Come out, Come out

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Come out, Come out

by [Werecakes](http://archiveofourown.org/)

Summary

Based on the episode, "The Power Inside Her". April was not able to bring Donatello back which changed everything for the family of mutants. Leonardo becomes withdrawn and starts having nightmares while Michelangelo looses himself in television leaving Raphael to try to keep the family together. The usual hothead has trouble with the new role and is worried that his little brother is wasting away while his older brother slowly slips into insanity. But is Leo really insane when he claims he's hearing Donatello over the static of the radio?

Notes

If any one has suggestions or comments please do not be shy and speak up. I'm playing with different pairing ideas and if there is any you would like to see please say so.
Leonardo sat down on his legs as he placed the tray of food outside of Donatello’s lab. He found it difficult to swallow in the oppressing silence. It had been some time since… since what had happened with April. At first, everything was going back to normal… but something had broken inside his gentle brother. Something that they had not seen; the tiny pencil line through Donnie’s heart. Each day it grew thicker and thicker. It had been a slow process, so slow that they had not seen it developing. Tiny steps were taken backwards, away from April, away from family. With each step his shoulders had slumped more and more, his arms raised higher and higher until he was holding onto himself in the darkness with only his tears to comfort him.

Less and less he ate. Less and less did he show his face. Less and less was he the Donatello that Leo had known and Leonardo had hated himself for that. He blamed himself for ever allowing any of this to happen. He should have been there for Donnie. He should have forbidden his brother from ever developing feelings beyond friendship for April! He should have seen it coming! He should have-

Leo closed his eyes so tight that his lids ached. He clenched his hands into white knuckled fists that rested on his thighs. Faced with the bleak emptiness of his home only made everything that much worse. He wasn’t blind to the facts; they were mutants. No one could relate to them besides other mutants. He could relate to Donnie for being in love with a human but… but now Karai was a mutant too…. April wasn’t. Betrayed by one’s love interest… Raph could relate but… Mona Lisa confessed her heart to their brother, all April seemed to do was pull Donnie along, unable to make a decision between the turtle and Casey Jones. But none of them- NONE of them- could relate to the fact that the person they loved the most in life had… had killed them and put them back together again. The sense of betrayal would be like no other. The hurt. The fear.

He hated himself for not seeing that before! He was the leader, the older brother, he should have seen it! He should have know! He should have protected!!

But this wasn’t about him. This was about Donnie. His sweet little brother, who had given everything up…

He swallowed. Took a few calming breaths before schooling his face into a smile. He raised up a fist and knocked on the lab door.
“Donnie?” He spoke softly. He had to repeat himself, louder, since he was certain his brother could not hear his first call through the door. “Donnie?”

When there was no reply he just talked, keeping his tone as light as he could keep it. “I brought you dinner. Sensei made fish and rice… it’s really good. You should eat it.”

He raised up his hands, a strange chill running through his body. Something was so very wrong.

Nestled in his palm was a wrinkled piece of purple fabric. His heart started to beat fast as he hurriedly placed it on the floor in front of him. His teeth clenched as he tried to desperately smooth out all the wrinkles.

He needed to preserve it. He needed to keep it nice. Donnie would want this back when he was better.

Leo’s fingers carefully pressed around the edges of the eye holes of the mask. No one had eyes like Donnie’s…

A smile forced itself onto the leader’s lips. He carefully picked up the mask. He tilted his head and looked through the holes as if he could see Donnie’s eyes looking right back at him.

Donnie.

“Hi Donnie.” Leo smiled a bit more despite the fact that it seemed a bit darker than usual.

A soft, slender hand touched his shoulder. Leonardo’s heart stopped. His thoughts halted as the darkness rushed forward to press against his skin.
“Leonardo?”

Leo jerked his attention to Splinter.

“What are you doing with this, my son?” Splinter leaned down, his hand reaching for the purple mask. Leo deftly watched as his father started to remove it from his grasp. “This should be in the family shrine with his picture.”

No.

“You should not carry this around with you, my son. If we are to preserve his memory—”

A flash of memory- Donnie’s picture right next to the one of Tang Shen, the mask folded and placed right in front of it as Splinter lit incense and candles for remembering the dead.

“NO!”

The turtle lunged forward, grabbing at the mask.

Everything fell away, no floor to catch his feet, no father in front of him to stop him. All there was to see was darkness and the mask. He clawed in the darkness to snatch up the mask. He clung onto it, held it to his heart as he curled up into a ball.

When Leonardo woke up he could feel his heart beating in his throat and his body was coated in sweat. He stared up at the emptiness above him in the dark room.
It was so dark.

It was so cold.

His eyes narrowed, tears forming at the edges. The tears rolled down his temples, becoming larger and larger as he felt something terrible clench his chest. His body began to tremble as once more he had to come and face the reality that his brother was gone, done in by the woman he had loved.

She had begged for their forgiveness. She had openly wept. The sound of her voice as she tried to apologize to Splinter, on her hands and knees on the tatami mats of the dojo. It was so painful, but it was nothing compared to his own pain. April's emotions were only jetsam floating in the raging sea of chaos that happened afterwords. He could still hear Splinter's soft cries that he had tried to hide as he put a new picture to the family shrine that honored their dead. He heard Raphael's rage and sorrow as he broke anything that could be smashed. He heard Mikey's screams for Raph to calm down, begging him not to break anything in Donatello's room or his lab. The image of Raph's feral eyes washed with hot tears open wide with realization of the implications, it was burned into his memory. The way Mikey bared the door, expression broken and pained. Raph had pressed his hands to his face and screamed as he fell to his knees. Mikey rushed to him, throwing his little body over his brother's shell as if he could shield him from harsh reality.

It was all burned into him. Branded like a hot iron to the thigh.

He gasped for breath. It seemed difficult to exhale as the tears continued to fall and his body shook. He raised his hands above his face, barely able to see the blurred shapes. His fingers curled, nails biting into his palms as he pressed his fists against his eyes.

Silently he wept.

Leonardo had no idea what time it was until he got out of bed. It was as if the act of crying had drained all the energy out of him forcing him to fall back to sleep. It took a lot of energy to get himself out of bed. He had not even tried to put on his gear. He had hesitated at his door, not sure if he had wanted to even leave his room or not. He knew what would be on the other side. Silence that
nibbled away at his sanity. Darkness that forced his shoulders to hunch and his back to bend under its weight.

Still, he reached forward, turned the nob and exited.

As true to form Mikey was curled up in a ball on one of the sofas. His eyes stared at the TV that had such low sound it was better off muted. The sliding doors to the dojo were open and Raph was inside, trying to meditate with their Master. It was an odd turn of events but when Raph had caught their father crying late one night he had took it upon himself to try and encourage the rat. And while Leo had started to drift away from everyone, Raph seemed to have stepped forward and had taken his place as leader and rational thinker. The only time that Leonardo got to see his brother's famous hot temper were on the rare occasions that Casey Jones would come to visit. He looked forward to those days, Casey was loud and pulled his brothers out of their shells. Mikey would be bubbly for as long as Casey stayed. Raph would tussle with their human friend and they would get into punching contests. Leo would sit with their father and watch as a tiny bit of normality pushed back the harshness of reality. Then... Casey would go. He would leave them and return to his home on the surface plunging them back into the darkness.

“You wanna watch some Space Heroes, Leo?” Mikey's voice was small, his eyes still glued to the tv in front of him.

Leonardo stopped for a moment. He looked at the static covered screen. It was still good enough to watch a tv show or a movie through the interference.

When his big brother had not answered Mikey continued to talk, “The picture is not the greatest... Can't seem to get good reception even when I mess with the antenna.”

It was a few moments before the leader finally spoke up, “It... it runs off of cable, Mikey. We don't have an antenna.”

“Well how am I supposed to know that!” Michelangelo snapped. He pulled his knees up to his chest and grumpily folded his arms over them. “I'm not the one that set this up! I don't know how to fix something like this! It just started up two weeks after Don...” The youngest turtle's eyes started to burn, tears welled up. His voice went back down to a whisper. “When... Donnie...”
Mikey buried his face into his crossed arms and started to cry. Leo held out a hand towards his baby brother for a moment before lowering it limply to his side. He slowly blinked. Turned and walked away. There was nothing he could do to comfort the orange clad turtle. Nothing at all.

Leo walked over to the kitchen, stood in the entrance for a bit. Long enough to hear Raphael's voice trying to calm Mikey down. He must have come running when he heard the sorrowful wails.

Deciding that he had lost his apatite, that is, if he even had one to begin with, Leo wondered into Donatello's lab. He left the door open, Mikey's sniffling was winding down, drifting farther away as Raph took their baby brother to the dojo. It left everything in silence once more. Except, with the door open he could barely hear the static filtered tv in the front room. It seemed to describe what he was seeing; a perfectly preserved lab that didn't seem real any more.

Things that showed that Donatello was around were slowly disappearing. No more cups full of coffee. No more new sketches taped onto boards, or new motor oil stains on the floor. No new projects. No old ones... only unfinished ones.

The tv started to get louder. He glanced over his shoulder to see that the rest of his family were huddled together on the sofa now, trying to watch something together. Trying to cheer Mikey up with the last reserves of cheer left in them.

Leo sighed heavily, his shoulder slumping forward a little. He dragged his feet across the cold floor, in the dark, dark room. There was a small cot where Donnie would sleep at times when too tired to get to his room. Leo laid down, carefully, pulling over himself the rumpled bedding until his head was covered and there was nothing but him and the darkness, leaving his family to watch their shows until they turned off the tv and went to bed.

*Everything was soft, it was warm too. He could hear the sounds of the sea rolling. A breeze brushed against his face, he could smell the salty air. He opened his eyes seeing the ocean that stretched on for as far as his eyes could see. There was a soft sandy beach, craggy boulders littered the beach along with tall tufts of grass.*
Down by the water was a tall figure staring out into the endless blue.

Leo's heart stopped. He couldn't even breathe before his legs started to move. He plunged forward, arms pinwheeling until he caught his balance.

“Donnie!! DONNIE!!”

He ran as fast as he could to his brother. He reached out his hand to grab onto the olive turtle. For a moment he felt flesh before it gave, popping like a bubble, bursting the calm scenery away. Everything was violently thrust into a strange world of dark greens and blues.

Leo shuffled his feet, frantically turning around to see where Donatello had disappeared to.

“DONNIE!!”

The only reply he got was the sound of twisting metal, groaning and squeaking above him. He took a step back, looking up. His eyes grew wide.

A boat? Ship? What the hell was that over his head?!

There was a terrible scratching sound that arouse. A white noise that bleached out everything else around him. His hands flew up to his head, pressing his palms against his ear slits as hard as he could as the scratching screamed and blurred with static. The pain was so intense that it forced Leonardo onto his knees. Instead of sand he felt hard metal. Pressure from the sound itself crowded him, shoving hard, stealing his breath. He tried screaming to feel a break from the onslaught. When that brought no relief he tried hitting his head against the metallic floor. Over and over again he beat his head down, using his own hands to give him extra strength to clang his skull against the unforgiving surface.
Then, as soon as it had started, it had stopped, replaced with a soft static and strange beeps and clicks.

