikey scampered over to his brother, and threw his arms around Donnie’s middle.

He was extremely glad his brother hadn’t gotten badly hurt, leading the other Kraang away.

*Terrible plan this was a terrible plan,* Donnie muttered, also hugging Mikey close. *You you okay? Hurt injured bleeding anywhere?*

*No, am fine am fine,* Mikey replied truthfully. He noticed on the shoulder Donnie had been holding, the scales look irritated and red. Mikey frowned, gently touching the areas around it. *What’s this?*

*Burn, shooting-flying lights from weapons, don’t let them hit you,* Donnie said, hissing softly and brushing Mikey’s hand away.

“Is it okay to come out now?” ‘pril asked quietly, poking her head out from behind the com-puu-terr.

“Yup!” Mikey said brightly. “All gone! Is safes!”

‘pril gave them a look, then flinched as another explosion happened down below. Mikey flinched too, trying to drag Donnie from the edge of the walkway. He smelled fire, and heard his other brothers start yelling again.

“Maybe not,” Mikey mumbled, glancing worriedly towards the ground below.

“This isn’t going quite how I planned,” Leo admitted, pressing his back to the crates he and Raph hid behind.
“No, really?” Raph replied sarcastically.

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“What the hell, Raph?!” Leo shouted, watching in horror as the flames got bigger.

“That didn’t go quite how I wanted it to,” Raph replied.

“What did you do?!”

“I threw a bomb into the biggest bunch of them and I think I might’ve hit a gas line.”

“Oh my god.”

“Time to go,” Raph said, rushing past Leo and heading for the front of the building. Leo couldn’t find anything to say other than wordless grief and annoyance.

The fire was spreading rapidly, consuming the wooden crates spaced throughout the whole warehouse. Leo and Raph ran around them, weaving through the groups of panicking Kraang. They got to the front of the warehouse, and were kicking down the doors when Leo remembered.

“Wait- the others!” He turned around, intent on going back for them, but another wave of heat pushed him back. It stung his eyes, and he flicked his third eyelids shut against the onslaught. The very air hurt to breathe, and it was quickly being replaced by thick smoke.

Leo coughed, and got ready to go back in anyways. But Raph dragged him backwards, his own eyelids shut and a hand over his mouth. Leo struggled, silently protesting, but his physically stronger brother pulled him out the doors.

They stumbled out into the street, gasping fresh un-polluted air. Leo could still hear the alien screams inside, but they were getting fainter by the second. He turned around, looking up in horror at the burning building.

The red flames were already climbing to the second floor, glass cracking under the strain of the heat. Leo couldn’t find any words to say, mutely looking at the growing inferno.

“I-I didn’t see them get out,” Raph said hoarsely.

“Me neither,” Leo whispered.

They stood in the street, eyes darting from exit to exit; waiting for their brothers and friend to emerge. They didn’t, and the seconds ticked onwards.

Something gave inside the structure, and a wave of flames burst the street level windows. Glass hit the pavement, following the roiling tide of heat.

Still, no one emerged from the fire.

“Holy fuck,” Raph said, voice soft and horrified.

Leo put a shaking hand over his mouth, and bit down on a scream.

This hadn’t gone as planned, at all. He’d been in charge, he was the leader, he was the one who was supposed to keep them safe and he’d failed-

“Um, guys?”

Leo jerked his head upwards.
Dangling from the streetlight near them, April was hanging in Donnie’s arms, and Leo’s two brothers were perched on top of the curved metal.

April waved, looking a bit pale, but not worse for wear. “Hey, yeah, sooooo… what the fuck was that, and can you tell them to let me down already?”

Leo stared for a moment, and then let out a strangled laugh.

“Oh my god,” Raph said, also staring up at their siblings and friend. “I’ll be fuckin’ damned.”

“Seriously guys, I don’t like being this high up. Tell them to put me on the ground already.”

Dizzy with relief, Leo waved his brothers down. “Come on; get down here before you fall down. I mean, how did you even get up there in the first place…”

April explained everything, once Donnie had slid them both to the ground and finally put her back on her feet.

“We got blocked coming down the stairway, by a bunch of Kraang,” She said, glancing back at the still burning building. “Also by the fire. They made the choice without telling me, and before I figured out what was happening—” April pointed up at a second story window, the whole pane missing. “—they jumped out that window, and took me with them. The whole thing went up pretty much seconds later, so I guess good on them for thinking so quickly.”

Leo still felt shaky, but he managed a smile as he clapped his brothers on the shoulder. “I am so proud of you two. You got out of there without even a scratch, and kept April safe too. Not bad for your first mission.”

Donnie shrugged, smiling as well, while Mikey trilled happily as he grinned. Leo stepped back, and did another once over of them all; still not quite believing what’d happened.

That had been too close. Waaaaaay too close.

He felt like sitting down for a few hours, maybe the vertigo would pass by then.

Sirens started in the distance, and got closer by the second.

“We should probably go,” He said, eyes widening as flashing lights turned the corner three blocks away.

A chorused agreement from his family, and their friend, and they all started running.

“So how much did you get out of that mess anyways,” Raph asked on the way home, stepping around suspicious looking lumps on the sewer tunnel’s floor. “We only had a little bit of time in there, and I know those computers ain’t easy to use…”
“Um, pretty much nothing?” April said, earning a groan from their whole group. She huffed indignantly. “Oh come on, none of you warned me how complex those machines would be! What did you expect to happen?”

“You’d use them to find info on your dad…?” Leo suggested tentatively.

“No! I got stuck wasting time for who knows how long just trying to turn it on!” April exclaimed, throwing her hands in the air. “If Mikey hadn’t helped me out, I wouldn’t have gotten anything before you blew the whole place up!”

Raph stopped, glancing at April. “Mikey did what??”

April crossed her arms, and was unaffected by the stares Raph and Leo gave her. “I was trying to find the repeating patterns to the codes- or symbols or whatever- and he did something to it. Speaking of,” she turned to Mikey, and gave him an appraising look. “How the heck did you know what to do?”

Raph also looked at Mikey, same as the rest of their brothers. Everyone stared at the smallest, height wise, member of their group, waiting for his answer.

Mikey hummed for a moment, tapping his chin as he thought- or translated what was going on, Raph couldn’t tell. Finally, he shrugged. “Jus’ felt right? Yee. Felt right.”

Well that wasn’t much of an explanation at all.

Raph pinched between his eyes, and sighed. Tonight’s rollercoaster of emotions had tired him out, and now he just wanted to go home and spend time with his confident. Spike, Spike would listen to him. He could talk about how completely terrified he’d been about the fire, and causing it, and Spike would listen to every word.

Mikey’s weird moment of brilliance could wait till later.

“I’m done,” Raph said, starting down the tunnel again. “I’m too tired for this kind of thing.”

He heard his family, and April, start following him, so Raph didn’t bother checking over his shoulder if they were coming with him or not.

They dropped April off at her Aunt’s place, and then went home.

His father questioned the smell of acrid smoke clinging to them, and the glass sticking into Donnie and Mikey’s arm wrappings. The glass could’ve done a lot of damage, had they not been wearing their guards.

That was something at least, knowing that the armor worked like it should’ve. It’d been made partially with their brothers in mind, their tendency to block with their arms no matter what. It made sense of course, seeing as they didn’t have weapons yet…

An explanation from Leo, and some medical care for their individual minor injuries, and their father dismissed them to their own activities. Keeping only Leo with him, probably going to discuss strategy and what could’ve been done better for their plan.

Donnie asked Raph as they left the dojo, if he felt like working on the motorbikes at all.

Raph declined, too wrung out from their evening. Donnie had looked mildly disappointed, but Mikey appearing at his side fixed that.
Raph watched his brothers amble off together, already starting a private conversation between the two of them. They disappeared into their room, and then it was Raph alone in the lair.

He was tempted to go work out, but… nah, his arms hurt, and if he really want uninterrupted alone time, he’d need to go to his room.

Raph ended up collapsing on his bed right away, flopping backwards onto it with Spike cradled gently in his hands. He felt almost tired enough to fall asleep, even without his dinner.

He didn’t sleep much though, spending a long while towards the late morning hours thinking and talking aloud.

He couldn’t be as reckless as he used to be anymore. Not with his younger siblings along for the ride, plus April. They wouldn’t be able to take the same hits as Leo, or avoid them like Raph’s older brother could.

He destroyed a whole building, and could’ve killed his family and friends by doing so. They’d only survived because of their quick thinking.

Watching the whole warehouse go up in flames, Raph had felt helpless and scared to his core.

It was probably a good idea to start rethinking how he dealt with things.

April closed her locker door, the slam echoed by a hundred others as the bell rang.

Students swarmed through the hallways, and she was forced to push through them all as she headed for the science wing.

Passing the tens of ordinary teenagers, all of them worrying about ordinary things and talking about ordinary activities, April found herself slightly jealous.

She’d been just like them, a few months ago.

Now, she was running around after dark with four mutant brothers, and attempting to rescue her father from a hostile alien force.

She felt very sleep deprived, and very overwhelmed.

She’d stayed up late, even later than when she’d snuck back into her Aunt’s home, trying to decipher the photographed documents on her phone. The quality of the photos was good, but she’d been too frazzled to get anything out of the attempt.

Though, it said something about her life, that the night prior was only the fifth most terrifying thing to her happen in the last two months.

April chuckled dryly under her breath, pushing through the doors to the science floor. She was so
completely over her head and out of her comfort zone.

She was great at math, biology, and physics. Not so much linguistics, computer sciences, and chemistry. The latter being something she’d been thinking on lately; since the real key to things might be in the mutagen. Which, as it stood, was too dangerous and mysterious for her to chance fooling around with.

It was also why she was skipping her first class, in favor of calling in a favor.

April weaved through the other early bird students, dedicated individuals already working on their projects throughout the lab. She aimed her path to the very back of the room, heading for the table that had an unspoken claim put on it and no one tried to disrespect.

April slid onto the stool in front of the wide table, and leaned on her elbows. “Hey, I got a question for you. How do you feel about working with highly toxic and alien chemicals that may or may not be not-of-this-earth, and helping crack the code behind an unregistered language?”

Raising one dark eyebrow, the other girl across the table leaned forwards; her short dark hair slipping in front of her glasses. “You have my attention, April. What’s the catch?”

April smiled; pleased her occasional study partner was being predictable. “You can’t tell anyone, at all. Its top secret, and you can never breathe a word of it to anyone for the rest of your life.”

“You make this sound like government level conspiracy, April. Just what’re you mixed up in these days?”

“Oh you know,” April waved her hand nonchalantly. “Things, places, people. So you in or not? Because I’m honestly stuck on this and really need some help.”

Irma smirked, and flipped her purple streaked hair out of her face. “You had me at ‘highly toxic’.”

Chapter End Notes

So, list of things before ya'll start commenting.

1) No Irma is not a Kraang spy, (right now at least? idk, future things to decide), and she'll become a regular member of the cast. We need like twenty more female characters in the 2012 universe, and I'll be damned if I let this chance to re-write Irma slip by me.

2) April and the boys will be getting new gear throughout things bc holy christ I have such anxiety whenever she and them throw themselves into battle. No armor in sight what so ever. I mean, especially for April. At least give her a chest plate like Karai folks, her running around without any protection at all gives me the Concerns.

3) Unrelated note: Mikey's POV is actually super difficult to write now days because I can't use any of my usual words and it is pure frustration.

4) Everyone has low-key nightmares about shit these days. Everyone. I'll be adding that
in later. Not really a note on this chapter, just a heads up sort of thing.

5) expect update soon???

6) I'm tired.

7) thanks for reading, AND FOR TWO HUNDRED KUDOS THANK YOU ALL OF YOU YOU'RE ALL FANTASTIC WONDERFUL HUMAN BEINGS (assuming at least) AND I APPRECIATE EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU.

8) does anyone want full bios on the new characters I introduce over time? because there's going to be a few of them as we go along and I'm just wondering. I'd put them in the drabbles series or something.

9) the author should probably sleep more and take their vitamins.
“Donnie, pass me the nine-sixteen?” Raph asked, holding out his hand without looking. A length of cool metal was dropped into his palm, and Raph nodded absently. “Thanks, Don.”

“Welcome,” Donnie replied just as absently.

Raph spun the wrench around in his hand, and slid it into place around the bolt he was tightening. Donnie’s own progress was noisier than his, the hiss of aerosol spray cans filling the air. While Donnie started the base coat on one of the finished motorbikes, Raph worked on the internal portions of an engine for another.

They’d been at it for a few hours, he thought at least. Time got a bit weird in the garage, especially since Donnie had started becoming a real gearhead. If Raph could’ve been considered a devoted hobbyist, then Donnie was downright obsessive compulsive. If it wasn’t books, or a documentary, it was one or more machines scattered at his feet.

Raph had started his bike as a way to pass the time, but since they’d finished it together, they’d started on another three. Which were coming along great; just a few more parts to find, and a paint job on one or two…

A knock on the door of their garage, and Raph looked up from his work.

Mikey was poking his head in, and waving them out. “C’mon c’mon, ‘pril’s here! Has things has somethings to sssay.”

Raph glanced over at Donnie, who was glancing at him. Donnie shrugged, and wiped a hand across his face; leaving a trace of black paint there, right under his eye.

“Yeah, we’ll be out in a few,” Raph said, replying for the both of them.

Mikey gave them an ‘O-K’ sign- though where he’d picked that up, Raph didn’t know- and vanished out the doors again.
“Pack up, we’ve got company,” Raph said, standing up and stretching out of his slouch. His spine ached, and his knees popped as he stood. He should get around to hauling some actual chairs into the garage; it probably wasn’t good for him to be sitting on the cement for so long.

“Hmmm…” Donnie hummed, not getting up at all, and hands rising to begin painting again.

“I know you’re still working Donnie, but we gotta go. Come on, on your feet already.”

Donnie still didn’t get up, and didn’t answer either. Probably avoiding having to answer the request at all.

“Come on Don, we have training in a bit anyways,” Raph said, stepping over the scattered spare bike parts between him and his brother. Donnie was still painting, spraying even strokes across the area they’d taped off.

Raph sighed, and rolled his eyes. He’d had to physically drag Donnie out of the garage these days, often with Mikey’s help. His brother was giving him a run for his money, at being the resident mechanics enthusiast.

“Donnie, seriously,” Raph reached out, putting a hand on top of Donnie’s skull. Donnie’s painting paused, and with a soft sigh, he leaned against Raph’s palm.

Raph yanked his hand away like he’d been burned, causing Donnie to slip sideways at the loss of support.

“Don’t… don’t do that. ’s weird,” Raph muttered, stepping away from his brother. Donnie gave him a confused look, and Raph ignored him. He walked purposefully away, heading towards the door.

“C’mon, April’s waiting.”

He felt Donnie watching him as he left, and Raph ignored that too.

April was sitting on the couch, with Mikey and Leo clustered around her. She had her laptop on her lap, and Raph could hear a video playing through the speakers. He caught the very end of the video as he approached.

“…hadn’t heard from him in days, so I stopped by his lab. The place was a mess, and he was gone. I… fear the worst.”

“Whatcha got for us, April?” Raph asked, sliding onto the couch beside Leo.

April paused the video, and shut the screen. “A scientist went missing a few days ago, and it could be a possible lead on my dad’s whereabouts.”

“How so?”

“Her dad’s a scientist too, Raph,” Leo said, elbowing Raph’s side. “You’re not dumb enough to have forgotten that, right?”

“Man fuck off, I got other shit on my mind,” Raph groused, elbowing his brother back, but with twice the force. Leo returned it, with thrice the force. Raph glared at his brother, and Leo scowled at him.

“Oh for- guys!” April exclaimed in frustration, smacking Leo’s arm and interrupting the elbow brawl that’d been developing. “Focus please! This could be a real lead, and we have to check it out.”
“How is this a lead, exactly?” Raph asked, shoving Leo’s head aside so he could address April directly. Leo smacked his hand away, and glared again.

“Because- and you would have heard this if you’d shown up on time-” April said, giving Raph a pointed look. “the Kraang have been kidnapping scientists all over the city, and my dad, as Leo so kindly established, was a scientist too. Duh.”

“Don’t ‘duh’ me.”

“I will ‘duh’ you all I want, because you’re late and interruptive,” April said, raising one eyebrow at him.

Leo and Mikey gave Raph matching grins, and simultaneously went, “Ooooooh-”

“Oh fuck off, both of you!” Raph snapped.

“Language, my son.”

Raph looked up, same as his brothers and friend. Splinter was standing across the media pit, along with Donnie beside him. Splinter raised one eyebrow as well, also giving Raph a pointed look. “You know the rules. Also, I do not want your younger siblings picking those words up.”

Raph slid a glance at Leo, who was giving him a knowing smirk.

Yeah, a bit too late for that. But apparently, Splinter didn’t know that yet.

“Hai, Sensei,” Raph replied, half praying that Leo wouldn’t rat him out to their rat. Leo didn’t, but the shiftiness of his eyes indicated he was holding onto the information for later. Asshole.

“So… who would like to explain what this meeting is about?”

April raised her hand. “I can, Sensei. I’ve got a possible lead on Kraang activity, and I swung by to show the guys and ask for some backup. Is it alright if I skip training tonight to do that? Plus whoever comes with me too.”

Donnie visibly perked up at the sound of that, and Splinter seemed to consider April’s request. “Hm. While I do not like letting beginners deviate from their training schedules… the chance to find your father outweighs that. But, be sure to add extra exercise to your private training tomorrow if you can.”

“I can do that, definitely,” April replied, standing up and pushing her laptop into her bag. “So who’s coming with me?”

“I will,” Donnie said, starting towards their gathered group. However, Splinter’s grip on the edge of his shell stopped him. Donnie gave him an obviously annoyed look, and Splinter repressed a slight smirk.

“Ah, my son, I don’t believe you will be. You and Michelangelo will be remaining here, seeing as you have training in about… oh, now or so?”

Raph cracked a smile at Donnie’s scowl. He darted a glance at Leo, who looked like he was having an intense internal debate. Probably torn between doing the morally right thing, and helping teach their brother’s more martial arts.

Raph decided to put him out of his misery.
“I’ll go,” Raph volunteered, raising a lazy wave. “Leo can stick around here, and I’ll watch April’s back while we investigate. Is that alright, Sensei?”

“Yes, that sounds good to me, Raphael. Be sure to come back at a timely hour though,” Splinter said, pointing a finger at Raph. “You have a tendency to disappear for hours, my son, and not return until morning. I worry when you do so.”