Leo collapsed onto his side, breathing hard, too hard to swallow as some saliva slipped from the corner of his mouth.

“...cho...... r-y...... p....p... ho....”

The turtle winced from the new sounds, bits and pieces of radio static coming together to make disjointed sounds. He let out a whimper from the back of his throat as it continued to make the strangest noise, like an animal trying to talk.

“....r....in....mike..........o......ember.......go....”

Mike... Mikey?

There was a blinding flash of light and for a brief moment he thought he saw something, towering, misshapen. Then that terrible sound came again. Harsh and hating, biting into his brain with cold teeth.

Leonardo woke up thrusting himself forward. His breath held in his throat he looked around.

He was in Donnie’s bedroom... How did he get there?

He saw the glowing numbers of the clock on Donatello’s bookshelf. The PM light was on as it showed him the time.
He felt a shiver run down his shell... **when** did he get there?
Chapter 2

Raph and Mikey had worked hard on dinner trying to spend quality time with each other. Splinter had been seated at the table for a while now, simply listening to his sons and to the radio that played in the background. He had liked the radio on, even though it was a bit scratchy in sound quality. It made the house feel fuller at times. With raising four sons, Splinter had gotten used to a certain noise level. After the loss of one of his children, it was too easy to hear the void that was left in Donatello's place. It was because of that fact that Raphael had left it on while he served dinner.

The red banded turtle paused for a moment as he watched Leonardo for the first time, in a long time, come into the kitchen to join the family for dinner. The dark color around Leonardo's eyes, his mask hung loosely around his neck, no gear, it all pointed towards the evidence that he was getting no rest despite how much he slept. It was worrisome considering that Leo slept a lot those days. He practiced less, ate little, it was making his once muscular figure smooth out and look more frail. Perhaps it was his own paranoia in the fear of losing any more family members that made Raph perceive Leo in such a way, at least... that's what he had hoped.

“Leo...” Mikey barely made a sound in saying his big brother's name when he saw Leonardo entering the kitchen. They had started to sit down, as usual there were two other spots at the table, one in anticipation for Leo to join them, the other was in respect for Donatello, as if his spirit could sit with them and share in a good meal even though the plate would always remain empty.

“Hey, little brother.” Leo tried a smile. It hurt a little less to make it this time than his last attempt.

“I am glad you could join us, my son.” Splinter's eyes were a little brighter seeing his eldest start to take his seat.

“I... I'm sorry I haven't...” Blue eyes turned down to an empty plate in front of him. How was he supposed to formulate the words to apologize to them. He's been so obsessed with Donatello's death that it had caused him to drive an uncomfortable rift between him and his family.

Suddenly there was movement in front of him. A dark green hand started to pile rice and vegetables onto his plate. Leo looked up to see Raphael, who had a small frown on his lips. His dark green brother would reach over to a bowl or plate and add just a little more of this and that onto Leo's.

“You don't need to say anything.” Raph kept his voice low and calm. “We're just glad you're coming out of your shell.” Then Raph gave Leo a small smile before leaving to his own seat.

Leo felt a great relief. Looking around to the three people he had left he knew they could relate to him; how they hurt just like him, how they were there for him, he felt ashamed for not doing the same for them. He picked up his fork and glanced over to the empty plate for Donnie. He blinked while remembering his dream; Donnie standing by the ocean. The soft and gentle feeling he had when he saw his brother. It made him wonder. Maybe that was Donnie's way of saying that he was okay, to not worry anymore and to move on with his life.

Blue eyes looked back down to the food in front of him. The rice was puffy and white, the vegetables colorful, the chicken was somehow grilled. Leo spared a small smile at the unusual mixture of pepperoni, onions, and... something else he couldn't identify in mac and cheese. That had definitely been cooked by Mikey.

Even though it all looked very appetizing something in him simply couldn't salivate. He could barely smell the meal, though it looked warm he couldn't tell its temperature.
"What'cha waiting for Leo? Raph and I worked hard on this." Mikey grinned, very proud of himself that he made something that looked more like a meal for a cooking show than the Goulash mixtures he was used to making.

Leo felt his lips pull into a wider smile. He looked up with soft eyes to his brothers.

"Thank you for the me-" His expression fell, his breath halting in his throat.

Sitting on one of the kitchen counters was Donatello, holding a coffee mug and looking to the side as he swung his legs. It looked like he was reading something on the counter.

"Donnie…" Leo stood up quickly, his chair falling back.

He heard it clatter to the floor and as he blinked everything changed. Once more he was standing outside the kitchen, hands ready to push back the cloth Japanese restaurant style curtains. He moved forward, brushing the curtains to the side, looking in finding Splinter sitting at the table with Mikey. Raph was setting the last of their dinner out on the table, eyeing Leo.

"Leo…" Mikey's voice was as quiet as a mouse.

Leonardo went to his seat, hesitant, as if it was a different chair that he had never seen before.

"Hey, little brother." Leo started to smile when he felt a small pressure start to build in his temples.

That was weird… this seemed a little familiar…

“I am glad you could join us, my son.” Splinter still had his ears back, but he looked livelier.

“I... I'm sorry I haven't...” Leo had a hard time finishing his words. This was… this was a little too familiar.

He pulled back his chair and took a seat. His head was starting to feel too heavy for his neck, lopsided and full of something trying to come to the surface of his skull.

A hand started to move in front of him. He glanced over to see his sai wielding brother working to put food on Leo's plate.

“You don't need to say anything.” Raph said rather softly. “We're just glad you're coming out of your shell.”

Leo's brows furrowed as he watched Raph take his own seat, the family starting to tuck themselves in for dinner. The faint playing of music was still in the background but this time it seemed… different, older in style.

He let out a sigh as he rested his head in a hand. He needed to get back to meditating. Sleep was not giving him the rest he needed and he was starting to think weird things.

"What'cha waiting for Leo? Raph and I worked hard on this." Mikey flashed a grin, hoping to encourage his eldest brother to eat.

Leo could appreciate that. He looked up with a smile to his little brother.

"Thank you for the me-" He froze.

Sitting on one of the kitchen counter was Donatello, holding a coffee mug and looking to the side as he swung his legs. It looked like he was reading something on the counter. He leaned over and
messed with something then took a sip from his cup.

The music changed.

The radio, Donnie was playing with the radio. Looking at the stations and carefully listening before reaching over to turn the tuning nob and find another station.

"Donnie…" Leo stood up quickly, his chair falling back.

There was no clatter of chair to floor. No weird looks from his family. He was outside the kitchen, hand raised, curtain cloth in hand. He could hear the music playing in the background. Splinter at the table… across from Mikey. Raph was serving…

He stepped into the kitchen. For some reason he knew exactly what Mikey was going to say and on que, his baby brother murmured Leonardo's name.

This time, Leonardo didn't say anything back, only looked at his brother with disbelief. Michelangelo frowned a bit in response and squirmed in his seat.

Splinter cleared his throat, "I'm glad you-

Leo's attention snapped over to his father and finished his sentence. "-could join us, my son."

His family exchanged concerned looks before centering their gazes on him.

"You feeling okay, Leo?" Raph asked.

Thank goodness, that was different, maybe all of this really was in his head.

"Yeah!" He expressed a little too quickly. Leo cleared his throat while rubbing at his eyes and speaking more calmly, "Yeah… I'm… I'm sorry… I haven't…"

What would be the proper words to describe what he was going through? And why was his head filling with pressure?

"You don't need to say anything." Raph was now by Leo. Putting food on his plate. It made him stiffen. "We're just glad you're coming out of your shell."

Leo pressed his lips together, hard. This wasn't happening, this wasn't…

"What'cha waiting for Leo? Raph and I worked hard on this."

He almost flinched at the sound of Michelangelo's voice.

He lowered his hand and looked over Raphael's shoulder, to the kitchen counter where Donatello sat. He was sipping from his mug and turning the tune of the radio.

Slowly, he stood up, maybe this time, if he didn't say anything. Didn't attract any attention to himself. Then maybe, just maybe…

He was standing outside the kitchen, ready to go in. Leonardo shook, his head felt so much pressure, the static on the radio was thick and loud, buzzing in his head like a swarm of hornets. He stepped into the kitchen, greeted with the same vision he had seen the past three times.

"Leo…"
That was Mikey.

Leonardo slowly shuffled in, stopping at his chair and gripping the back of it. He had to get his bearings. He had to think. He had to make sense of all of this. He had seen this before, knew exactly what they were going to do and say, but how?

"I'm glad you could join us, my son."

He mouthed the words silently as the words fell from his father's mouth. He rubbed a hand over his face. The static was so much worse now yet he could still hear the faint wobbly tones of music. It pounded into his head. Crashing and crushing his skull like ocean waves battering against a rocky shore.

He dreaded to see Donatello sitting on the counter as Raph walked around Mikey to go and start putting food on Leo's plate.

"You don't need to say anything." Raph sounded like he was trying to give Leo a reprieve, a reason not to talk. "We're just glad you're coming out of your shell."

Raph left his side, went to his chair and sat down. Leo could still hear the piece of furniture's legs scraping across the cement floor when he took his hand slowly away from his face. He glared at the vision of his deceased brother sitting on the counter. Messing with that infernal radio making it scratchier, making it louder!

"Stop it!!" Leo shouted. "STOP IT!!"

He raised his hands to cover his ears. His head felt like it was about to split in two.

Once more he found himself outside the kitchen.

Once more he could see his family doing the exact same thing as they have been doing for however many counts of this loop has provided for him.

Once more he could hear the horrific change of that terrible radio station making it so scratchy, so loud!

Once more they tried talking to him. And all he could do was cover his ears as he stared at that horrible, horrible radio. His teeth gritting as the pressure increased and the pain made his eyes water.

"Stop it." He finally said.

Raph paused in putting food on his brother's plate.

"Stop it…" Leo sniffled, eyes staying on the radio.

"Leo… seriously… are you okay?" Raph asked.

And once more Donatello was suddenly there, messing with the radio.

"Stop it." Leo leaned forward, his hand slapping into the rice and chicken on his plate. He motioned a hand in front of him in a pleading mannerism. "Donnie… Donnie, I'm sorry that I didn't-"

Raph reached out for Leo, unsure of what was going on. He glanced to a frightened Mikey and a concerned Splinter for any suggestions on to handle what looked to be Leo having a mental breakdown.
All of the sudden the radio screeched out a wailing long tone. Leo put his hands over his ears once more. The ear piercing tone scratched and wavered as something tried to come through.

Leo rushed forward, grabbing the radio. He yanked on it pulling it up and back before violently smashing it on the edge of the counter. Over and over again he whacked it, breaking off chunks, making the speakers spurt and sputter in trying to produce sound, dying and whirring as they broke.

He stood there shaking. Sweating. Breathing heavy as he waited for that moment when everything would reset. Waiting for his head to feel worse. Waiting for Donatello to come back and haunt him for eternity in just that one, simple, moment.

This time it didn't. Things changed, things progressed.

"What is wrong with you?!!" Mikey yelled. He pushed Leo to the side, he scrambled like a madman trying to collect the pieces. "That was Donnie's!!" Tears were racing down freckled cheeks as he tried to bring it all to his chest as if the broken radio was actually Donatello's broken body.