“I have a curfew still, so we won’t be too long,” April interjected, saving Raph from the likely following question of ‘and just what do you do during those hours?’ from his father.

“We’ll be back before midnight, promise, Sensei,” Raph said, hauling himself off the couch. “It’s just recon, we shouldn’t take more than an hour and some.”

“Fair enough. Be careful you two, and if you are not back within your time limit…” Splinter gave them a severe look. “I and your brothers just may come looking for you. In fact-” He then smiled in a way that made Raph vaguely nervous. “-if you and April do not check in, we will be testing out Donatello and Michelangelo’s tracking skills with a… game, of sorts.”

Raph exchanged a glance with April.

“We’ll be back,” They both chorused, turning and running out of the lair.

Hunted down by his feral brothers, his prickly elder brother, and their Sensei?

No thanks. Not tonight. Raph valued his life and pride too much for that.

Thankfully, from the steady pace April was keeping with him, she seemed to share the sentiment.

“So how far is this lab anyways?”

“Not too, too far. But it is a ways,” April replied, scrolling through her notes on her phone. She had a very thick digital notebook these days, full of addresses and possibly helpful tidbits of information. “I’ll take my bike, and you’ll take the roofs.”

“Sounds good to me-” Raph cut off, his stomach making a very loud gurgle. April glanced over at him, and raised an eyebrow. Raph avoided her eyes. “I… might’ve forgotten to eat breakfast today. Tonight. Something like that.”

Another loud gurgle from his stomach, and Raph hunched his shoulders.

April pursed her lips, and glanced at her phone’s clock. “When did you get up again?”

“…six-ish?”

“Raph, it’s almost nine. Have you eaten anything today??”
“…”

“We’re stopping at McDonald’s,” April concluded, storing her phone away and hopping onto her bike. Raph didn’t complain or protest, following along from above as she rode through the city.

The teenage boy at the till gave April some weird looks as she placed her order; three big mac’s, a large drink, and two large fries.

April in turn gave him a stone faced stare as she paid, refusing to cower under the judgemental looks. She also filled out a negative review and slid it into the complaints box; since during the process of making her order, she’d very clearly heard him sneeze loud and hard.

Right. onto. her. food.

April gave him her best glare as she left, and felt satisfied when he paled.

With her bike chained up out front, April slipped around the side of the building and waited.

There was no fire escape to climb up, but there were plenty of pipes. Raph landed with a soft thud in front of April, and took the bags and drink. Then, just as swiftly, he disappeared back up to the roof.

“Show off,” April muttered, slipping her fingers around the pipes and starting to climb.

It took an embarrassing amount of effort, but eventually, April clawed her way up the building’s side, and collapsed on roof top. Her fingers ached, and her arms burned from keeping herself steady.

Raph was already eating his second burger, watching with a half attentive stare.

“You could’ve, you know, helped me or something,” April groused breathlessly.

“Nah,” Raph replied, taking a couple of fries and eating them. “You need to practice scaling buildings anyways. Thought I’d give you some off the clock training.”

April glared at him. “I could’ve fallen. Broken my skull or back.”

“I would’ve caught you,” He replied evenly, taking another handful of fries.

“You better have left me some of those.”

“Hurry up and come and get some. Or I won’t have.”

“Asshole, I bought those.”

“Yep. Thanks for that.”

April grumbled, and dragged herself off the rough roof.

They ended up with their legs over the edge, sharing the large soda and fries between them.

“How much time we have left?” Raph asked, finishing off his third burger. April wasn’t sure where he put it all, but she had a feeling it had to do with his anatomy and metabolism.

April kept herself from staring at her friend- and his very intriguing physiological makeup- and tried to squash her curious-scientific side. “We’ve only been here for about twenty minutes. We’re still good for time.”
“Good.”

They sat in silence for a while, Raph finishing off the large soda, while April scrolled absently on her phone. She flicked through her notes again, and paused on one of her ‘to-do’ lists.

- tell them about Irma

Right. She’d nearly forgotten that, in her rush to investigate the possible lead. Might as well start that process right now.

“So… Raph.”

“What.” He asked, somehow phrasing it without the question mark.

“How does the idea of me… bringing in another human sound?”

“Um, what?” Raph looked at her, dropping the soda cup off the roof and into the open dumpster below.

“I, well, we’re in over heads. You have to have realized that,” April said, closing her phone screen and clasping her hands around it. Maybe protectively, maybe nervously. “See, I already told you all this, but I have no idea what to do with the mutagen. At all. And I thought, well, what if I found us some help…?”

Raph narrowed his eyes, and gave April a long look. Then, he grimaced. “You already told someone, didn’t you.”

April winced, clutching her phone tighter. “Yeah. Sorry. I got a bit ahead of myself, and… might’ve consulted someone I know at school.”

Raph sighed, and covered his eyes. “Great. And just what did you consult them on? Because I swear to god April, if you told someone about me and my family-”

“No! God no! I wouldn’t do that to you guys,” April said hurriedly, gesturing just as. “I just. told her about the mutagen, alright? She’s a… well, not a close friend, but a good one. I do study groups with her a lot.”

“This isn’t filling me with resounding faith, April.”

“Look, I have no idea what to do with the Kraang tech and- excluding Mikey’s connection with it- none of you do either. We’re stuck, and we need help,” April tilted her chin, trying for conviction and confidence. “Irma is probably the smartest person I know, she can help us. And, I trust her. She won’t tell anyone about the mutagen, or about you guys… if you meet her, that is.”

Raph was still giving her a suspicious look, but he didn’t seem overly hostile. Better than April had hoped for at least.

“How do you know for sure? That we can trust this girl,” Raph asked, clearly wary of the idea. “My experiences with humans, same as my family, haven’t been all that great. The track record doesn’t look good, April.”

“I just- I just know we can,” April said, trying to explain herself properly. She gestured vaguely with her hands. “Irma’s trustworthy, I know that much. I just have a feeling. I get them about certain people, like Irma. Not- not often, but… when it’s important, I do.”
Raph was still grimacing, but it slowly slid into a neutral expression.

“What?” April said, internally squirming under the steady look. She knew she sounded crazy, just like every other teenage girl in her school who claimed to get ‘feelings’, about luck or psychic bullshit.

“Is that why you decided to ask us for help?” Raph asked, leaning forwards at her. “Because you got a ‘feeling’?”

April bit her lip, and thought back to the night that the older boys had shown up on her Aunt’s apartment roof.

(Appearing behind her with twin thuds, Leo and Raph had emerged from the shadows as easy as anything.

April had been stuck, staring at the reappearance of the two people she’d half thought she’d imagined the night prior.

Her first reaction had been to try crying out- maybe shrink away in fear- but-

Leo’s honest and steady voice stopped her, followed by Raph’s gruff greetings.

They’d asked her how she was, if her arm hurt too bad.

They apologized for not saving her father.

A part of April had still wanted to go running, to hide in her room and pretend she hadn’t been tracked down by creatures straight out of a horror movie. But…

Something stopped her, and brought a question to her lips instead.

“Will you help me?”

April trusted her instincts, and listened to the rightness she felt asking for the turtles’ help.

When she’d reached out to shake Leo’s hand, it’d only been a split second that she’d hesitated. Big and green and scaled, Leo’s hand was easily twice the size of hers, and she’d seen just what damage it could do.

She recovered from her hesitation, and had listened once again to her instincts.

April had shaken Leo’s hand, and gripped just as tightly as he.)

“…something like that, yeah,” April admitted, shrugging off the memory. “You guys might’ve been…”

“ Weird looking? Freaks?”

“Um, I… guess, not quite that, but-” April blew a harsh breath out. “-you seemed trustworthy. Somehow.”

“We still seem trustworthy? You’ve seen a lot of shit with us, lately.”

April glanced at Raph- who, somewhere over the past weeks, had really become her friend, and not just her ‘friend’.
In the dimness of the evening, sitting above the streetlights’ beams, Raph still looked every inch the mutant he’d always been. But April wasn’t unnerved by that any longer, and hadn’t been in a good while. He was just him, same as the rest of his family.

Funny how fast things changed.

“’I’d say so,” April replied, giving a slight grin. “You get on my nerves, but I trust you.”

A series of expressions flickered across Raph’s face, before he settled back into his usual frown and looked away with a huff. “Well. Great, I guess. We trust you too.”

“’We’ as in you and your whole family?”

“…something like that, yeah.”

April laughed softly, feeling oddly honored by that. Something gentle and warm settled in her chest, and her ear tips felt hot.

“We should get going,” She suggested, brushing her bangs over her ears.

“Yeah. Sounds good. Let’s, um, get going then.”

Hearing the hint of awkwardness in his voice, April was mildly relieved she wasn’t the only one feeling a bit… well, she didn’t really have a word for it.

It was something. Definitely a something.

She’d think on that something later.

“So… am I the first one you told about Irma?”

“Um, yep. Why?”

“Ha! Leo’s gonna pitch a fit about that, he hates getting information after I do.”

“Oh no, no no no- don’t start a fight with him over something I did, I’ll get dragged right into it!”

“I know, it’ll be hilarious.”

“Raph.”

“April.”

“Raph.”

“It’s electronic, we can’t just bust in!”
“Why not? There’s no cameras, or alarm systems. It’s just there to be difficult.”

“It’ll tell whoever comes in tomorrow that there was a break in, the police will be everywhere-”

“Maybe so, but as long as you don’t touch anything, they won’t be able to figure out what happened. After all-” Raph stabbed the electronic door lock, and wrenched it open to get at the internal wiring.

“-who’s gonna suspect a giant turtle of breaking and entering?”

April hummed angrily, tapping her foot. “The more I hang out with you guys, the longer my list of felonies gets.”

“It’s only a felony if you get caught for it,” Raph quipped.

“That’s not how laws work.”

“It is for me,” Raph smirked, because it was true. If he was already illegal just for being alive, he might as well give himself even more breathing room with the law. “And- just a little- more- got it!”

The door swung open, and Raph stood up from his crouch. “After you,” He said teasingly, grinning at April as he gestured.

April gave him an unimpressed look, but went into the room anyways.

April’s flashlight lit up their path into the destroyed lab, spotlighting the wrecked equipment everywhere. Raph- with his something close to night vision- could see very clearly the destruction throughout the room. Ceiling panels torn out, tables over turned, broken glass and wrenched metal everywhere…

“Ugh, he must’ve been experimenting on animals,” April said, her voice dripping with disgust. Raph looked over, and grimaced at the cage set into the wall; its door barely clinging to its hinges, and showing dried puddles of something inside it. April shone her light further, and it landed on something straight out of a Saw movie.

“Wow, now that’s kind of really fucked up looking,” Raph commented, stepping towards the chair. He examined the scratches and stains over the wrought metal thing, and wrinkled his snout.

Occasionally, as he’d gotten older and realized just what he was, he’d had vague nightmares about ending up in one of those. Or in a cage, like the one nearby the chair.

It was a possibility he hated to consider, but had to nonetheless.

“This place is giving me the creeps,” April said, turning her light to the other parts of the room. “It’s like… something out of a horror movie.”

“And not even a good one,” Raph said dryly, turning away from the freaky as hell torture chair. “Let’s check the desk. Maybe they left some useful shit in there.”

April shuffled through the papers on the desk, her light reflecting weirdly off the stark white sheets. Raph knelt while she did, starting to pull out the drawers and examine the contents. Top drawer had nothing but office supplies, and a couple bottles of prescription medications. Raph closed it, and pulled open the bottom one.

Empty. Except… wait…

Raph zeroed in on the faint glow inside, coming from the edges of the drawer.
Oh, no way they’d been stupid enough…

He put his nearly too large fingers into a divot on the bottom panel, and tugged it out of place. An old, and badly executed trick of a false drawer bottom. Convenient for them, not so much for the people… hiding… it…

Raph’s eyes widened, and he stared at the contents of the hidden storage.

“Fuck,” He said aloud.

“What? What’d you find?”

“It’s…” Raph slowly picked up the cylinder, and held it up. The glowing liquid shone brighter than April’s flashlight, and created rippling patterns everywhere. “It’s mutagen.”

April gingerly took it from his hands, holding it up closer to herself. “What would this be doing here? Unless-” April suddenly gasped, eyes focusing on something behind Raph. “-Raph, look out!”

Raph turned, and caught the swung attack at him. In one movement, he used the individual’s grip on the length of metal to through them to the floor, and pin them with their own weapon. April’s flashlight disappeared, and Raph could only make out vaguely masculine features in the dimness.

The lights came on, the whole room becoming exposed.

Raph pressed harder against the man’s throat, and narrowed his eyes at the pale human.

“Doctor Falco!” April gasped.

The man- apparently named Falco- struggled underneath Raph’s grip, crying out as he got a solid look at Raph. “Gah-! What are you?!”

Raph snorted, and eased off the man’s throat. “Relax, we’re not here to hurt you.”

“You already have!” He exclaimed in an affronted tone.

Raph rolled his eyes, and stood up; going to stand with April. “Trust me, if I’d wanted to hurt you, you’d be hurting.”

“Raph,” April hissed under her breath, making Raph roll his eyes again. She plastered on a smile- obviously forced to Raph- and clasped her hands as she took a step in front of Raph. “Hi, Doctor. I promise we’re not here to hurt you. We’re actually here to help.”

“Forgive me for not believing you,” Falco said with a scowl, getting up from the floor and brushing himself off. “Breaking and entering, into my private laboratory-”

“I thought this place belonged to someone named Rockwell,” Raph commented, giving Falco a suspicious look. That’s what April had told him, at least.

“It- well, legally speaking, it does, but he’s missing at the moment, and I’m just keeping things in order while he’s gone- and why am I explaining this to you,” Falco gave Raph another glare, and he let it flow over him without acknowledging it. “You wouldn’t understand, likely speaking. Considering your ham-handed method of breaking into this lab, and then your snooping into classified files-!”

“Doctor Falco,” April said, cutting his rant off. She gave him another plastic smile, and Raph noticed how she started playing up her feminine body language. “We’d really like to help you out,
since it might help us out. If you wouldn’t mind… could we sit down and have a quick chat?”

Somehow, April talked the irate man down, and got him to literally sit down.

Raph privately congratulated her on that, impressed how well she talked them out of that one. Though externally, he showed none of that; keeping a blank expression, and just a smidgen of threat in his posture.

Raph didn’t really like scientists, of any sort. Made him think too much of what would happen if they got hold of him and his family. April’s father excluded, of course.

“I’m sorry, I wish I knew more about your father, but I don’t,” Falco said, sympathy noting in his voice.

Raph saw April’s shoulders fall a bit, but she recovered quickly. He took a turn talking anyways.

“So what can you tell us about this?” He pointed at the canister of mutagen, still being held by April.

Falco scowled, the expression aimed at the canister. “Some shady corporate goon paid Rockwell a lot of money to experiment with it.”

April pulled out her phone- balancing the container in one arm- and Raph caught the outline of a Kraang droid in human skin on the screen. “This the guy?”

“That’s him,” Falco replied gravely.

Raph grimaced. Theory confirmed then. “So Rockwell got tied up with the Kraang, did he?”

“Yes. I on the other hand-” Falco shook his head, expression tight and defensive. “I wanted no part of that. Who knows what sort of- monstrosities could result.” He glanced at Raph. “No offense.”

Raph narrowed his eyes, feeling the judgemental looks the man was giving him. He ground out his words, fighting his gut reaction of anger. “Some. Taken.”

“Is that what was in that cage over there?” April asked, gesturing towards the unsettling metal prison. “One of his… monstrosities?”

Raph’s scales prickled- feeling extra aware of what he was, compared to the humans in the room- and he grit his teeth. “Hey, ease up on the ‘M’ word, alright?”

“Sorry, Raph,” April whispered, wincing apologetically.

Falco however, showed no remorse for his word choices. Instead, he focused on the cage April had indicated. “That’s where he kept the monkey he was experimenting on.”

April’s lips formed a terse line, clearly unhappy about that bit of information. “It obviously didn’t like being in there, not that I blame it…”

Falco scowled deeper, his tone turning darker. “Rockwell didn’t treat it very well.”

Raph’s scales prickled again, and he quietly shifted his feet. The cage and the chair and the guy in white- they were really starting to get under his skin.

“Maybe the Kraang didn’t take Rockwell,” April said suddenly, tapping her fingers on the mutagen in her hands. “Maybe the monkey went berserk, busted out of the cage, and dragged him off.” She paused, looking again at the broken cage, and the wreckage of the room. “Or… worse.”
“Well, I’ve told you all I know,” Falco said even more suddenly, drawing their attention back to him. “If you would be so kind, please get out of my lab, and return my property to me,” he held out his hand, and gestured at the mutagen in April’s. “I won’t report you, but only if you leave now.”

Raph narrowed his eyes at the man again, for the tenth time in as many minutes. Something about him rankled Raph, but that could’ve just been the attitude and lab coat.

April glanced at Raph, and Raph considered their options.

They could keep the mutagen, since it was a dangerous substance, and anger the man in front of them. But then, that would result in a report being filed, and the possibility of it getting back to April’s Aunt. Plus, it risked Raph’s own exposure, and that was the last thing he needed.

Raph gave a slight nod, and April handed the mutagen back to Falco.

If the Kraang were watching this place, and Falco was threatening law against them, there wasn’t much else they could do.

They ended up leaving empty handed, and Raph felt Falco’s eyes on them for a full block after.

“So… what do we do now?” Raph asked, checking over his shoulder one last time. “We got no leads out of that, not even mutagen.”

“Well, we’ll just have to see, once we take a look at Rockwell’s flash-drive,” April replied, pushing her bike out from its hiding place behind an alleyway dumpster.

Raph turned his head, raising an eye ridge at her. “What flash-drive?”

“The one I swiped off his desk back there,” April said in a smug tone, smirking at Raph.

Raph felt his lips spread in a grin, and he laughed. “Nice. I didn’t even see you do it. Guess you really are picking up ninjutsu skills.”

April grinned back, and let out a laugh of her own. “Look at what you guys are doing to me; stealing, hijacking, breaking into buildings…”

“Don’t forget gang violence,” Raph added, thinking of the black and red uniforms of the Foot clan.

“Oh no, how could I forget that,” April said sarcastically, starting to roll her bike along as they walked. “It’s not like I don’t see them almost every night in my dreams or anything-”

She cut off with a shriek, as something big, angry, and inhuman landed in front of them.

Raph dodged around April to be in front, sais already in his hands and pointed at their attacker. The clatter of April dropping her bike was nothing, compared to the howling screech the enormous primate in front of them let out.

“Jesus CHRIST-” April exclaimed, and Raph could hear her retreating from behind him. “-that’s gotta be the monkey!”

“Oh yeah?” Raph sneered at the creature, calling up the anger he’d suppressed earlier. His third eyelids flickered closed, and he smirked at the mutant still screaming at him. “It’s my lucky night then.”

Raph spun his sais forwards, and darted close to go for a nonlethal attack to the arms, but-
His breath was knocked out of him, as the enemy mutant kicked him hard in the plastron. Raph flew backwards, landing on his shell and putting stars in his vision. He couldn’t feel his sais in his grip anymore, and he wheezed slightly as he struggled to stand up.

“Shoot! Raph, are you alright?” April asked, somewhere outside Raph’s line of vision.

“Hhh- yeah, yeah I’m fine,” Raph said, forcing his sight to clear and reasserting his stance. He watched as the huge monkey picked up his dropped weapons, sniffing them, and then discarding them. Raph bared his teeth, feeling hot anger at his weapons being treated like nothing.

He charged back into the fight, going low this time and aiming for the legs. Just a small fracture, no one would be able to tell the difference-

Raph missed his blow- the other mutant vanishing- and he wasn’t prepared for the mutant to rebound off the fire escape above, and land right back on top of him.

Raph’s insides rang from the blows, his shell taking the worst of the damage and making him pay for it. Raph ignored the pain, and kept at the fight. He swung, and kicked, and jabbed at the monkey. But, much to his growing frustration, the monkey dodged every attack he aimed at it.

“MotherFUCKER-” Raph cursed, the heavy fists of the other mutant landing another round of hits on him. “You’re gonna fuckin’ regret that-”

The monkey hit him in the jaw, and knocked him backwards. Raph’s feet skidded, and he nearly lost his footing. Too soon though, another series of jabs landed on him before he could find his bearings.

Raph’s vision swam, and his arms ached from blocking. Thank god he’d worn his arm guards, but fuck if his muscles weren’t up to the task of taking this much continuous punishment-

He tried to put some distance between him and the other mutant, flinging a couple throwing stars at him. Again, the monkey avoided each one; the stars thudding harmlessly into the side of an adjacent building.

The monkey snarled, and Raph found himself doing the same.

Raph locked arms against the other mutant, trying to overwhelm it with sheer strength. Unfortunately- and Raph would deny that it was just because he wasn’t as strong- his aching arms gave out, resulting in the monkey grabbing Raph, and throwing him off.

Raph landed on his shell, and lost his breath again at the resounding pain going through him. He barely had time to open his eyes, and only just caught sight of the monkey leaping onto him.

Raph brought up his arms to block, trying to protect his vitals- but the heavy fists of the other mutant made the movement useless. Raph’s skull hit the concrete beneath him, and he felt something split there; same as his lips had.

The rain of blows suddenly stopped, but not because the monkey was backing off. Raph felt the mutant’s hands wrap around his limbs, and then he was flying through the air for the umpteenth time.

He skidded on the pavement, rolling with the fall like he’d been trained to. He stopped finally, and groaned as black ate at his sight.

He felt someone touching him, but the touch wasn’t pain inducing- soft, gentle fingers skidding over his scales and shell. Then they vanished, and Raph heard snarling again.
He forced himself onto his elbows, and felt something hot dribble down the back of his neck. More snarling, and- where- where was April-?

“It’s okay. Everything’s going to be alright,” He heard her say. Raph blearily tried to turn towards her voice, but sparks went across his eyes as he did. “What? What is it-?”

A shrieking snarl, and then Raph heard clanging metal. April wasn’t screaming though, and he didn’t smell any blood other than his own. He chalked up the sounds to the monkey escaping.

Raph sighed tiredly, and burned with frustration.

“Shit- Raph, Raph are you alright?” April’s hands landed on him again, touching around spot he could feel gashes on, and blooming bruises.

“Ngh,” He answered, head swimming with pain. “ ‘m fine.”

“You don’t look fine.”

“I’m fine,” He insisted, trying to push himself up. “Just- just need to catch my breath-”

“You look like you need a doctor,” April commented, and Raph felt her poke the back of his neck; interrupting the droplets coming from his skull.

Raph hissed, baring his teeth and pushing her hands away. April backed off- thank god- but she didn’t move away. Raph blinked his vision back to normal, and he found her staring at him with worry.

Raph looked away, feeling embarrassed and angry with himself. “I’m fine, really. Just need a few to recover.”

He struggled to stand up again, putting his feet back under himself, and he stumbled hard as the world lurched.

“Okay, that’s it.”

April’s arm went under his, and she started supporting his weight despite their dramatic difference in size, and in strength. “I’m going to help you home, and then we are going to get you checked up, and I am not taking another ‘I’m fine’ as an answer. Are we clear?”

Raph scowled at her.

April didn’t back down.

Another moment glaring at April’s fierce blue eyes, and Raph huffed; glancing away. “Fine. Let’s just get going.”

“That’s the spirit.”
Leo twitched, hearing the turnstiles behind him. He turned his head, looking away from his video gaming session with his younger brothers. It was a treat, for having completed evening training so quickly and precisely.

Leo’s eyes widened, seeing his brother and April stumble down the steps together. Raph had one arm slung over her shoulders, and it looked like he’d been in a serious fight.

That was definitely dried blood on Raph’s cheek, crusted around a cut there. His lip was split too, a smear of faint brown around the area.

Leo leapt up from the floor, followed quickly by Donnie and Mikey.

“Raph- good god, what happened to you?” Leo asked, doing a rushed once over of his brother as he took him from April. Donnie and Mikey swarmed him similarly, sharp trills and concerned clicks filling the air.

“Raph got beat up by a lab monkey!” April exclaimed, looking fairly harried herself.

Leo furrowed his brow. A lab monkey? Seriously?? Not the Foot? Or the Kraang? Or, you know, individuals who were actual threats?

April colored under Leo’s perplexed gaze. “Well, not really a monkey, since it obviously didn’t have a tail, and looked a lot more like a chimpanzee, so that probably means that it was an ape, not a monkey-”

“April, can you get us some ice?” Leo said calmly, cutting his friend’s rambling off. April snapped her mouth shut, and jerked a nod; running off towards the kitchen.

Leo helped his groaning brother onto the couch, and let Raph lay against the cushions. He stepped back, getting a better look at Raph’s injuries. Though with him out of the way, Mikey and Donnie took his place; their hands fluttering around the shallow cuts and bruises across their brother’s scales.

“Raph, tell me right now, are you going to be alright?” Leo asked, studying his closest brother’s reactions.

“Ngh, yeah, I’ll be fine,” Raph grumbled, half-heartedly pushing Donnie’s hand from his cut cheek. “Just gotta rest up, and I’ll be good.”

“Well, in that case-” Leo burst out laughing, his cheeks already starting to hurt. “You- you- ohmygod- I can’t believe you let yourself get beat up by a monkey of all things!”

“It was a fucking ape!” Raph snapped, curling his lip at Leo. “And just so you know, it was a pretty vicious mutant too.”

“Oh, oh I’m sure it was!” Leo choked on his own laughter, his sides aching. “I’m sure he- he went bananas!”

“Leo!”

Leo’s laughter cut off, Donnie’s furious glare suddenly trained on him.

“This is not funny!” Donnie hissed, radiating anger. Mikey nodded resolutely beside him, clearly in agreement with Donnie. “Raph is hurt, and you laugh?”
“I- well-” Leo floundered, caught off guard. “-he’s fine, he said he is!”

Donnie growled low in his throat, and put a hand on Raph’s scratched plastron. “He is ours, and someone has hurt him. I- we- are angry. Should be angry. Why not you?”

Leo glanced between Donnie and Mikey, finding twin expressions of outrage. He looked to Raph for some sort of support- but Raph seemed as off-balanced as Leo was.

“I. I don’t know. I just sorta thought it was… funny,” Leo said, finishing lamely.

Donnie hissed, baring his teeth. “Hurt family is never funny.”

“Never,” Mikey agreed, sidling closer to Raph and Donnie.

Leo stared at his clustered brothers, tightly knit around Raph, and he felt… excluded, and called out by his brothers.

Well. Fair enough. Their brother getting hurt wasn’t funny, but still…

Actually… Donnie had a point there.

In hindsight, Raph getting bloodied and bruised wasn’t very funny at all.

“Sorry, Raph,” Leo said, feeling ashamed of his juvenile behaviour.

“Uh, apology accepted,” Raph said, clearly surprised by Leo’s words.

April reappeared with an icepack in hand, and she gave them all a weird look. “What’s with the silence and staring, guys? Shouldn’t someone be getting master Splinter?”

“I- yes. Mikey, would you please go get him?” Leo asked his brother, glancing at Mikey; who was still hovering within touching distance of Raph.

“The rat?”

Leo sighed. “Yes, the ‘rat’. Go find him, and tell him we need the medical kit.”

Mikey nodded, and gave Raph one last comforting pat before he scurried off. April slid into the spot Mikey had vacated on the couch, and handed Raph the icepack.

“Your sight any better?” She asked, giving him an appraising look.

“Mm, yeah. Can see straight and everything,” Raph replied, shrugging as he pressed the ice to a particularly bad bruise on his temple. He hissed- low and very much like their brothers did- as he held the cold pack to his scales. “Man, I fuckin’ hate these things. Takes forever to warm up afterwards.”

Leo hummed sympathetically, and opened his mouth to tell Raph that they’d get him some tea after this, but Donnie’s sudden and jerky movement stopped him. Leo turned his attention on his suddenly leaving brother. “And just where do you think you’re going?”

Donnie turned back to Leo, and Leo’s thoughts stuttered for a moment. Donnie’s eyes were whited out, and the air of rage he had was unsettling. Fingers twitching, and his claws acting like they wanted to be tearing into something already.

“Revenge,” Donnie said clearly, annunciating the word without a hint of trouble. “For Raph, for us.”
“What- no, you can’t just go charging off on your own,” Leo said, stepping towards Donnie. “And besides, our family…”

He trailed off, finding that the words he’d meant to say weren’t true anymore. After all, Leo himself wanted payback at certain people for slights they’d done against his family.

Leo shook his head, banishing that bit of wavering confidence. “Never mind. Just. stay here, alright? We need to consult master Splinter first, at least. And don’t you want to keep an eye on Raph still?”

Donnie’s eyelids flicked open, and Leo read the conflicting interests clearly in his posture.

Raph tipped the scales, sitting up properly and looking at Donnie seriously. “I’m fine, Donnie. Don’t get yourself worked up about it. I’ll get my own revenge later.”

Leo sighed again, looking at the ceiling above.

“And besides, do you even know where to go?”

Donnie grimaced, and finally eased out of the furious and predatory stance he’d taken. “No.” He said, clearly annoyed that he didn’t.

“Well there you go then,” Raph said in finality, laying back against the couch and holding his icepack again. “You’re staying here.”

Donnie scoffed, and reluctantly returned to the couch. He crouched next to Raph again, and ignored Raph’s protests against him examining the wounds over his body.

Leo was glad that their father appeared soon after that, medical kit in hand and Mikey scampering along beside him on all fours.

Chapter End Notes

Much relationships. Such wow.
Everyone is awkward and such wussies about being nice to each other,
aaaaaahhhhhmy kids, my god damn kids. I love writing the intricacies of relationships,
has anyone noticed this? Ha ha.

But guys, guuuuuuuuuuuusu- ohmygod, twenty chapters!!! Twenty whole chapters of
my personalized nonsense!
That you! All! Read! For some reason!!!

Ha ha, but seriously, thanks for over two hundred kudos, and for sticking around so long!
I’m sleep deprived and just. really happy you all read my shit. So happy. So very very happy.

Leave me nice comments below, please please, since its nearly christmas and I have So Much Holiday Stress to deal with! I could use some nice words from nice people, about
my dumb fanfics!

In conclusion, thanks, and congrats to DD for hitting a whole Twenty Chapters! (ﾉ◕ヮ◕)ﾉ*:・ﾟ✧
“-and I know it sounds crazy, but that’s probably why the ape reacted so badly to Raph.”

Leo nodded, eyes skimming over the digital pages of April’s laptop screen. “Raph gets angry about anything really, I’m not surprised he got frustrated during the fight.”

“Yep, and an empathic creature probably wouldn’t enjoy that sort of vibe,” April agreed. She clicked up another couple of articles, and the series of equations displayed made Leo’s head hurt. “Where is he anyways, we should tell him what I figured out here.”

“In room,” Mikey supplied, popping up from across the table; where he’d been recollecting his spilled marble bag. “Raph’s hiding ‘gain.”

Leo rolled his eyes, knowing Mikey was likely right. “He’s sulking. He always does that after he loses a fight. I’ll go get him in a moment here, since we need to take care of this right away. I don’t like the idea of a hostile monkey-”

“Ape,” April corrected.

“-a hostile *ape* running around unchecked,” Leo finished, standing up from his kitchen stool. “It might attack someone again, and it probably won’t be someone who can take the punishment like my brother can.”

April nodded, a series expression replacing her focused and curious one from earlier; when she’d first started sorting through the flash-drive’s notes. “The sooner we catch him, the sooner we can get him to safety.”

Leo raised an eye ridge at his friend. “Safety? It’s the one going around attacking people; the ape’s the one who’s dangerous here.”

“Animals don’t fight unless they have reason, and Raph’s the one who provoked him,” April defended, sitting straighter as she looked at Leo. “I don’t know why he approached us, but he didn’t attack until Raph did. Seems like self-defence to me.”
“Like ninjutsu?” Mikey piped up, dropping his bag of marble onto the table as he sat back onto his stool.

April smiled at Leo’s younger brother. “Sort of like that, yeah. You only hurt people who hurt you first, right Mikey?”

Mikey tilted his head, considering the question. He shrugged. “Sometime? Hurting family too, hurting them for hurting us.”

Leo recalled the words Donnie had said earlier, about wanting revenge for Raph, and for ‘us’. So, the ‘us’ in the equation was their family. Interesting.

Leo left his friend and brother to their conversation, April patiently deciphering Mikey’s replies and explaining her words to him.

A part of Leo was occasionally embarrassed about that, his younger brothers having such basic speech patterns and childlike words. Of course, it couldn’t be helped, seeing as they were still just learning. But still…

He tried to not let that part of himself overwhelm the other parts, like his pride for how fast his brothers were learning. He hoped that by thinking of only one of those things, he’d forget that the other ever existed.

He didn’t like that part of himself very much, not lately. It sounded so… condescending.

He’d been trying to rid himself of it. It wasn’t working as well as he would have liked.

Leo rapped his knuckles on Raph’s door, and waited for an answer. At Raph’s muffled “c’mon in”, Leo opened the door.

Raph was leaning on the headboard of his bed, with Spike settled in his lap. The bruises on his scales were fully formed now, and the few bandages that’d been applied stuck out badly. Raph’s gaze however, was steady and clear again. He must’ve been feeling better then.

“What?” Raph asked, a grumble in his tone.

“April figured out the files, and we’re heading out now. That monkey-”

“Ape.”

“-right, ape. Anyways, It needs to be caught before it does damage to anyone else,” Leo smirked at his brother, leaning on the door frame. “Not everyone can hold up to that sort of attack like you can, or has as much practice doing so.”

Raph narrowed his eyes. “I can’t tell if that was a compliment or an insult.”

“Hm, we may never know.”

“Man, fuck you. Get out of my room, I’ll be ‘round in a few,” Raph slowly slid off his bed, swinging his legs onto the floor while cradling Spike.

“Sure, just hurry up, alright? We still have to figure out how we’re all going to stay in contact while we search.”

“I… I may have an idea for that.”
Leo paused, halfway through shutting the door. He pushed it back open, looking at his brother questioningly. “You do?”

Raph finished settling Spike back into his terrarium, but held off turning around. Leo read some hesitance in his posture, and raised an eye ridge.

“Raph? What’s your idea?”

“It’s… ah, fuck it. Get everyone together; I’ll only explain it just the once.”

“Everyone listen up!” Raph said, crossing his arms and glaring at his assembled family, plus their friend. “I’m only going to explain this once, and no more.”

“We know,” Leo replied dryly.

“You said so three times already,” April added, just as dryly.

“You did,” Mikey agreed, nodding along.

Donnie didn’t say anything, not looking at Raph at all.

Raph scowled at the other four people on the roof top. “Alright wise guys, next person who interrupts gets to be the demonstration subject.”

“Demonstration?” Leo asked, wrinkling his snout.

Raph grinned with all his teeth. He had a volunteer then.

“Stop looking at me like that, what do you mean ‘demonstration’?”

“You’ll see, just give me a minute here,” Raph said, giving his brother leering grin. He only smiled wider at Leo’s uncomfortable grimace. Stepping away from the group, Raph walked towards the edge of the roof.

He bent, and reached down the side of the older apartment building. A moment later, and he felt something fluffy and alive flutter into his hand. He stood up, bringing the small avian close to his plastron.

Checking over his shoulder, Raph pushed down on his embarrassment about showing his family this part of himself.

“Is that a pigeon?” Leo asked, looking skeptically at Raph’s feathered friend. “Raph, why are you holding a pigeon. How does this help us.”

“I said, you’ll see,” Raph said again, his mood turning to annoyance. Leo held up his hands, and gave him an unimpressed look.
Raph sighed, and mentally prepared himself for what might happen next. Mocking, maybe severe teasing, the like.

Taking a breath, he made something between a rumble and a coo at the small bird in his hands; the sound traveling through his throat and plastron both.

He felt the gazes of his family- and April- but he kept at it anyways.

The pigeon bumped its head against his thumb, cooing its own reply. He pet it again, cooing low and long back to it. Another head butt from the pigeon, and it took off into the air.

Raph stood up, and crossed his arms; refusing to act ashamed of what they’d just seen him do, even if he... sorta was…

April was watching the pigeon fly away- same as Donnie and Mikey- while Leo was giving him another look. Leo crossed his own arms, and mirrored Raph. “So. You talk to pigeons now. Wonderful. Again, how does that help us?”

Raph covered up his embarrassment with another sharp grin. “Just wait for it, and you’ll get it.”