A rough grip took his shoulder whirling him around to meet Raphael's hard green eyes. "Get your butt in the dojo."

When Leo didn't move Raph shoved him into movement, "Now, Leo! Dojo!"

When Leonardo was leaving, he looked over his shoulder to see Splinter not moving from his seat, though his hand had reached over to rest on Donatello's dinner plate. Raphael had grabbed a sack and was helping Mikey pick up the pieces of the radio.
“What the SHELL is wrong with you?!” Raph’s voice was loud, yet it didn’t startle Leonardo who was only reveling in the peaceful quiet that came after destroying that terrible radio. There was no more pressure in his head. No more noise that seemed to invade his head and swell his brain. Everything was new once again and Donatello… he wasn’t there, sitting on the edge of his vision like a feverish nightmare.

Not understanding Leonardo’s relaxed form, Raphael became angrier. He shoved Leonardo in the shoulder as hard as he could. A sense of satisfaction crept over the red banded turtle when his older brother tensed and frowned.

“Do I have your attention now?”

Leo narrowed his eyes. “You didn’t need to shove me.”

“No, I didn’t, but I wanted to. I want to do a lot more than that to you too.”

“Don’t start-”

“Start what Leo?! Start losing it, like you? Do you have any idea what kind of damage you just did?! It took me months to get Mikey to be okay enough to help me in the kitchen and you just come in acting all crazy and breaking Donnie’s stuff!”

Leo opened his mouth only to have whatever he would have said be cut off by his brother continuing his angry rant.

“At first I thought you just needed your space after Donnie died.”

The eldest turtle flinched at that last word. Died. He was but…

“I gave you that space. I thought you needed time, I gave you that time. I know you blame yourself for Donnie’s death but really, none of us knew that was going to happen. But now… now you need to face reality, Leo. Donnie’s dead.”

Leo dropped his head, feeling a twitching anger building. He hated it when people talked about Donatello like that. Dead. He couldn’t…

“He’s GONE, Leo.”

“Don’t say that.” Dead… Donnie wasn’t…

“He’s DEAD!” Raph growled, pain and anger in his eyes.

“Shut up!”

“Face reality, Leo!” Raph shoved at his brother’s shoulder again.

This time it was Leo who threw the first punch, leaning fully into it as his knuckles connected with his brother’s jaw. The room fell quiet for two breaths before Leonardo let out a primal scream. He threw another punch at Raphael, followed by another and another. Each punch weakened a little more than the last as all Raph could do was block against the different blows that turned into a suffering flail. Eventually the deep green turtle was able to struggle to catch his older brother’s wrists. He held on tight, feeling how thin Leo had gotten. His heart beat painfully as he realilzed how his
once brave and strong brother had gotten so weak. And though it hurt to hear it, Leo’s sorrowful wails gave Raph a sense of relief. Leo was finally getting it out, everything he had bottled up.

The frustration.

The hopelessness.

The helplessness.

The poison it all made when bottled up.

Raph let go of Leo in favor of holding onto his shoulders as his brother’s knees started to buckle. He could see the tears running down leaf green cheeks.

“I should have… I could have…” Leo’s voice broke.

All Raph could do was shake his head. “No, Leo.” He felt a familiar thickness in his throat. He did the same thing, blaming himself, believing if he could only turn back time he could have prevented everything. But, as Donnie would say, “the facts are the facts”. They had no idea what was to happen. If they had, would Donnie have even fallen in love with April? Would Splinter have trained her? Would they have stayed her friend or watched her carefully like a volatile chemical? All of these questions had no answers. They only existed to torment them making them doubt so much bringing into play the most haunting phrases; I would have… I could have… I should have...

Leonardo curled in on himself as he felt everything finally collapse around him.

Donatello was gone.

His brother was dead.

No longer would he wake up to the sounds of late night tinkering, hear his funny, infectious laugh. He wouldn’t smell freshly brewed coffee. He wouldn’t hear love sick ramblings, flow charts, random lectures as to why certain things worked.

Beautiful eyes.

Goofy smile.

It was all gone.

While it pressed into him, he curled up onto his knees on the floor of the dojo, screaming and crying, desperately clawing his hands over Raphael’s legs with his head on his lap as he brother curled up over him as if Raph’s shell could spare him from being crushed by this loss.

“DONNIE!!” Leo wailed.

Raph pressed his cheek against his brother’s shell. Squeezing his eyes so tightly closed they hurt, telling himself to desperately that he wouldn’t cry, Leo needed him strong. Tears were weakness, not strength. Even with coaching himself to stay strong, he found tears on his cheeks later.

*******

Casey Jones was many things, he was arrogant, reckless, academically challenged, and even what the one corner store owner calls him a “punk kid”. He was also faithful, loyal, family oriented, strong, and highly adaptive. It was these very traits that helped him make his decision on “who’s side” he was on. April was his girl, or at least she was until that terrible night.
He could still remember her kneeling in the middle of the street, rain soaking her as she tried and tried to use the remainder of her abilities to “bring back” Donnie. He remembered how she hung back and shut down, eyes perpetually staring at the ground while Leo shook and choked on his words. It was Mikey and Raph who finally managed to tell their father what had happened. Splinter had such a small voice for such a strong mutant when he told the humans to leave. It was the first time April spoke, saying only, “But I was possessed by—” Casey had cringed at Splinter’s raging voice that seemed to shake the whole lair.

“We had warned you of that crystal! You made the decision to continue to covet it at the cost of the life of one my sons!!” He had stormed forward, towering, frightening. “Go! Leave! And never return!!”

“But… dad…” Mikey sounded like a small child, unsure of how to deal with the situation, moving next to his friends.

“Michelangelo!” Splinter grabbed Mikey’s arm and yanked him away as if April was toxic.

Casey couldn’t remember much more after that, besides taking April home. The next few days was hard on him as he tried to keep his head together. He was friends with Donnie. Donnie was his love rival. He was super smart, helpful, hopeful. And when he would go and talk with April all she could do was make it about her, how it was unfair of them to kick her out, unfair of them that they didn’t understand her side of it. It wasn’t long after that that Casey had to tell her to “reflect” on what she was saying and until then, he wasn’t talking to her. He found out that Splinter simply didn’t want April around, Casey was okay to visit, but they were officially done with venturing out into the surface world. Casey couldn’t blame Splinter for it either, he looked older, tired… almost as if Donatello’s loss had nearly snuffed him out.

Casey tried what he could to help them out in their recovery. It worried him that Leo was acting so strange, in the same hand he was happy and proud that Raph was stepping up. Mikey worried him the most though. He barely functioned and if he was honest with himself, Raph was the only one functioning. Which placed so much weight on green shoulders. So when Raph met up with him down in the sewers, eyes blood shot, tear stains on his cheeks and holding a plastic sack full of radio parts, Casey acted like everything was normal. Raph asked if Casey would repair the radio, stuttering over his words while explaining that it was something that Donnie had made. The human took the radio and smiled his toothless grin. “I’ll get it back to you, two days, tops.” He winked his promise. “I’ll pick up some pizzas and bring a new game.”

“Thanks man.” Raph tried to smile. It looked like it hurt.

“Raph?”

“Yeah?”

“...If any of you need to get out, there’s this old military place outside of the city. It’s not much, something from the 40’s or 50’s. It’s been abandoned for years… and I know it’s no farm house but it’s a really cool place, maybe you could… I don’t know, get out of the “house” for a bit, you know what I’m saying?”

The turtle sighed, rubbing a hand over his head and down to his neck. “I don’t know. Things are kinda like a rollercoaster right now. Everyone acts out in different times and I gotta—”

Casey interrupted, “You got to be there for them. Yeah… I know. I went through it with my little sister and my dad.” He looked down to the plastic sack he now held. “... when mom died, you know?”
Raph kept quiet. Casey never spoke about his mother. It was no wonder why, if she had died, it would have been… just as hard as losing Donnie.

“How… How did you handle it?” Raph asked.

“A lot of time… beating up meat heads and punks on the streets when Dad and Sis were asleep. But I remember this one time, Dad took us camping for a whole month. It was really weird to be out of the city for that long but it was good, you know? It was just us, no one else. We talked a lot about mom and ate marshmallows and hotdogs until we puked. After that, things got better.”

The turtle’s green eyes turned down as Raph folded his arms in thought. His eyes shifted from side to side subtly as if reading. They stood in silence for what felt like an hour before Raph looked up at his friend, “Where did you say this place was?”
The Lair was quiet.

It was dark.

Only one light was on, and that was in the kitchen, stretching shadow and light across the floors and walls, casting an eerie sight as the light would dim and flicker before growing bright once more. The only sound was the slow clicking of a switch being flipped off and on by a lazy hand. The machine wasn’t even plugged in, it sat in its little spot it had since the turtles had acquired it on their first rummaging of dumpsters on the surface. The coffee machine’s glass pot still sported a crack around the rim that seemed to have no desire to try to travel any further.

Leo leaned against the counter, eyes bloodshot and dry from crying. His mask hung around his neck like a handkerchief necklace. He had his chin resting on the palm of one hand, a finger pressed firmly into his upper lip as if he was deep in thought, when in reality, his mind was nothing but a void. His other hand slowly clicked the little read switch on the side of the white machine.

Click. On.

Silence for a breath.

Click. Off.

Silence, then click once more.

The lights over head would dim and flicker. From the insistent buzzing sound and the fact it would dim the light to a dull reddish hue at times, he could only assume the bulbs needed to be replaced, that was, if he was even interested in being bothered with such thoughts. As it was, he was in a stage of grieving that not many people care to talk about. It was somewhere in the vast distance between denial and acceptance. It was a simple method of self preservation that was numbness that would ebb away into grief every once in awhile only to come back. It was a stage of nothingness. There was no life. No death. Only an endless void that felt as if one could fall off the edge of the earth.

He was certain that Donnie would have known what that was called.

Donnie…

Sweet Donnie. Always the one that had to step into calm everything down. He was always there when they were hurt and Splinter could not take care of all of them at once. It was Donnie that made all the electronics that they owned, scavenged by themselves or Master Splinter before they were old
enough to go to the surface. They owed their warm home to him, for fixing heaters so that they wouldn’t have to curl up against their father’s warm furry body in the dead of winter just to survive. They owed the algae pool to him, he had provided them with food for years.

He gave them food, warmth, entertainment, companionship, medicine…

He gave them everything… and they took advantage of that and Leo couldn’t forgive himself for that very fact. He took his brother for granted.

His sweet brother, with his funny teeth, and unique eyes… always so curious, always so smart.

There was a sound behind Leo. He didn’t bother to look knowing it was one of his family members.

“...Hey, Leo.” Michelangelo had gotten up to get a drink of water in the middle of the night.

Click.

Mikey fidgeted for a bit, eyes looking to his hands, then his feet.

Click.

He took in a deep breath. “I’m... I’m sorry that I freaked out on you earlier, bro.”

Suddenly Leo was standing up straight, no longer leaning on the counter. The quick movement made the younger turtle flinch.

“Would you like some coffee?”

“Wha- it’s... like three AM.” Mikey fiddled with his fingers, head bowed.

“Well, I would like a cup.” Leonardo said while he plugged in the machine he had been messing with for hours.