Donnie, Mikey, and April- who were still watching where the pigeon had gone- widened their eyes. Leo however, scoffed, and rolled his eyes. “Raph, we don’t have time for your jokes. We have to find the monkey-”

“Ape.” Raph and April corrected together, echoed by Donnie.

“-it doesn’t matter what it is!” Leo exclaimed, throwing his arms up. “We just have to find it before someone gets hurt-!”

He cut off with a shriek, as a hoard of pigeons descended on him.

Raph laughed loudly, watching his eldest brother run around the roof; Leo swatting uselessly at the flock Raph had instructed to attack him. April was snickering behind her hands, while Mikey and Donnie were all but busting a gut.

Leo ran behind Raph, using him as a shield against the onslaught. “I take it back! They’ll be very very helpful- just call them off!”

Raph laughed again, and rolled a loud click to call off his pigeons. They settled down, dropping onto his outstretched arms and the rooftop.

“So, is this what you do now?” April asked, holding her hand out for a pigeon to alight onto it. She pet it’s back; gentle and slow, like someone was supposed to do with a bird. “Training attack pigeons?”

Raph shrugged, making the birds on his shoulders flutter their wings. “Something like that, just when I needed some alone time. Leo, you know that pizza guy in our neighborhood? I had to get a bit creative with distracting him from his deliveries.”

Leo was still shooing birds off of him, and trying to avoid the ones milling around their feet. “I can see that. So what, we use the birds to attack the mon- ape! I said ape!” Leo exclaimed hurriedly, before anyone could correct him again.

“Not quite. I was thinking we use them as a way to keep track of his position from above,” Raph lifted his arms higher, signalling the pigeons to take flight again. They flew upwards, and then
dropped back onto the roof. “They’re not good for real damage, but they’re dependable for a
distraction and a tracking device- which is partially why I started training them in the first place.
They’re really smart, even if not many people think so.”

Raph sort of related to them on that, since he knew Leo and their father had never really thought of
him as ‘smart’. Just… handy, on the occasion.

“I’ll believe it, and they’re pretty cute too,” April said affectionately, still petting her pigeon. “And so
tame, how’d you manage that?”

“All pigeons are tame, you just have to win their trust,” Raph said, preening under the general praise
aimed towards him. “It only took a little while, plus… I used a few, uh, tricks that Donnie and Mikey
taught me. And speaking of- Mikey, take the bird out of your mouth.”

Mikey paused, holding his mouth open around the head of a docile pigeon in his hands. “Ahhh?”

“Now, Mikey. They’re my pigeons, not your midnight snack.”

Mikey pouted, but released the pigeon with minimal fuss. Not ---- want ------- ---- tasty

“I don’t care if they’re tasty, they’re mine and you can’t eat them,” Raph said, letting the rescued
pigeon land on his shoulder. “That goes for you too, Donnie.”

A pause, and then Donnie grumbled loudly, revealing the pigeon he’d been hiding behind his back.
Raph held out his hand, and didn’t miss the extra frustration Donnie aimed at him as he gave the
pigeon over.

With his pigeons secured, and Raph looked around at the group. “Right then, what’s the next step? I
have tracking covered, what else do we need to talk about?”

“Well, there’s the fact that while we have following the mon-” Leo glared at everyone who opened
their mouths. “the ape around, we haven’t covered how we’ll find each other. It’ll be too easy for us
to get separated, plus we need to signal one another somehow…”

“Ooh! Ooh! Me! Have idea!” Mikey exclaimed, waving his arm wildly. Leo gestured for Mikey to
continue, and Mikey opened his mouth to- then shut it, looking frustrated all of a sudden. “Hnnnn…
not know word. Fuck. Donnie, Donnie Donnie Donnie- word? ‘lease??”

Donnie bent, as apparently asked, and let Mikey click and trill rapidly into his ear. Donnie nodded a
couple times as Mikey kept talking, and then stood back up as Mikey broke off from their group.
“Mikey will show, ‘kay? Faster, better than words.”

Raph watched as Mikey hopped off the building he’d brought them all too, and reappeared the next
one over. Mikey dodged and leapt fearlessly between buildings, and kept going until he vanished
from sight.

“Um… he knows what he’s doing, right?” Leo asked, sending a vaguely concerned look after their
brother.

“Is fine, he knows,” Donnie said, waving Leo’s concerns off. “Will show soon, just waiting now.”

Raph waited, same as everyone else, for the two ferals to explain themselves. A few minutes passed,
and Raph started fidgeting irritably with his pigeons. At least their soft feathers distracted him enough
that he didn’t try to question Donnie; he had a feeling his brother wasn’t open to conversation with
him at the moment.
April had started fussing with her phone, and Leo begun acting like he *really* wanted to ask again what was happening—when a long sound rose over the roof tops.

Donnie perked up; facing the direction the sound came from. Raph himself though, his senses prickled oddly at the call.

His pigeons fluttered nervously, anxious coos coming up from the whole flock as the howls continued.

Not quite low, and not quite high; a warbling howl floated through the night sky, reaching Raph’s ears just fine. Even if he hadn’t seen Mikey leave, he would have been able to tell; it was definitely Mikey making that sound, long and short howls mixing together in the evening air.

Raph saw Leo and April jump— as Donnie returned the howls with his own. A slight difference in pitch, but very similar to Mikey’s calls. They weren’t super loud— not like the echoing screams the two of them could make— but their howls carried through the wind and traffic noises regardless.

It made something in Raph twitch, and wake up.

April had her hands over her ears, watching wide eyed. Leo seemed caught by surprise, and somewhat spellbound by the exchanges of calls. Another short one from Mikey, and Donnie went silent. He turned back to the group, seeming satisfied with himself. “See? Is good, will work fine. Calls, yells, can hear fine, yes?”

April took her hands off her ears slowly. “Um, I certainly heard you fine. I think the whole neighborhood did.”

Leo was scratching the back of his neck, still staring at Donnie. “I… I think that’ll work pretty well, yep. I suppose we’ll divide into pairs, and use you two to communicate our positions then. Or… just follow you both if we get separated again. I’ll take Mikey, you and Raph—”

“No,” Donnie said, cutting Leo off. He glanced at Raph, and Raph spotted the frustration again in his eyes. “Me with you, Mikey with Raph.”

“Oh, uh, sure…?”

Raph looked down at the pigeon in his hands, and brushed a hand over its ruffled feathers. Guess Donnie was still upset, then.

Mikey reappeared then—clambering up over the roof’s edge, and rejoining their group with a series of excited trills. Donnie and him exchanged forehead touches, and short purrs. Raph ignored the momentary glance Donnie gave him, feeling more than seeing the meaning behind it.

“Well, since that’s all settled,” Leo clapped his hands, drawing everyone’s attentions to him. “Guess we’ll get on with the search then.”
“It’s nonlethal only, got it Donnie?” Leo stressed again to his brother, the two of them perched on top of a building’s ledge together. “We’re here to catch it, not kill it. Promise me you won’t kill it, please?”

Donnie huffed, and rolled his eyes. “Yes yes, not kill only catch. Boring slow dumb- but yes will catching only. Happy?”

“Essentially, yes,” Leo said, nodding. He’d keep an eye on his brother anyways, same as he’d told Raph to do with Mikey. They didn’t need any slip ups here. “You ready?”

Donnie’s white eyelids slid down, and he grinned sharply. “Very.”

Leo returned the grin with his own smaller, and considerably less wild one. “Let’s go then.”

April had located the last place the ape had been seen, and that’d given them a general area to start searching. Raph and Mikey had circled to the other side and started there, while Leo and Donnie had taken the opposite. April was riding straight through, carrying a pigeon with a bright string on its foot; just in case she needed help, it would fly directly to Raph and lead them to her.

It wasn’t full proof, but it was the best they had.

Leo skimmed over the roof tops, Donnie following seamlessly- or was Leo following him? He couldn’t tell, their paces matching evenly and near in time.

Though, Donnie on and off used his arms to run too; getting a slight advantage whenever they hit odd leveled buildings. Leo made up for it with his training, but he could definitely feel the difference in their abilities.

At least they were getting a chance to test Donnie and Mikey’s tracking skills in the field; that’d been something their father had been considering for a while now.

Leo caught a flash of movement up ahead, and saw a cloud of pigeons appear a few streets to the left of them. He moved the same time as Donnie- changing direction and zeroing in on the rapidly moving flock.

In the distance, Leo heard Mikey’s signalling howl. Their brothers had seen the flock, and were heading towards it too. Donnie’s answering call signalled their own positions, and hearing his two younger brothers communicate like that-

-something flickered on in Leo’s brain, and he found himself grinning.

Donnie’s shreking howls only encouraged that grin, and as the two of them raced across the rooftops- catching sight of a retreating creature below on the streets- Leo found himself getting caught up in things.

His heart thundered, and his breathing sped up. He felt sharper somehow- more keened than he usually was during a mission.

The mutant they were pursuing changed course again- the flock of pigeons still following its movements- and Leo heard again Mikey’s howl a ways away. Donnie answered- short and harsh- as they changed directions once more.

Leo’s legs burned, his lungs expanding further to take in more oxygen. He leapt with Donnie- clearing gaps between buildings easily. He didn’t know who was leading who anymore- and he didn’t care.
Leo grinned, and ran like the wind.

He felt-

He felt *alive*.

Excited, exhilarated, *ecstatic*.

He’d always tightly controlled himself- every movement, every sound- during missions. Now though-

He felt himself losing that control, and it felt like he’d shed some sort of burdening weight.

Was this how Raph felt? Or Donnie and Mikey? Loose and wild and *free*.

It felt-

Donnie howled again, the sound carrying through the whole of the sky.

*-it felt-*

Leo’s heart rate spiked, and he sucked in a deep breath.

*-it felt amazing-*

Leo let out a howl of his own, gleeful and unhindered.

It only took a moment- and then Donnie joined him.

They chased the mutant below, running faster and faster as they tried to capture it. Leo vaguely noted that Mikey’s responding howls were getting closer, and that the pigeons were leading them in a circle now.

The kept up the pursuit, chasing-*hunting* the mutant, unrelenting as they followed it.

Leo spotted across the roofs, that Mikey and Raph had also tightened the chase- narrowing the mutant’s path into a single area.

Donnie and Mikey howled at the sight of each other, and another one ripped itself out of Leo’s own throat.

Any other time- any other night- Leo would have been mortified.

But then, in that pulse racing, heart pounding moment-

He didn’t give a damn.

Leo raced along the roofs, following and leading his brothers, and let himself go.

All that mattered right now-

-*the four of them, together on a mission for real-*

-*racing, running, hunting and communicating with one another-*

-*all that mattered now-*
April peddled fast as she could, following the birds in the sky, as well as the hair-raising calls sounding around her.

The chase had gone zero to sixty so fast her head had spun, the boys suddenly signalling that they were on the move- and then very much going on the move.

She’d barely had time to start catching up, when they switched directions again.

Thank god they were so loud; otherwise she might’ve lost them a long while ago.

Though, she could have done without the spine-chilling howls the feral brothers were making. They triggered something in the far back of April’s brain, causing it to practically scream ‘get away! get away!’ every time she heard them.

April fought with the flight instincts clouding her mind, and pushed onwards.

Primal instincts be damned, she was keeping up with the four brothers whether her screaming muscles liked it or not. She trusted them with her life, yes- but not so much with an escaped lab experiment. Specifically the younger two, seeing as their morals were much looser.

April spotted the pigeon flock again, and pushed her legs to sweep her bike around the corner and head towards it.

She skidded to a halt- finally- making the pigeon on her shoulder flutter away. The boys had all gathered in an intersection, prowling around its center and glancing off in different directions.

There was that pesky self-preservation instinct again, blaring loudly at her as she tried to catch her breath.

Donnie and Mikey especially, the two of them shifting around and turning their whited eyes towards anything that moved. They looked startlingly similar to the first night she’d met them- dangerous, and very predatory. They weren’t howling anymore, but April caught bits of hissed conversation between them. Not a lick of English to be heard.

Leo and Raph weren’t excluded from the mood either, it seemed. Their postures were wary, and they were looking around just as observantly at their younger siblings. They hadn’t drawn their weapons, but April saw how Raph’s fingers were twitching towards his sais; practically heard the growling under his breath.

Leo on the other hand, was smiling. Nearly bouncing as he paced around.

April hadn’t seen that sort of smile on Leo before. It was a bit… unsettling.

The whole scene was a bit unsettling, if she were to be honest.
April squared her shoulders though, and got off her bike; approaching the collection of mutants without letting her momentary uncertainty show.

They were her friends; she didn’t have anything to be afraid of.

“Lose the trail?” April asked the brothers.

Raph grumbled, cracking his knuckles. “Yeah. Pigeons did too, which fucking sucks.”

“Hm, well we’ll just keep looking anyways,” Leo said in a chipper tone, still bouncing on his heels. “It can’t have gotten far from here; we had it cornered just a moment ago.”

April glanced around the intersection, looking down the streets leading from it. The brothers started talking amongst themselves, and it sounded like they were headed for bickering again; none of them agreeing which direction to go next.

She kept looking, until- April’s eyes settled on a dumpster, just a half block from the intersection.

Ah. There.

Something bumped into her side, and she glanced over to find Mikey also staring in the same direction.

He looked up at her, and softly growled as he darted glances at the dumpster. April put a hand on his hunched back, and nodded. “I know, I’m getting a feeling too. Stay here, I’ll be right back.”

April stepped away from Mikey, and the rest of their group, and made her way over to the large dumpster. She heard the bickering behind her continue, though the niggling feeling in the back of her head made it quieter.

April gripped the edge of the dumpster, and slowly eased in open.

There, curled on himself in the reeking darkness, was the mutant ape.

April’s eyes skittered over the way he was holding his head, and how the metal manacles around his limbs had rubbed raw patches into his thick hair.

April’s heart twinged, as the mutant hiding for his life slowly uncovered his eyes, and looked fearfully up at her. A soft hooting, rather than the enraged snarling up till now, came from him. A tentative, and cautious greeting to her.

April smiled fearlessly, and held out a hand.

She wanted to help him, that was all.

A moment of hesitation, and the ape mutant took her offered hand.

April stepped backwards, giving him space to clamber out of the dumpster. Up close once again, she took in how large he really was. Hunched and leaning on his knuckles, and the mutant in front of her came up to her shoulders even like that.

Something passed through the air between them, something April couldn’t identify, then-

A chain snaked through the air, wrapping its weighted repeatedly around the ape. April retreated from the snarling, panicking creature, and felt her back meet something hard.
She glanced up, and found Donnie right behind her. He looked down at her, and put a hand on her shoulder; forcing April to move behind him and his brothers.

“Great, so we got the ape. But we’re still not any closer to finding Doctor Rockwell,” Raph said in a put upon tone. April glanced around Donnie’s side to see the elder brother, and could already see the building need for violence in Raph’s posture. “Guess we could kill some time by-”

“Wait!” April exclaimed, pushing past Donnie. She stood between them and the mutant ape, spreading her arms defensively. “Don’t hurt him!”

That move got a round of confused looks aimed her way. Leo stepped forwards first, still holding the length of throwing chain taut. “We- well, we weren’t planning to hurt it per say-”

“Yes I was,” Raph refuted, crossing his arms. “I’m pissed and there’s a lump on the back of my head. Lemme at ‘im.”

“-okay so Raph might’ve been planning to-”

“Me too,” Donnie growled, curling his lip and glaring at the mutant behind April.

Leo sighed loudly. “So both Donnie and Raph were planning to- but we’re not really! It’d be wrong, since we already captured it, and its… well, it’s just an animal.”

“Maybe… maybe not, actually,” April said, turning to look over her shoulder. The chained mutant stopped struggling as she looked into his eyes, and the wild frenzy slowly left his expression. April’s heart twinged again, and something finally slotted into place in her head; confirming her suspicions. “I think… I think this is where Doctor Rockwell went. He… he’s been mutated.”

Mikey rolled his favorite new possession between his fingers, staring intently at the colorful center of the marbell in his hand. It reflected the lights from below, and made the oranges and reds inside it look like fire.

Mikey smiled to himself, and tucked it away into his belt pocket again. Lee-oh had given him the collection of little round stones a few days ago, and Mikey hadn’t let go of them ever since. Lee-oh had said that he himself had once played with them, when he was much smaller, and he’d thought Mikey would appreciate them.

Mikey did appreciate them. He thought they were wonderful.

He should find something to give to Lee-oh in return, but Mikey wasn’t sure what. Maybe he’d ask Raf later on, since he probably knew Lee-oh best out of them all…

Mikey glanced over his shoulder, towards the only other person on the roof with him.

Donnie was off to the side, hunched over his knees and staring moodily into nothing. He’d been moody all night, ever since Raf had come home beaten and bloody. Was it because the creature
they’d caught had escaped revenge? But ‘pril and Lee-oh had said that the ayp wasn’t to be hurt anymore… since he’d been a human once…

Mikey still didn’t understand that. How did a human turn into something completely different? It made no sense.

And he agreed with Donnie and Raf, revenge had been needed, but not gotten. Maybe that’s why Donnie was still so moody.

Mikey left the edge of the roof, and quietly approached his brother.

Donnie didn’t acknowledge him as Mikey sidled over, and only grumbled when Mikey bumped his head against Donnie’s shoulder.

Hm. Weird.

Why upset? Mikey asked, leaning against Donnie’s side.

Not upset, Donnie clicked petulantly.

Hmmmmmm… lying, Mikey said, rubbing his cheek against Donnie’s scales. Lying lying lyyyyying

Donnie grumbled again, a soft growl coming from his plastron. Mikey ignored that though, pushing against Donnie again. Donnie protested, but it was half-hearted at best, and Mikey kept pushing his brother until Donnie lay back.

With Donnie propped against a metal structure on the roof, Mikey slid into his lap, and looked Donnie straight in the eye. Now telling no hiding why upset?

Donnie sighed, and slid his eyes away. Mikey frowned, seeing his brother so frustrated with something.

…am mad at Raf, Donnie admitted after a long moment.

Ah, so that’s what it was.

How come? Mikey questioned.

Donnie shrugged, and leaned forwards to press his forehead against Mikey’s chest. Stupid reason just frustrated with him…

You you’re upset, not stupid then

Mmmmmggh…

Donnie, Mikey said seriously, resting his chin on top of Donnie’s back of skull. Just tell me, why upset?

…Raf refused care-comfort-love, said ‘leave me alone’,” Donnie said, switching to English with the last bit. Am ‘pissed’ with Raf

Mikey hummed sympathetically, turning his cheek to Donnie’s scales and rubbing them slowly. Lee-oh does too says no no no to care-comfort-love lots, every time all the time

Confusing… both so confusing… Donnie trilled quietly.
Mikey hummed again, turning the sound into a comforting purr.

He understood that feeling well. All he felt lately was confused. Rules and words and too many new and difficult things to keep learning.

He felt like the rat was disappointed in him sometimes, for not learning faster. Same with his older, English speaking brothers. Donnie was doing fine though, which was good.

At least Mikey was praised during *training*, he was good at that still.

He heard sounds coming up the side of the roof, and he turned his eyes towards it. *Lee-oh* waved at them, telling them to follow along. They must have finished dropping off the not-human and not-quite-right creature with his human. Time to go then.

*Time to go,* Mikey relayed to Donnie, leaning back from their half-cuddle. Donnie grumbled, but followed anyways.

As they dropped onto the ground again, Mikey saw the way *Raf* focused on Donnie in particular for a moment. Then, same as how Donnie was, he looked away and wouldn’t look back.

Mikey sighed to himself.

He agreed with Donnie; so, so confusing.

“I’m sorry we didn’t find anything about your father, April,” Leo said honestly to his friend. The lab and Rockwell had been dead ends, and when they’d left the building, Leo had caught a flash of exhaustion in April’s expression.

That exhaustion was gone now though, replaced by her serious thinking face. “Mm, it’s alright. Every piece of the puzzle gets us closer to just what the Kraang are,” She replied absently, still focused on her laptop screen.

“Still though… psychic research?” Leo shook his head. He hadn’t understood a lick of what had happened that evening, including his momentary… lapse, in self-control. “This is one weird puzzle. It’s just one thing after another.”

“Mmmmyup,” April replied vaguely.

Leo rolled his eyes, and returned to eating his pizza. Raph had broken off from their group on the way back, claiming that he felt like getting a bit of alone time, and had returned with a pizza around the same time they got home.

He’d had a smug expression, and Leo hadn’t needed to guess where he’d gotten the pie from. Or why there were feathers clinging to Raph’s scales for that matter.

(“*You used the pigeons on the delivery guy, again??*”)
And on that topic; his brother talked to birds now, fantastic. Though, Leo really didn’t have much of a leg to stand on, considering what’d happened during the hunt- the chase earlier.

He hadn’t commented again on Raph’s pigeons, and Raph hadn’t mentioned anything about Leo’s… behaviour.

They’d all drifted their own ways after pizza was dished out, leaving the kitchen mostly empty. Mikey and Donnie were absent from the room, same as Raph; all gone wherever they’d had things to do. It was just Leo and April, until she finished her late dinner and went home. It was nice, sharing space with someone as polite and quiet as April.

Speaking of quiet and polite people-

Splinter glided through the kitchen, carrying a piece of pizza on a plate. Raph must have brought their father his share of the meal, and now Splinter likely wanted to reheat it. At the sound of Splinter opening the microwave, April glanced up from her computer for the first time since they got home.

“Oh, hey master Splinter,” April greeted, rubbing her eyes. “Um, quick question, does two hours or so of serious cardio make up for my missed lessons tonight? Asking for the sake of my well-being.”

“Oh, I would say so,” Splinter said, chuckling lightly at April’s query. He turned his warm brown eyes on her, while the microwave started humming away. “If I may, I have a question of my own for you.”

“Yeah? Go ahead.”

“How did you know that the monkey-”

“Ape,” April corrected, then flushing at Splinter’s raised eyebrow. “Sorry, it’s a habit. Please continue.”

“Well… as I was saying, I’m curious as to how you knew that the ape was the missing scientist,” Splinter asked again, good humor in his voice.

April glanced back at her computer screen, and shrugged vaguely. “I don’t know. Sometimes I just get… feelings, about things. Happens pretty rarely, but I do.”

“Hm, a feeling…” Splinter said thoughtfully, taking his plate of pizza from the microwave. “Interesting.”

Leo watched his father leave- Splinter slipping out the doorway without any sound once again- then turned his attention back to his very distracted friend. April’s pizza still sat only half finished beside her laptop. “Hey April, shouldn’t you finish eating? You said your Aunt wanted you home soon.”

“Hm? Oh, right right,” April said, eyes not leaving her computer screen. “Sorry, it’s just… something’s not lining up here.”

“What? What’s wrong?” Leo asked, getting up from his stool and circling the table to peer over April’s shoulder. Again, the equations and long paragraphs of research were above his level of understanding. “You find something about the Kraang?”

“No, it’s something else,” April said, shifting the digital pages on the screen to show three specific ones. “You remember how Falco said Rockwell was experimenting with a ‘monkey’?”
“Uh, yes?”

“Well, not only did he address the species wrong, but none of Rockwell’s notes indicate he ever had an ape,” April turned to Leo, looking deeply concerned. “He was only using DNA samples in his experiments, not any living animals at all.”

Leo scratched the back of his neck, struggling to read the tight print on screen. “I’m… still not following you here.”

“If he never had a live ape in his lab, then what broke out of that cage?” April asked, tone grave and suspicious.

Leo connected the pieces together, and scowled. “It must have been Rockwell in that cage, and that means—”

“-Falco’s the one who put him there, and he’s been lying to us this whole time!” April finished, an angry flush clouding her freckles. “Ugh, I can’t believe I fell for his lies! I had a bad feeling about him from the start, but I thought that was just ‘cause he’s such a slimy guy. We have to go rescue Rockwell right away, before Falco does something worse than just mutating him.”

Leo felt a twinge of something at April’s disdain for the word ‘mutating’, but he ignored it. He stood up from his lean, and nodded firmly. “I’ll get my brothers; you start running for your bike. We can’t have much time; it’s already been a half hour since we left them alone.”

April shut her computer, and abandoned it on the table top. The two of them left the kitchen without a glance back, and split up to gather what they needed.

Things had changed, now someone’s life was possibly on the line. Time was of the essence, and they didn’t have any to waste.

Leo retrieved his brothers from their rooms, and they only stopped for a brief moment to explain things to their father. Then, meeting up with April on the surface, they started racing for the laboratory they’d abandoned a helpless man in.

Leo and his brothers arrived first, April still a few blocks behind. But they’d known that would happen, and had told April that they’d meet her inside. She’d agreed, and told them to stop Falco whether she was there yet or not.

Leo and Raph left their younger siblings on the fire escape, firm instructions to not come into the building unless they were called; same as the last time they’d all been here. Leo wasn’t sure what they were walking into, and he didn’t want to risk his brothers’ safety by charging in blind.

When Leo and Raph burst into the lab, Falco was looming over Rockwell, and held an empty needle in his hands.

“Alright Falco-” Leo said, drawing the man’s attention. “-it’s over. We figured out what’s really going on, and we’re here to stop you. We know it was you who mutated Rockwell, and don’t think we’re leaving until he’s out of your hands.”

Raph cracked his knuckles loudly, sneering at the human in the lab coat. “I knew you were bad news, right from the fuckin’ start. Been wanting to do this all night, so now I’m gonna-”

“-smack the white off my lab coat?” Falco said, sneering right back at Leo’s brother. “Please, Raphael, surely you have something more intelligent to say here than that.”
Leo’s eyes widened, and he shifted into an attack stance the same time as Raph. “So it’s true, you really did give yourself psychic abilities. You’re one sick-”

“-minded individual, and a twisted one at that? And you’re too small minded, Leonardo,” Falco said, grinning condescendingly. “The benefits of my work on Doctor Rockwell far exceed any negatives, even with the trouble he’s caused me. The psychic neurochemical I extracted from his mutant brain has already started to change me, and you cannot begin to comprehend how it feels. Your minds-they’re opening up to me. I can see your every move, your every thought, before you even start to think.”

“So that was your plan all along,” Raph grit out. “Become a b-rate horror movie villain.”

Falco sneered again, splaying his hands as he did. “Of course this was my plan, though you’re too imbecilic to understand the worth of it. No man can defeat you when you can read his every thought.”

“Read this!” Raph shouted, suddenly charging at Falco. Leo followed, but was nearly knocked off his feet as Falco effortlessly turned Raph’s charge to his advantage; throwing Raph off balance, and sending him right into Leo’s path.

Leo dodged around Raph- knowing his brother was likely fine- and took a turn attacking Falco. Leo jabbed at the man’s vitals, looking to wind him- but Falco seemed to know exactly how to deflect each one. Leo’s balance was thrown off, as Falco took the force of his movements and threw him into a nearby table.

Leo recovered fast as he could, and heard Raph’s sais clang against something metal. Leo drew his own weapons, and threw himself back into the fight. Raph had already been fended off again- his sais taken and thrown far across the room- so that meant the gloves had to come off.

Leo sliced through the air, trying to be careful of which body parts he might sever from Falco- but the care was useless, since he couldn’t land a single hit. His swords kept missing- the blades whistling through the air without impact- and his frustration only grew as Falco laughed at his attempts.

Raph reappeared, trying for a choke lock around Falco’s neck, but Falco only used Raph to force Leo to back off. Leo only just got his swords out of the way, when Raph was thrown at him.

The two of them skidded over the floor, and Leo’s head hit something hard. He groaned, trying to grapple his bearings back, and attempted to push himself off the floor.

“You two are fools, still thinking you could do anything against me!” Falco exclaimed, still laughing at them. “And you- girl, hiding in the hallway, you’re just as much a fool!”

Leo heard April’s soft gasp of surprise, and knew his friend must have entered the building to back them up. Leo pushed himself up and off the floor, stubbornly ignoring the swimming of his head. If Falco was throwing him and Raph around without any trouble, Leo didn’t want to see what he could do to April.

Raph was upright again, and the two of them charge Falco once more.

Too fast- embarrassingly fast- Falco knocked them off their feet again. The man- it seemed his claims about psychic prowess had worth to them after all. No matter which attack Leo tried, including team attacks with Raph- Falco defeated each one without breaking a sweat.

“That’s right, Leonardo-” Falco said, rankling Leo once again by using his full name. “-there’s
nothing you can do. It would best if you and your brother gave up now-”

Falco broke off, the same time as twin growls filled the air.

Leo blearily turned his head, and he spotted, there in the doorway-

Donnie and Mikey, eyes whited out and teeth bared.

“No- no, guys wait-” Leo struggled to push himself up, vision filling with sparks. “-you have to run-
take April and go-”

“There are more of you freaks? What a nuisance,” Falco said disdainfully, stepping away from Leo
and Raph and towards their younger brothers. “I suppose what they say about vermin is true, where
there are few, there are many…”

Mikey snapped and hissed, down on all fours and looking furious. Donnie still stood on two legs, but
way he held himself was no less feral and angry.

“And what’s this? No English to speak of? How pathetic.”

“I speak fine,” Donnie ground out, voice guttural and low.

“Evidence stands to say otherwise, you freak of nature,” Falco laughed. He swept his hands out,
inviting a challenge from the two mutants across the room. “Do you think you’ll do any better than
these two? From the way your brothers are panicking right now, I’d say you won’t.”

Falco laughed again, then-

He stopped, and Leo saw a shift in his cocky posture.

“What? No- that’s not right,” He said, suddenly taking a step backwards. Donnie and Mikey
prowled further into the room, growls getting deeper and louder. “I can’t- what-? What’s wrong
with you two?!”

Leo pushed himself onto his elbows, and stared as his brothers advanced.

Mikey attacked first- shrieking an enraged cry and charging at Falco almost too quick to follow. Leo
expected his brother to miss his slashes- same as how Leo and Raph had- but-

Mikey’s blow landed, tearing a gash in Falco’s lab coat. He didn’t stop there, spinning into a
powerful kick that sent Falco flying into the wall.

Falco hit the ground, and shakily stood up; holding the reddening arm Mikey had caught. He spat a
gob of blood and saliva onto the tiled floor, having apparently bit his tongue. “You- you freaks, what
are you?!?”

Donnie took a turn attacking, darting forwards to grab Falco by his shirt- and slamming him against
the wall again. He did it twice more- Falco’s head leaving dents in the plaster- then turning and
tossing Falco across the lab. The human skidded on the tiles, and stopped close to where Leo was.

Falco pushed himself up once more, a ragged and unhinged laugh coming from him. “You- I can’t
read your thoughts at all! How is that even possible?”

He laughed again; sneering at Leo’s approaching brothers. “At least your brothers think like humans.
They might be freaks, but you-” Falco struggled as Donnie grabbed him again, lifting him off the
floor. The human’s nails scrabbled against Donnie’s arm guards, and Leo saw something close to
pure hatred in Falco’s eyes. “You two- you’re nothing like your brothers. They’re just freaks, but you-”

Leo’s eyes widened, seeing the furious insanity in Falco’s expression.

“-you’re monsters,” Falco hissed balefully.

“Shut. Up.” Donnie growled. He grabbed Falco’s neck, and slammed him into the lab’s floor. Falco wheezed, and was given no time to recover as Donnie started strangling him.

Leo finally snapped out of his shocked daze, and he hurriedly shoved himself off the ground. “Donnie- Donnie no-!”

Leo got his fumbling hands around Donnie’s shell edge, and he pulled his brother off the choking human. “We don’t kill, we never kill! I’ve told you this! He’s had enough, so just- just stop it!”

Falco coughed weakly, turning on his side. Mikey- pushing past Leo- kicked Falco again in the stomach. The wounded scientist choked as the air left his lungs, and Leo was forced to multitask holding onto both his murderous younger siblings. “Both of you- cut it out this instant! We’re done. Fighting!”

Mikey hissed, struggling to break free, and Donnie slapped Leo’s restraining hand away. Leo grabbed them both again, and hauled them back from Falco. “I don’t care if you two want to do this- it’s not right, and I won’t let you! So- Jesus-” Leo nearly took an elbow to the face, and he felt his tenuous patience snap. “BOTH OF YOU SETTLE DOWN RIGHT NOW!”

“Wha’s all the yelling about?” Raph asked woozily, finally pulling himself out from under the desk wreckage he’d landed in.

“I’m- Donnie seriously stop it right now- I’m trying to keep our brothers from killing Falco!” Leo managed to get out, struggling to keep his hold on both Donnie and Mikey. “A little help please?!”

“Wait- where’d Falco even go?”

Leo- as well as Donnie and Mikey- went still, staring at the spot where Falco had been just a moment ago.

“I- what??” Leo said, confusion mixing with his frustration. “He was right there! Where the heck did he go?”

Donnie took the opportunity then to wrench himself free of Leo’s grip- freeing Mikey as well in the process- and turning to glare with white eyes. “I had him, we had him! How could you how dare you-”

“You were going to kill him!” Leo exclaimed angrily. “I wasn’t going to just stand there and let you!”

“He deserved it,” Donnie hissed viciously. “He hurt you!”

“Death is never the right punishment!” Leo refuted. “Our family doesn’t kill, and you’re a part of this family, so I’m not going to let you do that sort of thing anymore!”

“What the fuck did I miss,” Raph grumbled under his breath; hauling himself off the ground, holding his head as he did.
“And because you went overboard—” Leo jabbed a finger at the spot where Falco had been. “—Falco got away! It’s your fault.”

“He deserved it, deserved killing—”

“WE DO NOT KILL,” Leo shouted, raising his voice so loud it hurt. “Under no circumstances do you EVER kill someone, UNDERSTOOD?”

Donnie hissed, clenching his fists and glaring at Leo.

“I said, understood?” Leo repeated, his words becoming an angry hiss at the end.

Donnie curled his lip, and was about to answer—

“Um, hey guys?” April said, interrupting the fight. Leo and his brothers all looked at her, and April winced at the collective of stares. “Sorry, just wanted to know if it was safe to come in now.”

Leo closed his eyes, and wrestled with his anger. He opened his eyes again, and breathed out a harsh rush of air. “Yeah, it’s safe. Come on in.”

He stepped away from Donnie, and felt too tired to respond to the glare Donnie was still giving him.

April walked cautiously into the room, picking her way across to them. She gave Leo a once over, and raised an eyebrow. “Whoa, he sure gave you two a run for your money. You all alright?”

Leo shrugged, feeling his minor injuries worse now that the adrenaline was dying down. “I’ll be fine, and Donnie and Mikey didn’t even get scratched.”

“I’m fine too, if anyone cares,” Raph said, rejoining their group.

“Glad to hear it,” April said, sounding sincere. She glanced around the lab, and her eyes landed on something behind Leo. “So, what do we do with Rockwell?”

Leo turned, and found Mikey already fussing with the locks on the ape mutant’s limbs. Before anyone could stop him—both him’s—Mikey popped the cuffs open, and Rockwell leapt out of his restraining chair.

The other mutant didn’t attack though, instead rushing to the partially opened window. Rockwell paused, glancing back at them all. But only for a moment, and a second later, Rockwell threw himself out the window and disappeared outside.

“Well, I guess that answers my question,” April said, a short huff coming from her. “It’s not like we had somewhere else to take him anyways, there isn’t exactly a sanctuary for accidentally mutated humans.”

“Wait, if he reacts to angry thoughts, is New York really the best place for him?” Raph asked, glancing after Rockwell’s escape.

Leo thought he heard the sound of a crashing car outside, and angry yelling, but he shrugged it off. “Eh, I think he’ll be fine. He was doing alright before we caught him.”

Mikey wandered over to the open window, and started chuckling at whatever was happening below on street level. Leo chose to not investigate what that was.

He sighed, feeling blooming bruises everywhere on his body. What he wanted right now was a long, ferociously hot shower. But, he had to get his human friend and his brothers back home first.
He turned to address April- about how late it had gotten- and he found his friend holding Rockwell’s mutagen canister and fussing with lab equipment. “Uh, April, what are you doing?”

“Heh? Oh, I was just thinking…” She turned to look at him over her shoulder, giving a guilty smile. “We’ve already broken in here twice tonight, and since it turned out that Falco was a scum bag anyways, that maybe… we might take some of his equipment home?”

Leo furrowed his brow. “What? You want us to steal all this stuff?”

“Um… yes?”

Leo exchanged a glance with Raph, who shrugged indifferently.

“I… guess we could do that,” Leo said slowly. “Why do you want us to though?”

“Well, we need to research the mutagen still, and we don’t have a lab handy, so…” April bobbed her head, seeming resigned to their options. “It’s either I attempt to use the lab at my school, and likely fail, or we set up our own with a ton of highly valuable equipment that’s actually meant for the job.”