“But, I thought you hated the taste of coffee.” Mikey mumbled.

Leo ignored the statement, “Am I making enough for you too?”

“Uh... sure?”

“Great.” Leo set about the kitchen, digging out filters and grounds. He measured exactly the same way that he remembered Donatello doing it. He set in the same amount of water and set the machine to do its job while he poured cream and sugar into little bowls that he placed on the table. He dug through the cupboards for cups and spoons before grabbing small plates that he put some packaged cookies on.

Michelangelo didn’t say much when Leo put down enough places for three. He just quietly slipped himself into a seat and let his eldest brother do his thing. It felt as if all he could do was watch. He watched Leo fuss over perfect placement of items. He watched as his brother poured the freshly brewed coffee. He watched as Leo made a cup for the invisible third person the way that Donnie would have liked it. And suddenly, the kitchen didn’t seem so bad. He had forgotten how much coffee Donnie would drink in one day. The smell of it missing had placed him more on edge than an empty seat. The smell of the coffee and cream, the sweetness of sugar and cheap cookies, it was all part of his brother. It was something he had done every single night before bed. A little ritual of pattern that was overlooked and had been missed so much.

He looked up across the table to Leo. His eldest brother’s eyes were baggy, red, dark around the
edges. He looked old. He looked tired. But as Leo leaned over and took a soft, slow, drink from the
cup in front of him, Mikey could tell that something in Leo finally let go. Leo put down his cup and
smiled at his baby brother and for the first time since Donnie had died, Mikey got the feeling as if
everything was going to be okay.

“I never understood how he could have caffeine and sugar right before bed.” Leo chuckled as he
picked up one of the cookies off his small plate.

“Maybe he needed it to make it to bed?” Mikey smiled.

“I could believe that.” Leo dunked his cookie into the coffee before eating it.

“Leo?”

“Yeah?”

“I miss him…”

Leo bowed his head. “I do too.” He squeezed his eyes tightly shut. “I miss him a lot.”

“…Leo?”

“Yeah?” The light over head was buzzing louder now, flickering as it tried desperately to stay lit,
hitting that strange red color again.

“Was it really April’s fault?”

The light went out.

Leo looked up, his hand gripped his coffee cup so hard he could feel the porcelain strain. His eyes
grew wide as he fought for breath.

Standing behind Mikey, eyes red and piercing, were silhouettes of people.

So many people crammed into the room.

Leo bolted up, head whipping around as he saw that they were surrounded. Each person had those
red eyes, some fading, some blinking. The shadow people were so packed it was hard to tell one set
of shoulders and arms from another’s. Their heads and shoulders were only light from the red eyes of
those standing behind them, leaving only hazy hues of shapes.

They pressed in on him, rushing past Mikey, plunging everything into darkness. He tried to breath as
pressure pushed in onto him. The air in his lungs was forced out as that pressure tightened, choking,
crushing.

There was a sound, so loud that it beat into his ears. The unique sound of a light bulb burning out.
Then a red light flushed out the darkness. The pressure was gone and there was nothing but a
swaying light above. He looked up to the lone bulb that silently swung one way, then to the other.

He was no longer standing but sat at a table; wooden, old. On the table were wires, a few computer
looking chips, what looked like some stones, and odd looking bulbs. He picked up one of the bulbs,
rolling it between a finger and his thumb. He squinted at it. He had never seen anything like it but for
some reason he knew what it was called… a tube.

Why was this in front of him?
A groan of metal before something punched him from behind. Icy water rushed in, slamming him up against a metal wall across the way. He sputtered and spit out the salty water as he tried to cover his face from the spray. The space was filling with water quickly. Soon he wasn’t able to touch the floor, his head raising up towards the red bulb.

There was a bright flash and he blinked, trying to get the light out of his eyes.

He was… he was in his kitchen again. Master splinter had a small flashlight that he was using to look into his son’s eyes with.

“Master?” Leo ventured slowly.

Splinter leaned back, showing a concerned Mikey and a frowning Raph.

“Leo?” Mikey sounded cautious. “Are you okay now?”

“Okay now?” Leo looked around to his family.

Raph’s nose wrinkled a little. “You were wigging out.”

“I was, what?”

Splinter ran his hand over his son’s head. “Do you not remember?”

“Remember what?”

“Michelangelo.”

Mikey interrupted their father, “We were having coffee bro, and you just leaned your head back all zombie like and started to ramble nonsense to the ceiling! You were all shaking and twitching.” Mikey’s eyes started to water. He pushed past Raph and latched onto Leo’s side, snuggling his face into his brother’s arm. “It was really scary, bro.”

“We were worried.” Splinter continued to pet Leo as if to reassure himself that his son was still there with him.

“…Master… Dad,” Raph spoke up. “Can I talk to you?”

Splinter hesitated for a moment before nodding and meeting Raphael outside the kitchen. Leo could hear them talking. He could see flashes of Raphael’s arm movements. Mikey pressed up harder against Leo’s side. Leo adjusted himself to fully pull his baby brother onto his lap. There was no getting away from Mikey when he was like that, it was best to just get comfortable.

“You’re going to be okay.” Mikey mumbled against Leo’s chest. He hugged even tighter. “Donnie’s spirit will make you okay.”

Leo felt his throat constrict. His baby brother was so scared and he had made him that way.

He hugged Mikey unable to say a word.
Chapter 5

Casey had his hands full. School was harder now that he wasn’t having April tutor him, his dad was having some troubles with his job so Casey went and found himself a side job to fill in the financial gap. Going to high school, he was only allowed to work a certain amount of hours but it at least gave him a pay check to cash. On top of that, he had his friends that he tried to check on as often as his busy life would allow. He only recently fixed the smashed up radio, having to replace some parts that had cost more than he was willing to spend, but it was one of the few things that Donnie had left behind, so he was willing to put the money into it. When he went to return the radio he felt even more stressed out seeing how pale Leonardo was getting, and how his eyes were so dark it was almost like he was sporting two black eyes. Leo only smiled at him when he tried to talk to the turtle. As usual, when Casey was over, Leo went to meditate with Splinter just outside the dojo to watch Casey rough housing with Mikey and Raph. This time, though, they half heartedly played around. Each of them glancing over at Leo as he tried to meditate and would drift off to sleep only to wake himself back up again. Eventually he leaned over, his head resting against Splinter’s arm and fell asleep. Splinter moved, gently wrapping his arm around his son and holding him close.

The rough housing completely stopped as to not wake Leo.

“Is he okay?” Casey frowned with worry.

“Honestly,” Raph sighed as he plopped himself down on a seat. He was careful to keep his voice low. “This is the first time we’ve seen him sleep since his break down. And speaking of down, it wouldn’t kill you to whisper.”

“Sorry, bro.”

“Casey… can I ask you to do us a favor?” Raph folded his arms over his chest, obviously not happy over what he was about to request.

“Name it.” Casey took a seat next to his best friend.

“We need Karai.”

“What?”

Raph leaned towards Casey. “Just look at him, it doesn’t take a genius to know that he’s not coping well. We’re thinking that if we can get Karai down here then it’ll lighten his mood.”

“Why not go up and get her yourself? I don’t know where she is.”

“You know why we can’t. Splinter watches us like a hawk, we’re not allowed to leave the lair for any reason. Even meeting up with you is hard. Besides, it’s not like I can just call her up and ask her to come running.”

“Well, why not? I thought Leo had her number.”

Raph unfolded his arms in order to run a hand over his head. “His phone is on the fritz, all of ours are. Or haven’t you noticed that when you call me we have to practically scream in order for our voices to be heard over that crazy static?”

“I’ve been meaning to ask, bro. Where is that static coming from? You guys never had that kind of problem before.”
The turtle glowered. “I don’t know. Donnie was the one that built the things.”

“But don’t you find it kind of weird that all of your phones are doing that?”

“Are we going to play twenty questions or are you going to make yourself useful and get Karai for Leo?” Raph growled, showing his teeth.

“Okay, okay… I’ll find her.”

“Can you do it tonight?”

“Tonight? But…” He looked over at Leo who was starting to wake up, having only slept of a few measly minutes. Leo’s eyes were starting to look duller, more vacant. The human nodded with determination, “Yeah, I can do it tonight… You got an address?”

When Casey got the address he left. He went home to pick up his bike only to slow in his purposeful stride when he got close to the apartment building that the Jones family lived in. His feet grew heavier as he saw the familiar figure of April standing outside the apartment steps. She was holding herself, looking as if she was second guessing herself.

He hesitated, uncertain as to what to say. Donnie was no longer around… April was the one that did it… The family of mutants was falling apart but the Turtles were not the only ones suffering from what happened. It had to be hard on April having being the one that had done the deed. She took one of her closest friends and blew him apart. He couldn’t even imagine what that could feel like.

He swallowed before plastering on a smile and striding forth.

“Hey, Red.” He greeted as normally as he could.

“Casey!” April whipped around, startled by his sudden greeting. “I-I didn’t think you were home…”

“I wasn’t.” He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. “But I’m here now.”

“Were…” April looked down at her feet. “Did you come back from seeing them?”

Casey let his playful mask fall, his somber mood exposing itself. “Yeah.”

“How are they doing?” She hugged herself tighter obviously afraid of the answer. Whatever troubles they were experiencing she had forced upon them by what she had done.

He didn’t answer, only watched her.

She rubbed her arms, blinked her eyes rapidly to keep back tears. She was hurting, deeply. The silence that was stretching between the two of them felt like a void ever expanding. When she couldn’t stand it any more she spoke up.

“So stupid of me to ask that. I-I don’t even know why I asked.” Her eyes started to mist. “I-I have no right to ask, after-after what I did.”

“They’re trying.” Casey cut her off from any further ramblings. He shoved his hands into his pockets. “It’s hit Leo the hardest, like, way hard.”

“Leo?” April looked up, worried.

“Yeah… from what I was told he was in denial until recently. Now he just doesn’t sleep.” He kept eye contact with the girl. He wasn’t going to sugar coat it for her, giving things to people lightly was
simply not his style. “Raph says he does crazy things.”

“Like… like what?”

Casey scratched at his cheek recalling what his best friend had told him when giving him the address to Karai’s place. “Apparently, last night he was with Mikey in the kitchen and he started shaking and making weird noises. Like super wigging out. Head back, body spazzing, he didn’t respond to them, only shook and garbled out sounds.”

April stepped closer to Casey, very worried. “And he’s not sleeping?”

“He like slept for a grand total of ten minutes when I was just over there. That’s as much as I know.”

“Casey, that sounds like a possible stress induced seizure.”

“That can happen?!?”

“Yeah, we learned about them last week in biology class and the effects they can have on the brain. He needs to be sleeping and relaxing before it causes some real damage!”

“Relaxing, huh?” Casey brushed his fingers up against a paper in his pocket. He pulled it out and looked at the address. He smiled a little and looked back up at the girl. “Thanks, Red.”

“For… for what?”

Casey shrugged. “For coming over. For still caring.”

“Of course I care!” April nearly yelled.

A nasty quip rested on Casey’s tongue that he kept to himself. He understood only a part of what April was going through and starting an argument would only make things worse.