She certainly had a point there.

“None of us know how to use this stuff though,” Leo pointed out in return. “We don’t know the first thing about how to examine the mutagen, and neither do you. It’d be useless to haul it all to the lair if we didn’t have someone to work with it.”

April laughed nervously, her smile turning awkward. “Yeeeah… about that…”

It took way longer to get back to the lair the second time around, carrying all the crap April had asked them to. Raph grumbled the whole way, feeling his bruises from both fights through the evening get worse as the hours wore on.

When they finally did get home- dragging heavy machines and carting delicate glass wares- Raph had to deal with yet another annoyance.

The lab was going in his garage, whether he liked it or not.

April had had to leave before they even got everything set up, and that only served to piss Raph off even more; despite that he knew she really, really had to get back to her Aunt’s.

That knowledge only just soothed his temper, an understanding of having to respect your guardian’s rules. Only just though.

Now, a good chunk of his garage was covered in scientific research equipment, and it bothered Raph that he’d had to give up a place that was his space and his space alone.

Except, that wasn’t quite true anymore. Donnie used it almost as much, if not more. He even had a
corner to himself, set up with piles and piles of books, and a comfortable collection of pillows and blankets.

When his brother had first started hanging out in the garage, Raph had thought it would drive him up the wall until he finally kicked his brother out. But, it didn’t. Donnie’s presence was unobtrusive usually, and helpful every other time.

Donnie was probably the only member of their family that Raph didn’t need long breaks from.

As they’d all filed out of the newly refurbished lab/garage, Raph stopped his tallest brother.

“Hey, uh, d’you want to keep working on the bikes tonight?” Raph asked, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly. “It’s not that late yet, and we won’t be having dinner for a while. We could finish the one you were painting earlier…”

Donnie gave him a long look, then-

“No thanks,” He replied, somewhat coldly. He brushed past Raph, and kept walking without looking back.

Raph watched his brother leave, and felt… rejected.

Donnie met with Mikey in the media pit, and together, the two of them left the main area. As they retreated from Raph’s view in the lab/garage- hands linked between them- Raph tried to figure out why he felt so upset.

He was used to being alone. He sought out being alone.

It didn’t make sense that he’d feel so put out that his brother refused to spend time with him.

Raph tried to brush the feelings off, and shut the doors to his work space.

He sat down, and started half-heartedly working on the motor piece he’d been forced to abandon earlier on.

He worked in silence, not even bothering with the ancient stereo just along the wall.

The garage felt a lot emptier than it’d used to, without Donnie’s presence in it.

Chapter End Notes

I’d have more to say but it is sooooooo god forsakenly late and all I can say is:

-no posting previews we publish and die like men

-reason that I am giving for why Falco couldn't read the feral kids' minds is because their brain patterns/thought processes are basically this nightmare mish-mash of human and animal together and has zero connotation or order when viewed from outside
-I forget when Raph actually brought the pigeons into canon but fuck canon

-Raph for pigeon lord of the year

-you all got this chapter just a day later after the last bc I couldn't stop thinking about the hunt scene okay

-the author is not sure how people are going to react to this chapter

-also thanks for reading ya'll good fucking night and thanks for stopping by
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

A truth comes out.

Chapter Notes

okay so honestly i've had the Worst Writer's block for Literally Everything lately and it has been slowly killing me since i hadn't posted in over a week but Thank Fucking God i finally broke through that and finished this stupid chapter like god damn i feel both drained and rejuvenated and i can't tell if that sucks or rocks but whatever i can't even tell how good this is it all tastes like copper to me at this point so fuck this and fuck my fucking life just give me some feedback if you can to reassure me this ain't shit and if there's typos i'll fix them later and i swear i Tried.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Donnie stared at the wood and glass hung on the wall, trying to remember what this particular item was called.

A photo, and a picture frame around it. Right.

The image inside the frame, it was his brothers and their rat.

Donnie studied it, slowly taking in every detail of the picture.

Leo and Raph, they were so much smaller in the photo. Younger, much younger. They didn’t look much older than juveniles in the photo. Smiling brightly with their father, tucked on each side of the rat.

A frown tugged at Donnie’s lips.

Where had he and Mikey been?

They were all brothers. They all knew their song, they all looked similar, and Donnie had never met any others like themselves. It was just the four of them.

And yet... Donnie and Mikey hadn’t known their other siblings, when they all first met.

Leo and Raph had known them though.

Why was that?
And… why had they all been separated in the first place?

Donnie… he recalled that during the first few nights they stayed in the lair, back after Leo had injured him, Splinter had tried to explain something. But Donnie hadn’t been able to understand, the English words sounding garbled to him.

He couldn’t remember what had been said; only that it had been about himself and Mikey.

Donnie stared at the photo, wondering why he’d never noticed it hanging on the dojo wall until tonight.

Where had they been? Why was it that he and Mikey were left alone, while Leo and Raph grew up with a cares-for-small-young watching over them?

Donnie had been too busy learning new things to think about that. To wonder, why was it that Leo and Raph had known them, but Donnie and Mikey hadn’t?

Why had they been alone all these years?

“Donnie? What’re you looking at?”

Donnie turned his head, towards Leo standing a few feet away.

Leo’s eyes drifted to the picture on the wall, and he smiled. “Oh, that old thing? Man, we took that years ago. I think we were about nine around then.”

Nine. They’d been ‘nine’ in that photo.

Donnie had learned recently, that he and Mikey were ‘fifteen’; same as their brothers. Fifteen years was a very long time, as best he could tell.

Where had their brothers been?

“Where were we?”

“Hm?” Leo’s attention shifted from the photo to Donnie.

The frown Donnie had developed deepened, and he raised one hand to point at the hanging frame. “Where was Mikey and me? Why weren’t we there?”

Leo suddenly seemed off balanced, and somewhat nervous. “I- well, um-”

“And where were you? Years and years and years and- nothing! We were alone!” Donnie exclaimed, all of his internal questions from as far back as he could remember, bubbling up to the surface of his thoughts. Why, who, where-? “You- you knew us. You knew us the first night we saw each other, but me- I- I didn’t know you. Why. Why is that?”

Leo opened his mouth, closed it, and dropped his eyes to the floor.

“Where were you?” Donnie asked again, something twinging in his chest. “Why were we alone? What happened to us four?”

“Donatello, Leonardo? What is going on?”

Donnie glanced away from his brother, and saw Splinter standing across the room. Mikey and Raph, they’d paused in their stretching to stare as well.
“He’s… he wants to know why they’re not in the picture,” Leo said quietly, gesturing towards the photo.

Splinter’s ears fell flat against his head, and Donnie read the same nervousness he’d seen in Leo.

Donnie watched closely, as a weight seemed to settle on the rat.

And why was that? Why did Splinter care for them? Why was he a cares-for-small-young? Donnie had never seen that in rats before, not for so long, so many years...

Why would a rat of all creatures take in two turtles? And… why was Splinter so big? Why was he so clever? Why was Donnie so big and clever? Why were any of them?

What were they? Not normal rats and turtles, that was for sure.

Maybe… the ‘mutagen’… and the changed human, turned into a ‘monkey’…

He hadn’t gotten a chance to ask about that. Hadn’t remembered to; too busy with his hurt feelings and avoiding his brother…

Donnie waited for Splinter’s response, though his questions almost overpowered his patience.

Splinter sighed heavily, and lowered his eyes. “Perhaps… it is best we sit down for this particular conversation.”

Leo watched, and listened, as his father slowly told their family’s history.

He watched as Donnie and Mikey heard the story—their story, in whole, for the first time.

Leo set himself apart from his brothers and father, same as Raph. Both of them waiting tensely for the tale to end.

Somehow, in the chaos their lives had been jumbled into, they’d forgotten that they never told Donnie and Mikey the truth. About their family, about Splinter, about their separation… they’d neglected to tell them nearly everything.

They’d been so busy. Too many threats to handle, so many barriers to break down, and more things to get done than Leo had fingers. That had been a mistake, forgetting this vital act of sharing.

Leo watched as a series of emotions flickered across his brothers’ faces.

Splinter explained everything they knew about the mutagen, how it had changed him into a rat from a human, and how it had turned all four of them into mutant turtles. He explained that after he’d been changed, he’d adopted the four of them. He told them how they had all lived together, in the tunnels beneath New York.

He told them that they’d been separated, because of a flash flood. He told them… they’d thought Donnie and Mikey had died.
Confusion, shock, and disbelief—those emotions shifted across Donnie and Mikey’s faces. Taking turns as the story unfolded.

When Splinter said that they were all part human, Donnie’s expression had twisted into a grimace. When he had said they’d all been a family once before, Mikey’s eyes had widened. When he got to the point of their separation...

Confusion, shock, and disbelief; all at once, the emotions shifting almost faster than Leo could catch. Until, finally-

It settled on hurt.

Raw, confused hurt… and something close to betrayal.

Leo scarcely could look at his brothers, unhindered emotional turmoil clear in their eyes.

There was a long beat of silence, after Splinter had finished their story. Until Donnie broke it, still clenching his hands in his lap.

“You… you didn’t even look for us?” He asked, eyes wide and uncharacteristically vulnerable.

Splinter’s ears went flat, and he lowered his head. Leo had never seen shame on his father’s features before. “If I had known you were alive, I would have never, never stopped searching. Please, you must understand that. I am so, so very sorry, that I did not look for you.”

Leo could hear the tight inhale Donnie took, and saw the way he reached for Mikey’s hand, the same time Mikey reached for him.

Donnie’s shoulders slumped ever so slightly, and he looked… lost. He and Mikey both did.

Leo leaned forwards, disliking how something twinged and stung in his chest at his brother’s expressions. “Guys, if we’d known, we would have-”

Mikey snapped his head towards Leo, and hissed loudly. It was enough of a shock that Leo swallowed his words.

It’d been weeks since Mikey did that, displayed any aggression at all towards him.

Donnie put both hands around Mikey’s to squeeze it, mumbling quietly in their private language. Mikey’s posture slipped back from hostile- Leo hadn’t even noticed that, god- and he turned away from them all. An uncertain tension settled around both of Leo’s younger brothers, and he wasn’t sure what to make of it.

Leo darted a glance at Raph, for support or something, but his brother seemed just as at a loss as he was.

Donnie straightened slowly out of his slight hunch, meeting Splinter’s eyes with a closed off steadiness. “We… can we go? We need… we need time. Alone.”

Donnie’s expression was calm and blank, though Leo could still read the confused hurt in his eyes. He was usually so expressive, nearly as much as Mikey. To suddenly take that away, it was like the first days all over again-

Splinter closed his eyes, and slowly opened them as he sighed. “That is… probably for the best. You may be excused, Donatello, Michelangelo. We can talk again later, if you have any further
questions.”

“Thank you… s-Sensei,” Donnie mumbled, staggering slightly over the addressment to Splinter.

Leo didn’t move from his kneel, as his brothers slipped out of the room. Mikey glanced back- but Leo, for the first time in a while, couldn’t read what he was thinking.

The door shutting behind them sounded too loud to be right.

As their set of footsteps faded, a bubble of silence filled the dojo. The space was suddenly stifling, the tension from their conversation still hanging in the air.

Leo flicked his gaze over to his father. There was an exhausted air to him, and Splinter’s age seemed more prominent in that moment.

Leo’s father ran a stressed hand through his fur, and though he didn’t sigh, he seemed like he wanted to.

A beat later, without any words exchanged, they all stood.

Leo drifted out the doorway with Raph, while their father headed towards his bedroom. The twin thuds of the screen doors closing echoed, though they did nothing to alleviate the silence.

Leo looked at Raph, the two of them standing side by side in the gloom of their home.

Raph’s mouth had formed a hard line, and the sudden tiredness in his posture was the same that Leo felt.

They didn’t speak, separating without word. There wasn’t much they could really say.

Now, all they could do was wait.

Donnie slid closer to Mikey, placing his forehead against his brother’s chest. The sound of Mikey’s heart was familiar and steady, something to hold onto as he tried to wrap his mind around what had happened.

He wasn’t sure what to think. At all.

He’d been wondering all his life, about what they were, why they were alone, if there had ever been others like them… now he had his answers.

He wasn’t sure how he felt about them.

Donnie’s eyes opened, as he heard a hitch in Mikey’s breathing.

He craned his neck, looking up at Mikey.

His brother’s eyes were squeezed shut, and he was biting his lip. A tear slid off his cheek, dripping
onto the fabrics underneath them both.

Donnie slid upwards again, moving so he could be the one holding Mikey. Donnie might have been reeling, and completely off balance, but Mikey…

Mikey was taking it hard.

Shhh… shhh… shhh… Donnie whispered, pulling Mikey close. No crying no tears

Mikey shook his head, knocking it against Donnie’s chest as he sucked in harsh breaths. Don’t understand don’t understand don’t understand-

I know I know, shh

I can’t- why- how kin-family-brothers not look-search-find us?! Mikey hissed, voice caught between anger and sadness. Why why why… we were alone, lost, missing we were missing them…

Mikey whined, high and frustrated, in the back of his throat. He knocked his forehead against Donnie’s chest again. Don’t understand never understand, weird-strange-wrong makes no sense no sense…

Donnie didn’t have any answers to that. He had lots of answers, but none for that.

He stared into the darkness, listening and waiting as Mikey moved past his frustrated crying.

His head felt like it was filled with water, sloshing everything out of place. He didn’t like that at all.

Eventually, Mikey went quiet, and they lay in the comforting darkness of their room in silence.

Donnie stared still into nothing, thinking and wondering and trying to sort everything back into place.

They’d been with Splinter before. Splinter had been their ‘father’. They’d lived with their brothers. They’d all been a family once, long before now.

They were supposed to grow up with their brothers.

They were… they were supposed to be like their brothers.

English and Japanese speaking. Walking on two legs. Fighting with weapons and words and techniques. Not…

Not how they were. Not who they were.

Not… ‘feral’.

Donnie had finally looked up the word, learned what it meant.

He’d looked up what ‘monsters’ meant too. What ‘freaks’ meant.

Donnie’s books had provided their meanings. He hadn’t been sure what to do with those answers either.

Wrong… Donnie mumbled to himself.

Hm? Mikey hummed, shifting in Donnie’s arms.
What… what if we’re wrong ones? Different-strange-weird? Donnie asked quietly.

He’d thought Leo and Raph were the wrong ones. He’d held onto that thought and tried to keep it true, even as everything he learned had started to say otherwise.

The world was so much bigger now, with all the things he’d learned in it.

Donnie felt so much smaller in comparison.

What meaning? You-me-us wrong?? Mikey questioned, voice still rough from his crying. How?
How are we strange -weird-wrong?

Donnie didn’t answer, turning his face into their bed.

Donnie? Donnie??

He missed their old home. He missed knowing what was what, and who was who.

He missed feeling right.

Donnie shut his eyes, and tried staring at the darkness behind his eyelids instead.

…Donnie?

Shh, am tired now, talking later speaking later, thinking sleeping resting now

…okay

A long pause of silence, and then Mikey whispered, “love you” into the dark.

Donnie felt Mikey try a comforting purr, but he couldn’t encourage himself to return it. He settled for hugging Mikey tighter, and whispering back, “love you” as well.

Raph leaned on the side of the hallway, staring hard at his brothers’ shut door.

It’d been over an hour since they’d disappeared inside.

Raph’s plastron felt tight, like he’d pulled a muscle deep inside it. He rubbed at it irritably, trying to ease the tightness.

It didn’t help. If anything, it felt even tighter. Almost painful.

Raph grimaced, and crossed his arms again.

He wasn’t sure what he was waiting for. It could be another few hours before his brothers came back out. What they were digesting right now… it couldn’t be easy.

Their whole lives, based on a tragedy they didn’t remember. Twelve years spent alone, without any clear reason why.
Raph couldn’t imagine how that felt, learning everything they’d been through was because of their father’s mistake.

Something in his chest twinged again, and he tried digging at the sensation with his thumb. No luck, it just kept on hurting.

Raph pushed harder against it, though he knew it was mostly useless against the thick plating. Why was that happening, it wasn’t like he could actually pull a muscle inside his muscles, right? Did he even have muscles that he could pull there?

God, the only time he ever got an uncomfortable sensation like this, was during-

“Still nothing?”

Raph turned his head.

Leo walked up the steps to the hallway, and sat down on the opposite side to Raph. “It’s been a whole hour now.”

“And then some,” Raph muttered, sliding down his own wall to mirror Leo. “I dunno what we’re supposed to do here.”

“We wait, I guess,” Leo said with a shrug. “Not much else we can do.”

Raph grumbled irritably, shaking his head. “I hate doing nothing. I hate waiting.”

“I know that. I know that a bit too well,” Leo said in a dry tone.

“Fuck off,” Raph mumbled without heat.

They lapsed into silence, the tension from earlier still hanging in the air.

Raph picked at his knee pads, feeling the aged and worn material under his fingers. He hadn’t heard anything coming from Donnie and Mikey’s room since he’d entered the hallway, but that wasn’t much of a tell. The two of them could go silent as ghosts when they felt like it.

Raph thought that if he’d been going through what they were, he would’ve been making a lot more noise. He would have been angry, probably. That was his usual reaction to unpleasant surprises.

“Think they’ll be pissed?” He asked, breaking the silence. “I know I would’ve been.”

“You get pissed at everything,” Leo replied, his eyes on the closed door still.

“I fucking know that. But do you think they will?”

“Well… hard to tell,” Leo admitted, scratching the bridge between his eyes. He turned his head back to Raph, and shrugged again. “They get upset sometimes, and then don’t other times. It’s difficult to really call their reactions on this. It’s… it’s a lot more complicated than some of the stuff they’ve dealt with. Or that’s what I think at least.” Leo’s gaze drifted down to the stone floor they were sitting on. “I don’t know, actually. I have a hard time figuring out reactions other than yours.”

“We have been together fifteen years after all,” Raph said wryly.

That got a smile out of Leo, almost reaching his tired looking eyes. “I suppose after putting up with you for that long, I’m going to know how you’ll react to things.”
Raph scoffed. “Who’s putting up with who? You’re the stick in the mud here.”

“I am not!”

“Yeah you are, and you know it too.”

“Fuck you.”

Raph smirked. “He swears. Leo-the-model-student just swore, and in front of a witness no less. What will your Sensei say?”

“Chalk it up to stress,” Leo said breezily. “I think he’d let it slide.”