He stuffed the address back into his pocket. “I gotta go, Red.” He flashed her a weak smile. “You should come over Wednesday, got a big math test Friday, we could study.”

April blinked her large eyes, surprised that Casey was willing to spend time with her. “R-really?”

“Yeah.” He jogged up the few steps that lead to the main door of the apartment complex. “Gotta babysit my sis that day, so you won’t get all of this—” He flexed his arms. “—to yourself. You’ll be missing out.”

April smiled a little. She nodded and waited for Casey to say goodbye before he disappeared inside the building. She felt hope for the first time in a long time. Casey was willing to talk to her, see her, but the Turtles? She felt her throat constrict with sadness. She didn’t deserve their friendship, their companionship. She didn’t deserve Donnie’s devotion nor his friendship. She didn’t deserve his attention, his determination to help her and her dad. She didn’t deserve any of it.

She put a hand over her mouth as she started to cry again. She turned on her heel and started to walk home. She didn’t even deserve to cry over him. She didn’t have the right to look back and miss his goofy smiles and funny laughs. He tried to be with her and all she could do was…

She took a deep breath and tried to stop the tears.

She didn’t have the right…

She didn’t deserve the right…
When Karai came over she was greeted by an excited Mikey and a hopeful Raph. Mikey grabbed a hold of her and hugged her tight. Not much of a hugger, she laughed a little and gently pushed at him.

“It’s good to see you too, Michelangelo.” She smiled as she rubbed a hand over his head as if he was a found pet.

“I wasn’t sure if Casey would find you, or that you could come over the same night.” Raph folded his arms across his chest. “I’m glad you could come.”

“I have to admit, I found it strange that you sent Jones over to find me.” Karai cocked her hip to the side while folding her arms to mirror Raphael. “But when he said that something was up with Leo, well… you guys have helped me out a lot. It would be messed up if I turned my back on you. Speaking of backs, I don’t see Donatello. Is he curled up on his under some new machine?”

The friendly atmosphere suddenly rushed away from them.

“Casey didn’t tell you?” Raph frowned.

Karai’s smile fell, a serious tone taking over her voice. “Tell me what?”

“D’s gone.” Mikey’s voice was tiny.

“Gone?” Karai’s eyes opened wide. “Gone, how?”

“A-april–” Mikey squeezed his eyes shut, trying to will himself not to cry.

Raph put a hand on his brother’s shell. “Hey, Mike, why don’t you go and find Splinter and Leo?”

Mikey sniffled and nodded. “Okay.”

Raph waited until Mikey was far away enough that he couldn’t hear him before he picked back up the conversation. He told Karai what had happened. He tried to keep it as simple and to the facts as possible. There was no need for him to draw it out. All she needed to know was that Donnie was dead, that April was possessed and killed him, and Leo was going insane over it.

“April? Really?” Karai was in disbelief.

Raph nodded.

“But I thought those two had a thing going on, at the very least I thought she cared enough about him not to- to–” She took a deep breath and heaved it out, trying to keep her cool. She felt anger over the situation. He was from the same clan as her. Her strict up bringing with the Shredder made her feel possessive of her clan, first the Foot and now that she knew the truth, the Hamato as well. Raph, Mikey, and Donnie were all special to her in a strange, disjointed way. She wasn’t close to them, but they fought alongside each other enough times to develop a sort of comradery, a bond that made her feel entitled to the family. She could say that it was messed up, only because it was, but those words were too playful for such a grim situation.

She took another breath, finding the words she really wanted to say.

“I’m sorry about your brother… he was as good guy. He didn’t deserve that.”
“He was the best.” Raph corrected her. “So, you going to try and help Leo out, or what?”

“Of course.”

Splinter came in at that time. He held his hands behind his back as he said, “Miwa” gently.

Karai put a smile on her face when she heard her birth name spoken by her real father. She turned and walked to the mutant rat. She hugged her father who squeezed her tightly. He hesitated in letting her go. They pulled apart, but their hands found each other and held on. Karai knew how painful it was to live with the knowledge that her mother was dead and gone. When she found out that Splinter was her real father she had spent days reflecting on the realization that he had thought he lost his wife and child. While she was able to start calling him “father” and be happy to see him, she saw him change from a simple mutant to a very happy one. That happiness that she had helped rebuild for him was now gone, replaced with grim lines and tired eyes. He even looked a little grayer.

He had lost a child once more. This time, that child will not be coming back. The stress of seeing another of his children suffer so thoroughly was waning on him and she found herself hating to see her father in such a state.

“I heard what had happened.” She held her father’s hands and squeezed them. “I’m sorry, father. I’m sorry that you have to go through this feeling again.”

Splinter closed his eyes and bowed his head. “Thank you…”

“I… I heard that Leo isn’t doing so well. I would like to help if I can. Do you know where he is?”

“He is in Donatello’s room.” Splinter looked up and over at the closed door to said room. “He has been damaged in many ways from this ordeal, perhaps your company is the remedy he needs.”

She smiled and squeezed her father’s hands once more before letting go. “I’ll try my best.”
“Hey, Leo, it’s your favorite person, coming to see how you’re doing.” Karai announced as she carefully opened the door to Donatello’s room. She was purposely trying to sound up beat, even though her mood was dashed by the sad news of Donatello’s death. There was nothing she could do for him, but she could try to help Leo.

Still… she hesitated by the door. She had never truly been in any of the turtle’s bedrooms, especially Donnie’s, only his adjacent lab. Coming into his room felt akin to a violation as she saw things that were left unfinished. Screw drivers and circuit boards were still waiting on a table for their master craftsmen to return. Books laid around on almost every surface. Leafs of notes were crammed in various places. Off to the corner was a messy bed, there were rows of shelves and book cases that held strange objects and books. Every surface had something on it showing that the person who owned the room was always busy with their hands as well as their mind. She felt a bit of sadness seeing that even his computers were still on, humming away with programs waiting for coding.

Across the way, on the cold floor, sat Leonardo. He was looking up at a large bookshelf that looked full to the brim with books of all types and ages. When she walked up, her eyes caught some books that were even from the forties. There was even a few old Kipling mixed in with user manuals and How-To’s. She smiled a little at a tattered book of Robert Lewis Stevenson’s “The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” She didn’t know why she thought about it, but it seemed so very like Donatello to have that.

“Wow…” Some other books, older ones, caught her eye. She deftly reached out towards a small green book that was titled “Household Medicine and Surgery”.

“Please don’t touch that.” Leo’s voice cut through her actions, his tone distant and unfamiliar.

“Sorry, it’s-”

Leo reached up from where he was sitting and pulled out a book at random. He placed it carefully on his lap and caressed it with reverence. “It’s over a hundred years old, published in 1854 by John Stevenson Bushnan.”

“That’s pretty old for a book.”

“So don’t touch it.” Leo’s voice didn’t change in any way, only held that distant cold as he opened the book in his lap and carefully leafed through the pages.

Karai watched him for a moment. He really didn’t look good. He didn’t even have his mask on his face, it only hung around his neck like a scarf or handkerchief. He had no gear, looking vulnerable.

He was pale. He was thin. And if she was honest with herself, she would admit that he looked very,
very sick.

With a swallow she sat down next to her fellow mutant.

“How are you doing Leo?”

Leo didn’t respond, only continued to leaf through the book.

“What’s wrong with you?” She reached over, putting her hand over his to still his actions. “Everybody is worried about you.”

“So?” He brushed her hand to the side, closing the book and carefully putting it back into place before skimming over the books once more.

Karai had to bite her tongue. She wanted to bite into him for his melancholy replies, his unwillingness to even greet her. She wanted to yell at him for being the shell of the man she knew and enjoyed the company of. It was like he was off in his own world. She had to remind herself that this was exactly why she was asked over, to help him pull out of that dark bubble he had encased himself in.

“So… why don’t we do something fun? We could play a game with Michelangelo or maybe do some training with Father and Raphael.”

Leo bowed his head and shook it. He closed his tired, red eyes. There was no point in having fun any more. Donnie wasn’t there to laugh with him. No point in training. Donnie wasn’t there for him to help tone his technique. He wasn’t good enough to help Donnie… Donnie, who would ask for help and everyone would brush off. Donnie, who learned how to stay quiet in his little corner away from everyone else because his words were too big for everyone to understand. Donnie, who learned the “joys” of being alone, having only his machines and books for company. If Leo had only tried harder to be there beside Donatello instead of being so preoccupied with his own damned life of having fun and being a teenager than he could have seen what was coming.

Karai’s warm hand pressed against his shoulder. He looked up at her, saw concern, and maybe even pity. “You come here to feel close to him, don’t you?”

Leo nodded, looking back to the books. “He spent a lot of time here. I… I look back and I realize… how much time he actually was here… a-away from all of us.”

“I don’t think he was sad. Every time I met him, he seemed rather happy.”

Was he?

Was he really?

Leo remembered a time he checked in on his brother. The room was quiet, he thought Don would have been reading but what he came across was a turtle completely alone. Just sitting at his computer chair staring off into space with a sullen look on his face. He looked so lonely, and what did Leo do? He choked. He didn’t step in to check up on the turtle, he only stepped away, not knowing what to do.

Maybe, Donnie was miserable and just had a good face.

Seeing Leo’s shoulders sag as he let a saddened breath out, Karai groped for another tactic to cheer
him up. “How about you tell me about Donatello. I was always curious about him, I know more about Raphael and Michelangelo more than I knew about him.”

She shifted herself, facing Leo with her hands holding onto her ankle and shin like a child ready for a story. The cheerful smile she had on her face faltered. She hadn’t noticed the dark rings around his red eyes. It made him look so much worse. It was no wonder the Hamato family were so scared. Leo really was wasting away.

“Com… come on,” she put her smile back on. “Tell me all about Donatello. Looking at all these books, did he like collecting them?”

“He… He read them all a few times.” Leo’s eyes drifted from Karai back to the room, taking it all in. “He taught himself how to speak four different languages and read five more. Everything he knows about chemicals he got from these books. He set us up with electricity when we were seven.” Leo smirked as a little spark of life started to ignite in his eyes. He looked to Karai and started to talk a bit more enthusiastically delving into good memories. “We didn’t have electricity until then. I still remember a winter where Master Splinter made a fire and huddled us close to it for warmth. When he would go out to forage for wood, we would all take turns warming each other by the fire.” His eyes unfocused as he gazed into the past.

The golden glow of the fire was a comfort. Sensei was taking too long and it was starting to die down. They were each huddled under their tattered blankets. Donnie looked to his brothers, seeing them shiver. He stood up and wadded up his blanket. The fire was only a few flickering flames now, a handful of red coals glowed in the darkness.

“I-i-it’s c-c-cold.” Mikey whimpered.

“I-it’s okay M-mikey,” Donnie’s teeth were chattering. He fumbled through the darkness where he grabbed up some of his cloth and wooden toys that Sensei had made for him. He wrapped them all in his blanket and stuffed it into the rusted dutch oven that they used for a fire pit.

He blew on the exposed coals until new flames came to life. He smiled to his brothers as he shivered. Leo smiled as he remembered having to share his blanket with his brother after that.