“He made me wash out my mouth with soap one time. No he wouldn’t.”

“Using a vulgar term for intimacy is a lot different from what you said, Raph.”

“My turn then. ‘Fuck you’.”

Leo laughed, and Raph’s own laugh echoed it.

He felt a bit better. Maybe he should try talking with Leo more often. Not that they didn’t, but it was usually peppered with barbs and insults that had actual heat behind them. Raph found he liked this better, easy nonthreatening conversation. Basically pleasant to experience.

Though, the pinching sensation in his chest tightened again, and Raph started rubbing it unconsciously. It was right in the center of his plastron, and it was really starting to bother him. Twisting and pinching and just being a general nuisance, like it always was.

Then, Raph noticed Leo was also rubbing the center of his chest.

Leo noticed Raph the exact same moment.

They both froze, staring at each other and their identical positions.

Raph opened and closed his mouth a few times, before he finally got out, “You- you too?”

Leo blinked, still looking mildly shocked. “I- only sometimes?? I mean, I didn’t hurt myself, never do. It just…”

“…happens, without any reason,” Raph said, eyes widening.

Leo nodded empathetically. “And it’s usually only during-”

“-a bad storm,” Raph finished.

The pinch inside his chest gave a particularly bad tug, and the same moment Raph winced, he saw Leo do it too.

They stared at one another again.

Raph swallowed, and struggled to figure out what the hell was going on.

What the fuck.

What the actual fuck.
“What the hell is happening,” Raph managed to say.

“Um. I. don’t know??” Leo said in a slightly strangled voice.

Raph was so caught up in trying to form a rational explanation to things, that he missed the footsteps pattering into the lair.

“Hello? Guys?? Any of you around- oh!” April appeared suddenly, stopping at the mouth of their hallway. She looked a bit flushed, and slightly out of breath; her ponytail lopsided and her coat held under one arm. “Leo, Raph! Um. Hey. I just came by to tell you I took care of, uh, something and some things, but… is this a bad time? I’m getting ‘it’s a bad time’ vibes here.”

Raph glanced at Leo, and they shared a look.

_We talk about this later._

Right.

“Just a little bit,” Raph said, answering April’s rushed questions. “It’s family drama night. Again.”

April winced sympathetically, as well as apologetically. “Yikes, I’m sorry. I would’ve called ahead to say I was coming around, but you don’t exactly have a phone line.”

“It’s okay, you didn’t know,” Leo said, waving off April’s concerns.

April glanced around them, at the shut doors and the stillness of the lair. Her lips formed a worried line. “Is everything alright with you guys? I mean, if it’s okay for me to ask.”

Raph shrugged. They’d told her enough themselves, that at this point that they might as well tell her this too. “You know how our brothers got washed away twelve years ago, raised themselves, went feral, yada yada yada? Well, Donnie finally asked why he and Mikey weren’t here to grow up with us, and…”

“We realized we’d never actually… _told_ them why that was,” Leo said, a note of guilt in his voice. “We, uh, forgot to?”

April blinked at them both, and her expression turned into disbelief. “Guys, _seriously?_”

Raph held up his hands defensively. “We have busy lives, okay? It wasn’t a big priority!”

“Oh my god.”

“We feel really bad about it, honestly,” Leo said, scratching the back of his neck awkwardly.

April steepled her fingers in front of her face, closing her eyes. “Okay. You’re both really great guys, and I value you both as friends, but good _god_ you have no social skills.”

“_Hey!_” Raph exclaimed the same time as Leo.

“It is the truth and this proves it,” April said, shaking her head slowly. “God. I can’t imagine how they’re feeling right now. And you just. dumped this all on them _tonight_?”

“Um… about an hour ago actually…?” Leo said awkwardly.

“_Guys._”
Mikey rubbed at his eyes, which felt good against the residual sting from crying. He didn’t like crying that much, since his eyes always felt gross and hurt for a while afterwards. It was almost as bad as him getting really angry, but not quite.

Donnie was stretching out slowly, still quiet and lost in thought like he had been for the last while. Mikey watched without saying anything, as Donnie bent and spread out his limbs. Soft pops came from his joints, a reminder of how long they’d been hiding in their room.

Mikey pulled the covers over himself, swaddling deeper into his blankets.

He didn’t feel ready to go outside again. He didn’t want to see his other brothers right now. He still felt too tangled up and confused.

Donnie seemed restless though, which was a swap of how things usually were.

*Going outside?* Mikey trilled quietly.

*Need… need something, distraction activity something,* Donnie replied, sounding distant despite being right next to Mikey on their bed.

Mikey watched his brother stand up, and felt a frown form on his lips.

He didn’t want to go outside, but if Donnie needed to that badly…

His brother was never much company when he got like this. Distant and distracted, not much good for talking to or cuddling with. Mikey would just have to go along with things then.

*Alright… we can go,* Mikey agreed, letting his covers of warmth slip away. His scales met the cool air, and he grimaced at the loss of comfort. He’d taken off all his *tray-ning* wraps earlier, and gone back to it just being him.

*Tray-ning* was fun, but it was also getting really complicated. Everything was getting really complicated. Mikey wasn’t really appreciating that. He loved *tray-ning* with his brothers, he loved spending time with their human *aprill,* and he thought he loved them all too, but…

They’d kept things from him. From him and Donnie both.

Did that count as lying? Mikey wasn’t sure. He just hated secrets being kept from him.

He felt like… that happened more often these days. Donnie didn’t lie to him, but…

He’d asked *Lee-oh* what some words had meant, what the human they’d fought had yelled at them, and…

“There don’t worry about it, Mikey. They don’t mean anything.”

*Lee-oh* had been lying. Mikey could tell.
He didn’t know why. He didn’t know the ‘why’ of a lot of things lately.

And now… it turned out that Lee-oh, Raf, and rat-that-is-big had all been lying to them? Or at least keeping secrets…

Mikey felt sick, and frustrated, and dizzyingly confused.

Donnie was already opening the door slowly, peeking out into the hall to see if they were alone. Mikey didn’t smell anyone close by, but there were so many fresh scent trails in their home, it could be hard to tell sometimes. He thought he caught a slip of ‘pril’s scent.

All clear no one there, Donnie clicked quietly. He pushed the door the rest of the way open, and stepped out into the hall.

Mikey sighed, and left the soft comfort of their sleeping space.

The lay-err was quiet, and seemed to be empty. No sign of Lee-oh or Raf, or their cares-for-small-young either.

Mikey blinked, and suddenly remembered that now Splinterr was his cares-for-small-young too. Not just Lee-oh and Raf’s. Or, he’d always been, and just hadn’t told Mikey or Donnie.

Ugh. Why not? It didn’t make sense, and the thought made his squirmy confusion and vague anger bubble up in his throat again.

Maybe he needed to go out too.

Donnie tapped Mikey’s shoulder, and he glanced up.

Donnie pointed towards the garrage. I’ll be there, thinking-working, where you going?

Mikey shrugged. He wasn’t really sure. Out? Somewhere some place, just running-leaping-thinking

Donnie nodded, and wrapped Mikey in a loose hug. Alright be safe be careful, no injuries no dangerous things?

Promise no injuries no dangerous things, Mikey chirped affirmatively. He stretched on his toes, and bumped noses with his brother; giving a chirpy purr.

Lee-oh never let Mikey do this. Why was that anyways, was it because…?

Donnie rumbled softly back, and rubbed his nose against Mikey’s before stepping away. Be back soon be back safe

Will be promise I promise, love you?

Love you

Mikey let his grip on Donnie’s arms slip, and he watched his brother walk away. Then, just as Donnie was halfway across the room, a thought occurred to him.

Donnie? Mikey asked, his voice carrying through the still air.

Donnie paused, turning back to look at him. Yes?

Would… would Lee-oh Raf Splinterr like you-me-us better if… if we’d lived grown been here long
time ago? Mikey questioned, fidgeting his hands together. It would make sense; it would make a lot of sense. It would explain a lot of things… so many things…

Donnie tilted his head, thinking Mikey’s question over.

If you-me-us were more like human-talking-walking turtles, would they… Mikey trailed off, unsure of how to phrase the question.

Would they like them better? More?

Did Lee-oh and Raf keep pushing him away because he wasn’t quite like them? He could talk, could fight, could play vid-dio-games… couldn’t talk properly in eenglish though. Or read right. Or do math right.

Was that why?

Mikey waited for Donnie to answer his vague questions.

Donnie sighed, loud enough it echoed in the huge room. He seemed tired, and confused. Donnie wasn’t often confused, it was strange to see.

Don’t know, sorry I don’t know, Donnie said, running a hand over his skull. Sorry I’m sorry

Mikey shrugged. That wasn’t Donnie’s fault. Their brothers and apparent cares-for-small-young were all very confusing and hard to understand; Donnie was doing his best, same as Mikey.

Donnie turned away, and slipped into his special room that he and Raf shared. Mikey was left alone, standing in a huge empty room.

He waited for another moment, then dropped onto all fours and headed towards the exit.

He just needed to clear his head a bit. Get rid of all the upset feelings inside him that felt worse by the moment. Then he could come back and be okay again, and he wouldn’t feel so- so-

Mikey paused at the top of the steps, and looked down at his hands.

He’d walked like this all his life. Or… he thought he had…

Had he not when he was small? When he lived with his brothers and cares-for-small-young?

Maybe…

Mikey stared at his hands and claws, splayed against the stones.

Lee-oh and Raf didn’t do this.

Maybe…

Mikey stood up at his full height, and flexed his hands.

Maybe… if he tried being a bit more like them… they’d like him better?

It wasn’t too different. Really. Mikey walked on two legs all the time. This was normal still. He just had to do it a bit more now.

Mikey sighed, long and hard, and set off into the tunnels.
No more thinking. Just walking and running.

On two legs only.

Raph pushed open the door to his garage, sighing as he slid it shut behind him. It’d taken way too long for April to let them go, and after they’d escorted her home no less. Going on and on about the impact on relationships caused by trauma and lying… and she was the one who’d said she needed to hurry home too…

And they hadn’t been lying, honestly. It’d been a god damn mistake, and with all the other shit they’d been dealing with, Raph had just. *forgotten*. They all had, and that was the truth.

Though, April had made a lot of good points. About trust and faith in others and shit like that. Raph supposed she wasn’t the daughter of a psychologist for nothing.

Did she really have to chew them out like she did though? And she’d done it in such an eerily polite tone too. To the point and leaving no room to evade her words. Guess she hadn’t just been learning how to use her body as a weapon, but her words and smile too…

Maybe Raph’s father was teaching her a little *too* well how to be a kunoichi.

…and maybe not, because Raph was genuinely impressed sometimes, how far she’d gotten just a few weeks into training-

Raph blinked, and realized he wasn’t alone in the room.

“Oh, uh, hey… Donnie.”

Chapter End Notes

*Everything Tastes Like Copper And I Don't Know Why.*
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

One solved, another ignored.

Chapter Notes

guess who ain't dead

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Raph stared at his brother, who was holding a book in his hands. A dictionary from the looks of it. One that Donnie had picked up weeks ago and not put down since.

Raph put his hand on the door handle behind him, and considered leaving. Donnie didn’t seem overly friendly at the moment.

Raph should check up on his brother though, since April had said they needed to communicate better. She’d also said that it would probably help fix the rift they’d made between the four of them, so Raph pulled himself together enough to speak.

“So, uh, how you feeling?” Raph tried, wincing at how awkward he sounded.

Donnie blinked slowly at him, and replied, “Fine,” in a clipped tone.

“…that’s good,” Raph said, even more awkwardly.

Donnie shrugged, and turned back to the books he’d been stacking on the table when Raph had come in. Raph swallowed, and looked away from his brother as he tried to think of what else to say.

Augh, why was interacting with his brother so hard all of a sudden? They’d been doing fine, until…

Until lately, because Raph had screwed up somewhere along the line, and then Donnie had drawn away, and then the mess that had been their evening had happened, and now…

Raph didn’t know how to proceed. He didn’t have any easy direction to choose and he was floundering.

Donnie made the choice for him.

“Why did you not tell us?” He said suddenly, looking down at the table in front of him. He stopped stacking books. “Was very important, and yet. Did not tell us.”
Raph grimaced, and rubbed the back of his neck. Ashamed. He didn’t even have to think that hard about what Donnie was asking him about. “…we forgot, honestly,” He said, feeling the frustration with himself amp up. It’d been their job to ease Donnie and Mikey into their new lives, and they’d fucked up badly. “I feel like shit for it, and I’m really sorry. That was our bad. Everything just got so-messy, so quickly. One thing led to another, and it got forgotten with everything that’s gone on. But still. I’m sorry.”

There. That should be a step in the right direction. Apologies were hard but necessary, and maybe Donnie would forgive him for their short-comings.

His brother still didn’t look at him. Staring only at the table.

Donnie made a low clicking sound in his throat, and Raph couldn’t catch a single bit of its meaning. Then he sighed, and seemed to shake something off. “Fine. Forgot, fine. Understandable, lots has been happening, lots to think about. I forgive you.”

That made some of Raph’s tension ease up. Good. Then they were on the road to mending things.

“Thank you,” Raph said, nodding to himself.

“But.”

Uh oh.

“But?”

“Still kept secrets,” Donnie said with a slight hiss, like the words wanted to shift into a different sound. “I- back some weeks ago- maybe couldn’t understand, but still. None of you tried. Not with me.”

He had a point, and that made Raph grimace. “We should’ve, yeah, and I think we did with Mikey. But he… well, obviously didn’t get much from it. And you were unconscious, so we’d already decided to wait until later before you’d even woken up. And we…”

“Forget,” Donnie finished grimly.

Raph nodded, still ashamed. “We did. Again, I’m sorry.”

Donnie drifted across the floor between them, looking around as he did. Raph took a couple steps away from the door, half-consciously copying wherever Donnie was taking this.

He took it in the direction of continuing to absently look around at what they’d been building together, and reach out to grab Raph’s hand. “Makes me. Upset. Lots of times you could have, and didn’t. Could have filled so many… holes, in mine life. I wanted to know better, and no one told me.”

Raph pulled his hand out of Donnie’s, stepping away to have a bubble of space again. He didn’t notice the frown that appeared on Donnie. “Well, we have it all out now, and you can ask us whenever you feel like it. And you both speak English pretty well already, so we won’t have too much of a language barrier anymore…”

He trailed off; finally noticing the tight frown Donnie was giving him.

“What are you upset about now?” Raph asked, feeling a tad defensive. He was really trying, and Donnie just seemed to keep looping back to being upset with him.
“You- ugh,” Donnie clenched his hands, trilling a sharp sound before continuing. “You won’t let me near! Always- always angry and not close and shitty- why do you act like this??”

Raph stuttered, caught off guard by the question. “I- what?”

Donnie advanced closer, shoulders set in a tense and unhappy pose as he paced around Raph. “No touching no- no closeness, always space and snapping and being awful. Why not touching? You and Leo- closed off, cold. Assholes,” He spat at the end. “Both assholes.”

Raph was really confused now, and that just made him more frustrated. “Oh my god- what do you mean not touching?” Then he slotted the pieces in place, figuring out all the times Donnie had been cold to him, and what he’d done prior to those times. “Oh for- is this because I’m not as touchy-feely as Mikey? Jesus, Donnie, of course I’m not! That’s not fucking normal, the shit you two do. That’s not something people do.”

“Why not?” Donnie snapped, finally stopping his pacing and standing face to face with Raph.

“Why- why is it not normal?”

“Because! It’s- it’s just not something people do!” Raph insisted.

“Why?” Donnie asked again.

“Because it is!”

“Would it be if I were like you?”

Raph stopped, staring at Donnie. His brother’s jaw was tight, and he was breathing rapidly.

“…what?” Raph asked.

“If I- if we were like you- Leo and rat and you- if we were that-” Donnie’s voice wavered for a moment. “-if we were not wrong, would you be close? To us? Would you- would you want us? Better? No, like us better?” His shoulders remained hunched and defensive, and yet somehow read vulnerable. “If me and Mikey had been normal, would you like us better?”

“I-” Raph cut off. He didn’t know what to say to that at all. Would he have liked his brothers better if they’d grown up with him? Would getting along with them be easier if they’d been raised the same he had? Would they have been closer?

Donnie read his silence the wrong way, and his expression closed off. “I knew it,” He hissed, mostly to himself. “I knew- was right-” And then he broke off, trading English for the rolling, clicking words he and Mikey exclusively used. He turned away from Raph, and it felt like something closing off for good.

Raph needed to do something, say something. “-It’s not that!” He rushed out, reaching for Donnie’s shell only for his brother to whirl and snap his teeth at Raph. The feral behavior didn’t even really faze Raph at this point; weeks spent sharing space with his brother taking some of the novelty away. He pushed on, even as Donnie remained hostile. “It’s not because you guys didn’t grow up with us- it’s because- because it’s just plain not normal for people to do that stuff, okay? The whole- cuddling thing and- other shit. It’s not something people do.”

“Why not?” Donnie demanded, looking confused and frustrated as Raph felt.

“Because they don’t!” Raph repeated, throwing his arms out. “It’s just not something people do, okay? End of fucking story!”
“But that makes no sense!” Donnie fired back.

“It doesn’t have to; it’s just how things are!”

Donnie snarled something Raph couldn’t understand, and that just made Raph feel even more frustrated. How were they supposed to communicate if his brother kept speaking a totally different language than him?

“And could you pick a language already?” Raph snapped. “Talking’s kind of hard when you don’t speak what I can get.”

Donnie trilled something angrily, and Raph could just tell it was an insult. He made his own furious sound, and put his hands on his head; pushing against his skull and gritting his teeth. Why was this so fucking hard? Couldn’t his brother just accept that it wasn’t a thing to do what he and Mikey did?

“You have Mikey, don’t you?” Raph said bitterly, dropping his hands and glaring at his chittering brother. “Why the fuck do you need me in on it, too? You got him crawling all over you pretty much constantly. You don’t need us.”

Donnie went quiet, mouthing words to himself, and then replied, “Because- because it’s family, togetherness. Right. Like- half of communication is- is being close. Near and safe. You, Leo- rat, too- so… distant. Alone. Seems lonely. Better to be touching and close, no?”

“…we’re not lonely,” Raph said, his defensiveness dying down slowly. They weren’t. It was normal to be a little distant from family, right? Television and books had never told him otherwise. “It’s just how-” He edited himself, choosing to avoid the word ‘normal’. “-most people are. We get on fine without hugging every ten seconds.”