“Sensei came back with a book that he intended to use as fuel but Donnie got a hold of it and started to read. I can’t remember how he did it but he managed to convince Father that it was worth a try to tap into the city’s electrical grid. Father wouldn’t let him touch the wires so Donnie guided him.” Leo skimmed his gaze over the different shelves, knowing that book was hidden amongst the forest of knowledge. “It was Donnie’s first real science book, all about electricity and how to make radios and repair TVs and all this other stuff.”

“That’s amazing.”

“He is… was… amazing.” Leo looked down to his hands, a fresh sting of tears came to his dry eyes. “He did so much for us.”

“Leo… Why don’t you tell me more about him? Did he do funny things like Mikey does on average?”

Leo shook his head. “Not really. He-he always knew how to be playful but so much of his time was taken up with doing things for us. He would stay up way too late, even days on end to finish something. He drank a lot of coffee when he was like…like that. He wouldn’t even sleep if one of us
was sick. Always there…. Always right next to me.”

“Me?” Karai questioned.

Leo didn’t hear her as he squeezed his eyes shut, tears falling down his cheeks, more memories coming freely now that he had opened that door.

“Hey, Leo.” Donnie smiled at his brother. The resident genius was holding a mug of coffee looking tired and worn out. He leaned over the bed that Leo was tucked into. The leader coughed, feeling sluggish. Everything hurt from his toes to the tip of his head and everything felt too warm.

“Easy. Easy.” Donnie sat on the edge of the bed. He placed the coffee cup onto a night stand and proceeded to gently caress Leo’s features. His hands were cool, it was such a relief. “You have a bad fever.”

“Don-” The leader coughed hoarsely feeling his throat rip up at the action.

“Don’t worry, Leo.” Donnie smiled, soft and concerned. He got up to fetch a chair and a cool cloth. He rested the cloth over Leo’s eyes and brow, before sitting down next to his brother. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“He was always there for me.” Leo’s tears fell freely as he tried to wipe them away. “When I was sick he wouldn’t sleep until I was better. He would get sick for doing it and I would just bring him food. What kind of jerk does that?!?”

“Leo, everyone has their own way of caring for someone, it doesn’t mean you abandoned him.” Karai reasoned.

“I should have done more.” He looked at his fellow mutant. She flinched seeing how broken he was. His hands flexed, not sure what to do with them. “I should have told him how important he was. How much he mattered to us, to me.”

There was a massive explosion that shook the lair. Leonardo darted into Donatello’s laboratory where acidic smelling smoke was slowly being filtered out by a vent. He coughed and waded through, trying to choke out Donatello’s name. He nearly fell over his brother’s body, instead being yanked down below the cloud.

“What are you doing?!” Donnie hissed. “Hit the floor when you see smoke! Breathing this stuff in can be disastrous!”

“Your lab just exploded and you’re trying to tell me about safety precautions?” Leo frowned at his brother.

“Leo.” Donnie’s pretty eyes pierced through his brother. “If it’s me, it doesn’t matter, but if it’s you, or Mikey, or Raph, then it’s a different story. I can mess myself up with stupid mistakes, I won’t let it happen to you.”
Karai took one of Leo’s hands trying to give comfort. “I’m certain he knew. Remember when you tried to help me with my petty vendetta against the Shredder. He got hurt and you went right to his side.”

Remembering Donatello being carried by his brothers, unconscious and riddled with wounds. He had covered the two of them, took the brunt of the explosion. An explosion that Leo had caused. Then, suddenly, the explosion in his memories was replaced with a different one. Of April being possessed. Of Donnie trying to the very end to help. How she levitated him, how he was shouting at her, then, in painful detail, Leo could see that moment.

“It should have been me!!” Leo pressed his palms into his hands. A wretched howl of a sob ripped from his lungs. “Donnie!!”

Karai was up on her knees now, trying to calm him down.

“Leo!! LEO!! It’s okay!”

Another painful memory slammed into him, rubbing salt into his wound.

“Leo?”

Leo looked up from the comic he had been reading. He was still feeling frustrated over his fight with Donatello. They had argued over something ridiculously simple and ended up saying some hurtful comments. Leo’s being, “No good, rotten brained, air head” and Donnie screaming, “Self righteous, self centered, two legged bull.”

They didn’t talk much after that. Then Leo got hurt during a run in with Foot bots. Donnie had lectured him while patching him up and Leo… well, he wasn’t proud of it but he said, “I don’t need to be told what to do by a worthless member of this family.”

Since then, he was pouting and kicking himself for making those pretty eyes mist up from the hurtful comment.

“What?”

Mikey was fidgeting after gotten his eldest brother’s attention. “What you said about Donnie…”

Leo scowled. He crumpled his comic in one hand while standing up. “I don’t care what he told you Mikey, but-”

“He’s crying.”

“What?” It felt like ice was poured over his head. Donnie? Crying? He had never seen Donnie cry, why would he?

“What you said to him… it was messed up, yo. He’s always doing things for us. You really hurt him.”

Leonardo didn’t hear a word Mikey said, too stunned over the idea of his brother crying. He dropped his comic and rushed over to Donatello’s room. He pushed open the door, uninvited, finding Donatello seated at his computer, trying to wipe away at some tears before continuing to work on something.
“You gotta do better, Donnie.” The genius told himself. “Leo said you were-” He suddenly covered his mouth and squeezed his eyes tightly shut as he silently cried.

Karai grabbed a hold of the turtle’s shoulders. “Leo!! You need to calm down! I-”

Raphael burst into the room, eyes fiery. “What’s going on here?!?”

“I-I don’t know! I was just asking him to tell me about Donatello and he started freaking out!” She shouted over Leo’s anguished screams.

The lights in the room dimmed, flickering. Donatello’s computers let out a high pitched squeal as the fans were pushed past their limit. The monitors grew bright, drowning out the shadows of the room. Computer speakers let out a loud static sound, shifting and growling. The monitors cracked and burnt. One of the computer towers blew up sending a shower of sparks across the room. Another lit on fire as wires and cords started to spark and pop.

“What the shell?!?” Raph ran through the room to the adjacent lab to grab the fire extinguisher.

“Where’s your circuit breaker? I’ll turn off the power!” Karai called out.

“Front room, east wall!!” Raph yelled as he ran back in, readying the extinguisher.

Leo screamed out Donatello’s name, still in the thralls of his memories.

A familiar hand came down onto his shoulder, shaking him.

“Hey. Hey, Leo, you okay?”

Leo froze.

He knew that voice.

He knew that touch.

He slowly lifted his face from his hands, as if this would all disappear within an instant.

Between his fingers he could see familiar red-brown eyes. The little gap between Donatello’s teeth was visible as his mouth hung partially open in his concern for his brother.

“D… Donnie?”

“Um, yeah.” The turtle raised a brow. “You okay?” He moved his hand over to Leo’s forehead, checking for a temperature. “You don’t seem to have a fever.”

Touching him… Donnie was physically touching him. Like a greedy rat, Leonardo quickly snatched up his brother’s hand, holding it to his face, burying his cheek into the calloused palm for the tinkerer.

His sibling gave a little chuckle. “You got really spooked didn’t ya?” He rubbed his thumb just under Leonardo’s eye. He smiled softly.

“You… you died.”

Leo shook his head. “You died, Donnie. I saw it.” His voice cracked. “A-april just… with one thought… and you were gone.”

“You know who April is!!” Leo snapped, grabbing a hold of his brother by the strap over his shoulder. “The human girl we met on our first trip to the surface!”

“You were thinking about asking this Mutation Day, but you know, if you’re feeling sick we can put it off.” Donnie carefully started to wipe at Leo’s tears with his knuckles. His caring, gentle smile affecting his voice.

“You may not be running a fever now, but you might soon. I would like to give you a check up.”

“But Donnie, I…” Leo looked around. It was his home, nice and bright. Mikey was standing by the TV holding a controller while staring at the two across the way. Raph was sitting in a bean bag chair with a leaf in one hand and Spike on his chest. The more he looked around, the more he saw the lack of objects. Objects they had collected from the surface. “W-... where am I?”

“You’re home, Leo.” Raph said in a worried tone.

“We’re always home.” Mikey spoke up. “Maybe so much training has made you sick, bro.”

“Possibly.” Donatello mused, he took hold of Leonardo’s hand and pulled him along into his lab. He pushed him down into a chair. “Let me get my things, I want to check your temperature first.”

Leo was dumbfounded. He was home, before going to the surface? But… how? That… That didn’t make any sense, unless it was all a dream. A terrible, fever dream, where Donnie was taken from him. His gentle, caring, brother.

Donnie came back with a first aid kit, he popped it open and found an old thermometer. “Here we go.”

“Donnie?”

“Hmm?”

It was all a dream, right? He didn’t have to tell him that he missed him, that everything is all messed up without him.

He quickly decided to change the subject, “What are you working on?”

“It’s pretty neat.” Donatello grinned, placed the thermometer under Leo’s tongue. He walked back to his desk and picked up a book. “I found this in the sewers recently.”

He held open part of it. Splayed over the pages were wires and cords, circuits and little light bulbs and a pile of rocks.
“It’s from World War II. It teaches how to make a really cool radio.” He pointed to one of the bulbs, “This is called a tube. It’s the only thing I’m missing. I got the quartz and the wiring, but the tubes, I need to finish it. After that I was going to try out this thing called WAL.”

Leo’s mouth dropped open, the thermometer tumbled to the floor.

The horrible vision of all those people standing around came back to the leader. The desk with those same objects on it looked just like what was in Donatello’s book. He could still hear the metal breaking from the pressure of seawater. The spray of it stinging his flesh.

That was a dream… or this was?

Donnie was in front of him once more. Looking at him with such concern that it hurt Leo’s heart.

“Leo?”

“I… I think I might be going crazy, Donnie.”

Donnie smiled again. He pushed Leo’s hands away from his head in order to soothe his palms over his brother’s cheeks.

When did he move his hands up to his head?

Why hadn’t he noticed how much Donatello actually touched him before?

“You’re not going crazy.”

“You don’t know what’s going on in my head.” His mouth felt dry as he watched olive lips. Donnie was so close that Leo could smell him.

“It’ll be okay, Leo.” Donatello’s voice was so calming. His hands felt like warm sunshine. He brushed his thumbs over Leo’s eyes, wiping away remains of tears from earlier. “It’ll be okay. Just hang in there…. Just hang on, and everything will be okay.”

That warmth was gone. Ripped from him as soon as it had come. Everything turned dark. Someone was holding his face but the hands were cold. The voice calling out to him was rough and not reassuring.

“Just hang on, Leo.” Karai’s voice pushed through the darkness. “Everything will be okay. Just hang on.”

It took a lot of effort for the leader to open his eyes. He wanted nothing more than to close them and be back in the past before all of this happened. He sat up, batting Karai’s hands away. He didn’t like the feel of them. Too thin, too cold. Her voice was not as comforting. He could even smell her and all he wanted was to smell the scent of his lost brother.

“You… you were doing that thing again.” Raph was there, his expression of fear was evident.

“That ‘thing’ was some sort of seizure, Raph.” Karai held an edge to her voice.

“S-sorry.” Leo kept his eyes to the floor.

“Don’t apologize for something like that, Leo. I think you seriously need to relax…” Karai placed a hand on Leo’s shoulder.