Donnie shook his head, frowning. “No. No you do not. Seems so-” He made a drawn out sound, and then shook his head again. “-lonely. You are. None- no one- of you touches or communicates. Couldn’t think of not with Mikey. Would be like…”

He trailed off, and Raph looked at the ground between them. It offered no answers to what was happening, even though he really, really needed them.

What was the right answer here, anyways? He wasn’t sure if he had any except for wrong ones. He’d try the least wrong ones first.

“Well… it’s fine for you two. You’re… you guys, and we’re us. We don’t need that kind of thing.”

“Because we’re feral, right?” Donnie said, bitterness entering his voice.

Raph frowned. When had Donnie picked up that word? “That’s not quite what I meant, but… yeah.”

Donnie scoffed, folding his arms over his plastron. It seemed like he was trying to protect it with the action. “Knew it knew it knew it. Always goes back to feral, abnormality. Wrong. C’kk c’kk c’kk.” Donnie abruptly broke off the sound he’d started, and bit his lip. “If we were lived- raised with you, grown up right. Maybe wouldn’t need closeness either.”

And he looked so sad to say that, a tight worry around his eyes and mouth along with the sadness. Raph remembered vaguely Leo saying that he, and the rest of them, shouldn’t keep asking their brothers to change so drastically. Raph felt like they’d failed to follow through with that.

And Raph had just asked him to choose English over the language he’d spoken his whole life, god dammnit. Now he felt like an even bigger piece of shit.
Raph sighed harshly. It felt like no matter how good he thought they’d finally gotten things, they always managed to find a snag somewhere to catch on. Apparently this was the biggest one in a while, along with the whole… failing to actually explain their origins.

He didn’t want to know how bad it was affecting Donnie, finding out how complicated their ‘birth’ really had been, or how they’d failed to go looking for them all these years. But at the same time, he did.

Looking at his brother, hunched around himself defensive as their shells had originally been meant to be, Raph realized that things wouldn’t be so cut and dry for them. An explanation and space afterwards wasn’t going to be enough to put things back to rights. His brothers needed more than that.

And Raph just wasn’t sure how to give it.

“…hey,” He said quietly, drawing Donnie’s eyes back to him as he did. “I dunno what you would’ve been like if you’d lived with us all this time, but… I’m pretty sure I’d still like you the same amount I do now.”

He couldn’t really think of Donnie in any other way, other than the really weird, quick learner and mildly murderous turtle he’d turned out to be. Whoever Donnie might’ve been otherwise, this was the Donnie Raph got and this was the one he wanted.

He hadn’t ever actually thought about that before, prior to Donnie asking him. Of whether or not he would’ve wanted a different version of his brother. He found his answer true regardless.

Donnie gave him a long look, and then glanced away, softly chattering to himself under his breath. Still not enough, then.

“And as for the whole… thouchy-feely stuff…” He hesitated, trying to find the right way to put things. “It’s not you guys, okay? It’s not you, it’s my issues gunking it up. I’ve just never… done that sort of thing. I don’t think I even know how to.”

Donnie didn’t look at him for a long moment, and then, some of his defense leaving his posture, he did. “It’s not hard,” Donnie said slowly, warily. “Just is. Simple. Closeness is family, and family is closeness. You’re mine family, like Mikey, like Leo, like… rat,” He added Splinter to the list a little begrudgingly. “And April, too, s’ppose. Closeness keeps us together, stronger… easy if you try.”

“…you have Mikey, though,” Raph pointed out. “Isn’t he enough?”

Donnie shrugged. “Yes? No? He is… Mikey, and you are you, same as all others. Everyone is different, but important anyway. Love Mikey, need him yes, but there’s also you. All of you.” He looked Raph in the eyes, something between cautious and hopeful. “Can you try? Have tried, once, back in old homes. Not since. It’s… better. Promise.”

Raph stared at his brother for a long moment, weighing options and responses in his head, before finally replying, “Why do you even need us to? Or want me specifically to. We were good with how things were.”

“You, maybe,” Donnie said softly. “Not… me.”

“…has it really been bothering you that much?” Raph asked.

Donnie nodded slowly, still holding his arms around himself. “You said not because I’m feral, but is this true? You act like it’s not.”
“No, no it’s not because of that,” Raph said, because it wasn’t, it wasn’t. Maybe Donnie ate raw meat sometimes or Mikey would sleep in weird places or they’d PDA all over the place- but that was just how they were. He wasn’t resisting things because of them-

-he was resisting things because he just didn’t know how to deal with it, and tried to avoid it instead.

“Look, I’m gonna admit it, this is all on me,” Raph said, taking a few steps closer to Donnie so they were only a few feet apart. “I didn’t tell you straight up why I wasn’t… doing what you wanted, and I don’t think I ever said for you to stop. I was just. Not sure how I was supposed to react, alright? I don’t think I’ve done more than give a hug or two in years. You and Mikey… I doubt I could do so much feelsy stuff all the time.”

“You tried?” Donnie asked.

“…okay, no I haven’t, but still,” Raph sighed. “I don’t remember much about being a little kid, but that’s probably the only time in my life I did this sort of thing. I grew up and grew out of it. Maybe you will, too.”

Donnie shook his head, a little more force than probably necessary. “No, could never. Have, once, was terrible and won’t do so ever again. Just- no.”

“When did you… oh,” Raph felt his heart do a weird twinge, the way Donnie gestured at the scars on his neck. Right. He’d probably been a kid when that happened, and like kids without help ever dealt with anything well… “Okay, so maybe you won’t grow out of it.”

Donnie nodded. “Won’t. Mikey neither. Closeness keeps us together, would keep you together, too, all of us together. It’s… right, can’t you get?”

“…not really,” Raph sighed.

Donnie looked at him for a drawn out second, and then let his arms drop out of their defensive hug. “Try?” He asked, holding them up ever so slightly. Cautious and ready for… rejection.

Well, Raph kind of owed to him, honestly. The bullshit they’d put him and Mikey through the last few hours- and days, on Raph’s part.

It was just one hug. Probably. He could do one hug. Probably.

He literally fought alien robots on a regular basis now. He could do this and not screw it up.

“…just don’t go crazy or anything,” Raph said, raising his own arms to accept the invitation.

Donnie’s expression brightened immediately- god, when he wasn’t being inscrutable, he was like an open book- and used his stupidly lanky arms to pull Raph into a loose hug. Raph’s brother tangled them together, and Raph ended up with his forehead pressed to Donnie’s plastron. Unfamiliar, but not uncomfortable. Just a little strange. Less desperate than the hug after the Foot attack had been.

First five seconds of hug- assessment: going fine. Actually pretty okay. He’d done hugs before, this one wasn’t much different excluding the awkward situation. Ten seconds into the hug- still fine, getting a little long by Raph’s standards. Fifteen seconds- alright, a little clingy, but alri- hey wait what’s that-

Raph’s shoulders jerked and he bent his neck at a weird angle to get away from the digits on it. “Ooooookay why are you doing that?”
Donnie gave him a Look, from the annoyingly taller angle he had to look down from. God damn was he tall when you got close. “Scratches?” He said in a *duh* type of tone. Did Donnie even know what that phrase was yet? Jeeze. “Part of being close. Duh.” Apparently he did. Little shit.

Raph squinted up at Donnie, debating ditching the hug all together. Donnie rolled his eyes. “Try,” He reminded Raph impatiently.

He did say he would. Darn it.

“Fine,” Raph said grumpily. Not like he didn’t know Donnie could tear people’s throats out with those claws of his, the ones his brother was placing right back onto Raph’s neck and starting to- oh, oh. Okay.

Wow.

Well.

Okay, so scratches were. A thing. That felt nice.

“See?” Donnie said, continuing to scratch all the places Raph couldn’t get with his comparably dull nails. “Better to be close. Nicer.”

And then he moved his claws up to the rest of Raph’s skull and- *aaaahhhhhhh Jesus Christ why did Raph cut his nails.* This was. Amazing.

It was probably a good thing Donnie was still hugging him with his other arm, because Raph’s body was kind of getting limp. Scratches were officially the best thing. Why had he been so against this. God.

“Good?”

Raph made an incoherent sound.

Donnie hummed happily, the sound moving into a purr.

Embarrassingly enough, Raph felt one work its way up his own throat, but he didn’t give a shit. He felt the knot of his mask be tugged undone, left to hang loosely on his neck, and still didn’t give a shit. Donnie was his new favorite brother hands down.

Yeah, okay, so there was something to the touchy-feely stuff.

Oh god yes scratches. More scratches.

Donnie made a pleased clicking sound, and then laughed. Raph mumbled something along the lines of “-fuck you and your stupid non-English laughter,” but it didn’t come out quite right and Donnie ignored it anyways.

Raph’s chest felt the vibrations of Donnie’s warbly purrs, and his own purrs warbled right back. He wasn’t hitting quite the same complexity with sound as his brother was, but the longer Donnie scratched at Raph’s scales the louder Raph got.

He didn’t do that sort of thing unless he was alone and usually only when he got around to having a hot shower. He tended to forget about those, there were always other things to do besides get clean futilely. Living in the underground of New York kind of deterred him from trying to stay clean, so purring and hot showers didn’t happen often.
But apparently. Scratches.

Raph hadn’t thought much about his brothers’ claws, beyond that they were a little strange and a sorta cool, but now he was. Kind of enviously.

*Oh god scratches, yes.*

And then Donnie stopped, and Raph made a complaining noise before he could stop himself.

“Let’s sit down,” Donnie suggested. “Talk more about… other things.”

Raph took a second to drag his brain back together. Right, they still needed to do that. “Sure, just. Could you? Again?”

“This?” Two scratches to the base of Raph’s skull.

“Yes.”

Donnie snickered at him. “Told you.”

Raph thumped his head on his brother’s chest. “Shut uuuuup.”

Donnie just kept laughing.

Then the scratching resumed once they’d sat down against the wall, and Raph forgave his brother immediately for laughing at him.

A bit later, or maybe a while later time was hard when *scratches* were a thing—Raph decided to finally pull himself together enough to stop purring like a dumbass kid and get his brother to listen to some ground rules.

“Oh okay so. Hugging. And scratches. You can do that *sometimes*, alright? Sometimes, but not all the time. I’m not Mikey.”

“Hmmm…”

Raph swatted Donnie’s hand away from his neck. He wasn’t being lulled back into a hugfest, not a third time. “Hands off. That shit is cut off for tonight and I’m not- no, giving me innocent looks won’t convince me otherwise. Shut up. You’re like the least innocent mutant ever.”

“Slander,” Donnie said with a small gasp, and Raph really wondered how many damn books he’d read lately to pick up *that* phrase.

“But for real,” Raph said seriously, putting a hand on Donnie’s clawed one. “I’d really prefer it if you did that kind of thing with me… not in front of other people, okay? I’m just. Not comfortable being so open like that. You and Mikey can do whatever, but just… keep this sort of thing between us. Please?”

Donnie smiled, and turned his hand over to clasp it around Raph’s. “Okay. I promise.”

Raph smiled back. He felt like things would finally go back to normal now, at least between him and Donnie. Hopefully, their other two siblings would be on the same page with each other already, and Raph could just talk to Mikey the same way he’d talked to Donnie, should their youngest brother feel like they needed to.

Donnie’s free arm made a move to get at Raph’s neck again, and as Raph went to swat at it, he
opened himself up to a surprise hug.

“Oh for- **Donnie.**”

“**Shh,** only hugs now.”

“Oh my god. You’re like a fucking leech.”

“Squid.”

“What?”

“I’m more like a squid. Long, fast. Eats small swimming things.”

“…fair enough.”

Donnie made a *hm-hm-hm-hmmmm* sound in his plastron, and continued to hold Raph hostage in his still stupidly long arms.

Raph grumbled without real heat, and gave up fighting. “You’re ridiculous, you know?”

“No, that’s you.”

Raph growled a little, and Donnie just laughed.

After another moment, Raph returned the hug.

So. Maybe touchy-feely things weren’t so bad, so long as he had privacy for it. Raph would have to properly evaluate how he felt about the whole thing later, once he was out of range of Donnie and his magical fucking claws’ witchcraft.

*Oh god scratches yes-* hey wait.

“**Hey, I said no- oh, oh shit. There, yes.**”

“Ah ha ha ha…”

“Shut up, and keep scratching.”

Mikey walked slowly back into his home, feeling tired out. He’d run as fast and far as he could on two legs, and then circled close to their territory for a few hours. Climbed a few roofs, ate a few birds. Thought about things.

He still felt upset. All his emotions still in a twist and he was still unsure how to deal with them.

Mikey’s eyes drifted to the only figure in the wide room as he entered. **Lee-oh,** watching the **tee-vee,** alone.

**Lee-oh** turned his head, and he gave Mikey a nervous seeming smile. “Hey, Mikey. How… how you feeling?”
Mikey’s hurt, and angry, and confused feelings swirled at the sight of his brother, lodging his throat, choking him, until-

-he swallowed his emotions, and put them somewhere they couldn’t touch him anymore.

“I’m fine,” Mikey said, giving Lee-oh the best smile he could. “Am fine, very fine.”

Lee-oh seemed relieved by his answer, and Mikey smiled wider. Because that’d been what he wanted.

No more upset feelings, not for any of them. It was better to not have them at all.

Mikey settled next to Lee-oh in front of the tee-vee, and curled over his knees. He saw Lee-oh rubbing at a spot on his chest, and ignored the glances his brother tried to secretly shoot him.

Mikey was tired. It’d been a long evening, and he didn’t feel like thinking about anything anymore.

Donnie and Raf wandered out of the lab a while later, smiling and speaking without hesitation or tension. Mikey smiled back at both of them, happy since they’d clearly figured things out. Fi-nal-ly, it was getting plain stupid, watching them circle each other all angry and confused.

Donnie asked him, as they all gathered around the tee-vee for one of Lee-oh’s shows, Are you feeling okay now?

And Mikey responded, Yes am fine very fine, you you feeling okay?

Very, Donnie said warmly, glancing over at Raf. Have talked have fixed things, we understand better each other now

Good, Mikey said, leaning on Donnie’s shoulder, sliding close as he could. Very good.

Donnie hummed an agreement, and gave Mikey’s forehead a quick nuzzle before turning back to the tee-vee.

Mikey smiled softly, and then closed his eyes. Opting to listen to what happened around him, rather than watch. He didn’t feel like it tonight, too tired to try and keep up with the too quick talking people on screen, or interpret what his eenglish speaking brothers were feeling.

He just wanted to be quiet for a bit, and spend time with Donnie. He didn’t have to try hard with Donnie, even if he had to with everyone else.

Chapter End Notes

okay so, long story short, i was in a Really Bad swing of depression last time i touched on this story. bad enough i didn't even realize it until it was over. and basically when that happens, my brain applies a bunch of warnings all over whatever i’d been working on during the depression swing that was making it worse, and even if i forget Why i can't do something my brain keeps the roadblocks up to prevent a return of the
depression swing.

so for the longest time this chapter had 'DO NOT TOUCH TO NOT THINK ABOUT DO NOT DO NOT' labelled all around it, and me being me kind of just went "ey okay bud whatever you say" and let it be. i still thought a shit ton about future events, like, i have five scenes specifically that are auto-calm down things now, but like... i just couldn't get my brain to go at this chapter. i started it at least three times and only just got around to finishing.

honestly, i feel really bad i left you all hanging for so long, and i'm not even sure if this chapter will be worth the wait in your opinions. i hope it is, since i stayed up pretty late to finally kick writer's block in the gonads.

idk, i'm just hoping the other sorts of writing practice i've done since i last published for DD will make things worth it, since my writing quality did a jump since then. lemme know if you guys are still with me, and thanks for being so patient. i won't leave off on this story, no matter what my broken brain tries on me, okay? trust me on that.

thanks to all the folks who've stuck with me this far, y'all are troopers and i appreciate you all.
queries and gratitude.

Chapter Summary

just something i wanna ask you all

okay so, this series has been going on for a long time, and i've been thinking about a comment i got three million years ago. it was about how i shouldn't burn myself out trying to rewrite the entire series on my own, which admittedly i ended up attempting and failing to do, and they gave me a suggestion to go at with a piece by piece approach rather than large scale chapters covering everything.

basically, while i really really wish i could, i sincerely doubt i'll be able to reach the lofty rewrite goals my idealistic younger self had. i also now understand why there's typically a board of writers instead of a single writer doing all the work for a television series- this is just too much work for one person working on it constantly, let alone one person who is frequently distracted by shiny new fic ideas and can't keep themself focused.

essentially speaking i'm asking here and now where everyone would like me to cut this specific fic off at, from which point on i'll be writing in scattered drabbles like i have with "The other side of the divide" since that method is A) less stressful on my anxiety and muse, and B) actually a lot quicker to update, as you've likely noticed. you guys would be able to request specific scenes too, translated into this AU setting, and that would hopefully ease any disappointment i've generated by having to give up on my grand dream here.

if i could clone myself, i really would. i probably could have done this if i had more than one of me. :

so, if you all would be so kind, please leave in the comments below where you'd think a good cut off point for "Division Difference" would. and, in the meantime, i'd like to give a shout out to a couple of people who really made me happy regarding this whole fic.

shout out to Jiyun, who gave me absolutely adorable and heartwarming doodles a little while ago. they really did make me incredibly happy and i'm sorry we fell out of contact afterwards (i'm bad at that sort of thing, but please know i go and look at those doodles now and again and just smile to myself). following that, shout out to whoever similarly gave me DD doodles, through my tumblr. i also go and look at those and smile to myself (the latest of your drawings has been my i-pod's background multiple times since i got it). and finally, shout out to my good friend Rhi over on tumblr, who gave me stunning fanart of both DD and TOSOTD for my birthday this past week. you're the best Rhi, and that incredible gift plus your willingness to listen to me babble about this AU made this birthday one of the best. <3

and of course, a shout out to everyone who encouraged me along the way of this turmoil filled journey, and for your guys' understanding that sometimes depression and anxiety win.

thank you for your time, and please be assured i'm awfully sorry i can't do the full rewrite i always wanted to. i hope the drabble version of the series will be enough in its place.
End Notes

Let me know if this should keep happening or not in the comments. (σ´_´σ)

Works inspired by this one:  
_"We walk paths that are mirrored and yet intertwined more than we could ever understand."_ by FanFiction_Artist_Prototype

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