He shrugged it off. “Don’t touch me.” He reached up and rubbed at the spot she had touched. He
didn’t like her voice. He didn’t like her scent. And it was slowly coming to the realization as to why. She had been a crush, nothing more. He had wasted time on her when he should have been appreciating the one with the warm hands and a caring nature. He should have realized sooner. She was not his favorite person.

He should have realized sooner. It was Donatello.

He bowed his head, this time the tears hurt more than before as he finally realized how much he had lost.

Raph and Karai exchanged a glance. Raph got up, motioning Karai to do the same. He saw her out of the room before shutting the door and coming back to his brother. He knelt down and ran his hand over Leo’s shell.

“I loved him.” Leo breathed out, his voice sounding funny as his nose got stuffy.

“We all did, brother.”

Leo twisted and held onto Raph. “I loved him.” He repeated. Raph grew silent as he realized what his sibling was saying. He didn’t know what to think of it but if it caused this much grief, it must have been a very deep love.
Chapter 7

There were two good things that had come from Karai’s visit, three if you counted Raph’s smug relief that Leo would never go after Karai again. The first, Leo took a giant leap in self discovery. He loved Donatello, and while Raph kept the realization to himself, he would leave it be. The implications that Leonardo had a thing for the egghead was strange and foreign for Raph. It made him feel uncomfortable, but he also felt at ease with it. The more he thought about it, the more it made sense. Leo was the only one that could actually get Donnie genuinely angry. When they argued they butted heads so hard that it was scary. He remembered a few times having to usher Mikey somewhere else because it was getting so bad. Leo was the only one to get Donnie to cry. He still remembered the first time. He had punched their fearless leader square in the jaw for making his brother cry, and Leo took it, even begged him, silently through his eyes for another. The other tell was that Leo and Donnie always touched. Donnie’s hands on Leo’s head, Leo always holding onto Donnie’s arm when the tall turtle would sling his arm around Leo’s shoulders. They enjoyed touching each other more than touching the others. It wasn’t like they stopped wrestling with Raph or patting Mikey’s shell, they simply touched each other more.

The second good thing; Leo slept. He had managed to curl up into Donatello’s bed and fell into a deep slumber. They would check up on him. Mikey even brought in Donatello’s radio, the one Casey had fixed, and put it next to the bed, playing scratchy music on a low volume to help him have good dreams.

It was during this time that the rest of the family gathered themselves into the dojo to discuss what had happened with Karai’s visit. Raphael went over what he knew, being careful not to mention Leo’s confession. It basically boiled down to two things; Karai’s presence didn’t help, and it seemed as if all the things that Donatello had built for their livelihood were breaking down.

“I hate to say this, but, I think the stuff that Donnie was maintaining is getting dangerous without him here to prevent it.” Raph flexed his fingers over his knees, all of them kneeling and facing each other in a tight circle.

“We could unplug the stuff.” Mikey offered thoughtfully. “Casey is getting better at fixing things, maybe he could-”

“Casey is no Donnie.” Raph reached over and ran his palm over his little brother’s head, trying to keep his voice soft and reassuring, careful not to show how worried and scared he was. “He’s good, but Donnie was on a whole different level, little brother. Remember how he helped fix the ship with the Fugitoid? No one on our planet can do what Donnie did. And… and his stuff is so unique that I think that it may be hurting Leo to see it all.

“Leo… well, Leo’s not exactly a fearless leader any more, Mikey. He’s scared all the time now, and I think it’s because he’s reminded of how much he misses our brother. Because if he couldn’t protect Donnie,” the person he loved. “How could he protect us?”

“But it wasn’t his fault!”

“I know, you know, Sensei knows, but Leo… he’s so sad right now, that he doesn’t know that.”

Mikey let out a little whimper and nodded. He took in a breath, eyes wandering across the floor. “Then… what do we do? I don’t want to throw away Donnie’s things…”

Splinter put on a strong face, not liking what was being suggested. “I believe, what Raphael is trying
to say, my little one, is that it would be for the best to move.”

“Move? But- but this is our home! D-donnie- he grew up here. I-”

Raph cut in, placing a firm grip on a sea green shoulder, “Mikey, easy there. Take a breath.” He waited in silence until his brother’s heaving chest calmed. “I was actually thinking about something more like a vacation. Moving would be a last resort.”

“V-vacation?” Mikey looked at his brother with hope. He hated the idea of moving.

“Yeah, get Leo out of here. Get him some fresh air.”

“The farm house?”

“I was thinking somewhere else. Maybe somewhere that Don hasn’t been. Casey told me about a real cool place, it’ll have lots of stuff to look at and places to explore. How does that sound?”

Mikey smiled and looked over to their father. Splinter smiled and nodded. Mikey’s smile grew brighter, almost akin to what he used to have.

“But…” Raph’s tone turned serious. “If he gets better when we’re out there, and he starts getting… getting ‘sick’ again when we come home… we’ll have to move, Mikey.”

Sick…

He hated using that term with Leo.

For him, Leo was always the picture of health. He had only gotten sick a handful of times and even then, Raph never saw it. Either Splinter or Donnie took care of him. It saved Raph and Mikey from seeing weakness and vulnerability in their leader. It kept them from developing doubts of their brother, at the same time, it had sheltered them immensely. Now, it was proving to have developed a strange sort of fruit. One of Raphael’s own doubts, worry, and strong desire to protect his family.

~

The light was soft, warm. Leo held up his hands over his eyes to keep the glaring sun from invading his vision. He could smell the salty air of the ocean. There were cries of seagulls.

It was peaceful.

The beach had some rocks, a tall grass line that rolled in the wind and a scraggly looking tree that bent in one direction.

Blue eyes blinked a few times. The familiar vision of his purple banded brother came into focus. He was ten feet away. He looked… he was…

Leo felt his throat tighten. He couldn’t swallow as Donnie smiled at him. Ruddy colored eyes held something in them that he couldn’t understand. It was like, Donnie was trying to talk through his gaze. Tell him something important. He also looked tired and worn. It strangely reminded him of a grinding stone being used to the point it could be used to skip over water.

Soon as Leo tried to reach out for the turtle he loved the warm sun was cast out, plunging him into the cold of a metal room with a seat at a foldable, wooden, military desk. Above was a red bulb that gave the only light to work by. Sitting at the desk was Donatello, trying to work fast and hard, taking up different parts and trying to put them together. He looked stressed… panicked. His mouth opened,
shouting something as he shook his head. He clenched his fists, suddenly bracing. The high pitched
scream of metal bending from pressure came just as quickly as the cold rush of seawater that threw
Donatello up against the opposite wall. He struggled to keep his head above the flood. The red light
got closer and closer to Donnie’s head as the room filled with water.

It was when Leo tried to grab at Donatello’s flailing hands that he realized he had not felt the water.
He had not experienced the impact. He could not touch his brother. He was there as a spectator.
Helpless as he was forced to watch the one he loved lose his last breath. He screamed as the red light
above allowed him to see Donatello pull water into his lungs instead of air. His brother jerked and
twitched as he succumbed, eyes glazing over and lifeless as he simply listed in the surrounding
water.

Like a skip in a film, the water was all gone. The table was back. Donatello was sitting at it,
snapping up parts and working harder trying to go faster.

Leo felt his stomach churn. He watched his brother do the same thing as before. How he got so far
then stopped, said something he could not hear, and braced before the wall ruptured and the sea
water came in. This time, the water pressure crushed Donatello’s skull up against a shelf, killing him
instantly. His blood mixing into the gushing water making it darker within the gaze of that horrid red
light. Donnie’s limbs twitching as if he was trying to fight to stay alive. He floated past Leo, showing
the collapsed section of brain and skull. The damage so extensive that some of his teeth sunk to the
floor.

Leo’s hands came up to his face as he fell to his knees. Hands clawing at his skin as he dragged them
painfully down.

He couldn’t breathe.

He had just witnessed his brother’s head be brutally bashed in.

Time skipped once more.

Donatello sitting at that desk. Pushing himself more than ever. He burnt his fingers on the soldering
iron. He stabbed wires under his fingernails while fumbling for speed. He had an urgency to
complete what was before him.

“Donnie!” Leo tried to get his brother to hear him. “Get out of the room!! Leave before-”

Donatello stopped working, shook his head as he repeated his fate once more. The only change, Leo
heard him. He heard Donatello’s voice call out his name before the metal shrieked and broke. The
way of death this time was a broken off piece of the metal wall. It sliced through Donatello’s shell,
going through his body as easily as Leo’s katana would go through a rolled up tatami mat. The
debris pinned Donnie to the opposite wall. Blood spat out over olive lips. He tried to gasp, looking
down at the injury.

“No. No,no,no!!” Leo lunged for his brother, scrambling up from his knees to his feet. Suddenly feeling all
the water rush in around his body. He could feel the ribbons of warm liquid that was blood as he
stood in front of his brother. He hesitated, not sure what to do. Donatello coughed, red spattering
forward. He smiled, finding enough strength to reach forward. His wet fingers barely brushed over
Leo’s cheek before falling lifeless.

“No. No,no,no!!” Leo grabbed his brother’s shoulders. He tried to hold on as the water filled over
his head. He struggled to keep contact even as a rush of current pulled. His fingers clutched and
clung, tearing grooves into Donatello’s flesh as he was yanked away from him. The current swirled
him around the small room. Bringing him up against the red light. Pressure wrapped around him, squeezing, crushing.

He struggled as that red light washed away the water, washed away the darkness, washed away the air. A piercing sound of static rung through Leonardo’s skull. The sound crushed down on his meat and bones, pressing just as hard as the red light.

There was a pop, a giving release as the static evened out and the red light pulled away to a respectable distance. Leonardo’s body quivered from the onslaught, air rushed back into his lungs making him cough against the nothingness beneath.

The static broke with different words; garbled and strained, each one different in pitch and tone, voices different from the previous, sounding as if plucked from old radio broadcasts from decades ago.

“....Romeo…. A-alpha… ...Delta…… In….dia…… Oscar…………..wall……”

“.........wall.........” It repeated.

Leo coughed once more, looking up towards the light that washed over him. His hands gripped into fists at what he saw; a distorted humanoid. Torso and limbs elongated, head short and shoulders broad. The only way it could look even more terrifying was if he could fully see the creature, as it was, only splashes of red illuminated the silhouette. The red light pulled and fizzed like an image struggling to remain on a broken monitor.

“...... talk…………..Lima………...E….cho…….. Oscar……”

There was a series of beeps that filled the air loud enough to bust his ear drums.

He covered his ears before the feeling of waking from a dream wrapped around him. Gently it pulled him up and away from the depths of his mind. A stagnant relief came to him knowing that it was all a terrible dream. He clung onto the little hope he had left that Donnie wasn’t repeatedly dying over and over again. Calling out Leo’s name… before….

The images of Donatello, dead and listless in the water of red illumination. It pulled a whimper from his lips.

He raised up a hand to rub at his face to help the will to open his eyes. As his hand came to his face something flopped down onto the back of his hand. It flexed and moved in a weak manner. Dread grasped Leo’s heart as he slowly opened his eyes.

Above him, imbedded in the wall was a human. A man. Half of his body was leaning out as if the wall itself had somehow gave in like pudding and the man was now caught in it. His one free arm reached and grasped as his tongue wiggled in a gaping mouth that was held still, halfway into the cement.

Leo scrambled away, falling off of the bed in a tangle of limbs and blanket. He hurried back as fast as he could, heart hammering away at his chest. He looked back to the man only to see no man at all. The only thing in front of him was a messy bed and a radio on an end table.

Trying to catch his breath, he picked himself up off of the floor. He blinked several times trying to get that image out of his head; the man, Donatello, all of it. Leo picked up the blanket and threw it onto the bed. He sat down on the edge trying to make heads or tails of what he had seen. If he had seen it. It could have been a waking nightmare, riding on the coattails of his sleepy mind. It could have been… something else. The static on the radio didn’t help him think too clearly, especially since
it sounded as if it was only getting worse.

Then… softly… faintly… something picked up right on the edge of his hearing.

His hand shot to the radio and turned up the volume as high as it could go.

He heard it again, mixed in the static.

He squeezed his eyes shut, pushed his ear up to the radio and concentrated.

“........................................................l……...e…………...o……………………”

He let out a strangled sound. He put a hand over his mouth as he heard it once more. He swallowed and took a deep breath. He waited for it to repeat. This could be a trick. His insane mind trying to conjure ghosts to haunt him.

But it came, louder but still faint.

Leonardo’s name being said by Donatello’s voice.

“I’m here,” Leo whispered, voice cracking. He clutched the radio with one hand, gently stroking it with the other. He rocked back and forth, choking on the release of something he couldn’t describe. “I’m here, Donnie. ...My Donnie.”
Chapter 8

It was early in the morning, no one was awake besides himself. His nightmares only made it harder to sleep. After realizing he was petting a radio and cooing to it like it was Donnie himself, Leo felt a strange sort of fear. He wasn't sure if he was going crazy or what. His rational mind slowly started to turn its gears. After being completely lost for so long it felt foreign to put scepticism back to work. It was so foreign that it felt uncomfortable. He was now coming to terms with his hidden desires, how deeply he had loved his brother. It was to a point that he found life pointless, but he couldn't leave Raph and Mikey… and Splinter had already gone through so much that Leo found it to be out right treason if he left his family in one way or another. … but then, hadn't he already? He shut down, isolated himself.

It was a terrible thing to think about. He needed a distraction of some sort. He tried reading his Space Heroes comics but he had little interest in them. He missed having Donnie try to explain why the science of Space Heroes was actually plausible and how with all of their adventures it wouldn’t be hard to make. Instead he opted for going through Donnie’s books. Pulling out the ones that were well used by his brother. It helped him feel close.

Leo would pull a book from the shelf and run his fingers over the cover, taking in every tattered corner, scratch over the spine, even the eventual coffee stain. He would open the book and push his beak between the pages. Closing his eyes, if he breathed slow and steady, he could have sworn he could smell Donatello’s breath lingering among the inked letters. Peaceful memories of Donatello with his beak in a book, mumbling to himself, started to ease Leo. Despite what media showed on TV, intelligent people would read aloud from time to time. It was normal, a natural process in order to focus.

He closed the book and pressed his lips against the smooth cover. He carefully put it back to its rightful place. His fingers ran over the book spines.

“I should have told you.” Leo mused out loud. His voice low in reverence. “I admired how much you read. I admired… I loved,” he corrected. “How you could call upon all your literary knowledge at any time. I would get lost in your words, the passion you would say them in.”

He let out a heavy sigh of remorse. “I should have been by your side more. Listened to your every word… hugged you more…. Held you.” He closed his eyes trying to remember how Donnie's skin felt. How warm his shell was. His smell of old books, coffee, and metal.

“I want to hold you, Donnie… and never let you go.”

When he slowly opened his eyes he looked to the book his hand had stop to rest upon. The cover was a military green canvas, tattered and warped. He smiled sadly at it. If this book was alive it would have been the old stray dog that stole a child's heart. Donnie always brought home old books like Mikey with little lost pets. He always gave a dewey eyed look, arms heavy with beat, battered, and broken books. He simply couldn't leave them behind and it won him Leo’s help to carry it all back home.

The book felt good in his hands as he pulled it out. Whatever lettering it once had was now barely flakes of stubborn black bits. He flipped it open and started to thumb through the pages of long, complicated text. He felt a small smile tug at the corner of his mouth as he mused over how Donnie must have poured himself over it. With a flip of a page he caught a whiff of something so tangible it felt he could touch it. His eyes slid shut, not even taking in what was on the pages. His heart fluttered, his breath held as he opened his mouth to breathe. He could taste the smell.
Donnie’s smell. It was so powerful.

He felt a warmth behind him, ghostly fingers running up his arm. He tilted his head, as if allowing Donatello access to his neck. It was a sleep deprived fantasy. How he wished that Donatello was still there. That Donnie was touching him for real. He wanted to feel the scientist to gently push him up against the bookshelf. Slip his tongue over Leo’s pulse. Have Donnie’s hands pin his own up against the spines of those old books, preventing him from going anywhere.

He wanted it to be real…

“Donnie…” His voice dispelled the fantasy, chasing it away like morning to night.

He opened his eyes only halfway. He didn’t feel shame in his desires. He wanted to do terrible things to Donatello. Things that would have cracked open their shells and allowed them to bleed upon one another, mix and bind for eternity. He wanted to place tears in those piercing eyes, tears of joy, tears of frustrated arousal. He wanted to slip his tongue between the gap in Donnie’s teeth. Touch every bit of his skin and drown in his brother’s essence.

He sighed and began to turn the page before something on it had caught his attention.

He blinked in curiosity, letting it fall back so he could see the light scribble in a margin. It was Leo’s name in Donatello’s hand writing, a heart drawn around it, traced several times. He placed his fingers over it, feeling his body start to tremble.

“You idiot.” He felt heat in his eyes. Large tears pearled down his cheeks, down to the paper below.

“You goddamn idiot!” Leo had to lean against the bookshelf to keep himself upright. “You fucking moron.” He choked out. He dropped the book, his hands balling into fists as he pushed his face up against the book spines, choking on every wail of sorrow. His tears burned his cheeks, his teeth gnashed together.

Donnie had loved him too?!

Leo was such an idiot!! He should have known better! How Donnie always was there for him. He defended Leo, he took care of him. Going out of his way to do things for him. No wonder Donnie took everything that Leo dished out!! No wonder… no wonder Donnie tried to seek love somewhere else… Leo was a damn idiot for not chasing after him! He was a fucking moron for not snapping up such a beautiful thing before it could be taken away from him.

“Fuck,” He whimpered, his knees buckling. He slipped to the floor, his hand landing on the discarded book, wrinkling the pages. He tried scrubbing at his eyes. He wanted to see that doodle once more, like a man dying of thirst reaching for a mud puddle. He lapped at it not caring what it could do to him later. He ran his fingers over the dried ink, stroking and caressing. He was such an idiot. A fool…

It wasn’t for a few more minutes before he could tell that there was a little arrow that lopped down under the drawn heart. It pointed over in the page to a cluster of words that had been circled in the same colored red ink.

Radio Equipped WAL locks

Radio… equipped WAL… wall?

A pressure stabbed into his head. The book fell as he clutched at his head. Those strange static voices murmured in the back of his mind.
“Romeo… Alpha… Delta…… In….dia…. Oscar…. Wall…. Wall….”

His eyes widened, slowly. The pain in his head increased as he started to understand.

His wide eyed gaze snapped over to the radio by the bed. He only now realized that it was nothing but static, steadily getting louder.

He looked back to the book. He fumbled it to the beginning pages seeing what it read;
FM 24-6
War Department Field Manual
Radio Operator's Manual
Army Ground Forces

He swallowed, the rational part of his mind tried to offer an explanation of grasping at straws. That this wasn’t real, it was all part of his developing insanity. But there was another part of him. The part of him that could smell Donnie, that could still hear his voice, still feel his warmth, and that part said that this was truly happening.

Leo licked his lips. There was a faint memory of his, something far back where Donnie was once again spouting out random facts at rapid fire speed. But he said some things that Leo was able to hold onto. This was… how to understand licence plate letters.

He tried to find his voice, scared to speak because if he was wrong… then there truly was no hope.

He opened the manual back to the page with Leo’s name on it. He squeezed his eyes shut as tight as he could. Fingers on the writing. His heart hammered as he forced himself to face this hard choice. Either run the test that he was thinking of or not. If he did, he could prove to himself that Donnie was not a fractured piece of his mind or it could prove that he was truly gone.

He had to do it.

“Delta… O-Oscar…” He licked his lips, trying to remember what was used for ‘N’. “November… November…” What was ‘I’? Maybe his dream… in his dream it was, “India… Echo.”

There was nothing but that terrible static.

He ground his teeth together. He was just crazy. He was so insane that-

“Lima… Echo… Oscar….”

Leo felt something spark inside. His eyes opened, widening as he looked once more at the radio across the room.

“Donnie!!” He scrambled up, paddling up to his feet and running to the radio.

It wasn’t a dream!! This wasn’t insanity! This was Donnie’s voice in the static of the radio!

“Donnie!!” He started to mess with the dials, adjusting the antenna. “Donnie, keep talking! Keep talking, please!!”

There was a series of beeps that were covered up by strong static once more, Leo’s head pounding in pain as a sudden sound cut through.

“Sorry, Soldier,” Leo held his palms over his ears as a strange voice came over the radio sounding like the voice of a public announcement back in time. “Leave is not granted.”
“What does that-AAAAHHH!!!” He stumbled, that terrible sound only got louder.

It was all suddenly gone, leaving him alone and in pain. He growled, grabbing the radio with both hands.

“Donnie!! Donnie!!! I know you’re there!! Come on, Don!”

The bedroom door opened, the Splinter walked in, Mikey and Raph following him.

“Leonardo, what are you-”

“I heard him!” Leo shook the radio. “I heard him, he talked to me!”

“Leonardo, it is nothing but a radio.”

“You think I don’t know that?!” Leo snapped at his father, baring his teeth. “I heard his voice! He spoke to me! Then…” Leo’s eyes started to burn with a dangerous fire as a thought came to him. What if the reason why all of this was happening was because someone ‘took’ Donnie. What if he was kidnapped? It made sense. It was the only way to keep Donnie from home. Keep him away from Leo.

Someone took his Donatello.

“They took him.”

“No one took Donnie, Leo.” Mikey tried speaking in a soft manner.

But Leo didn’t hear Mikey as he stared down at the radio, shock settling in. Someone… something, had taken his brother, and if his dreams weren’t just dreams then… Donnie was actually living through all of that.

How? How was he supposed to help him out of there, away from all that pain?

The familiar hand of his father’s rested on his back. He looked up at him, lost and helpless. Splinter leaned down and wrapped his arms around his son. He tucked a hand under Leo’s butt and lifted him up like a child, and Leo, his mind completely scrambled, all he could do was allow his father to carry him as if he was a five year old boy.

Raph folded his arms across his chest as he stepped to the side to let Splinter take Leo out of the room. Enough was enough. He was going to get that address from Casey and get Leo out of the sewers. He was going to do it that very night.

~

It took Casey some time to get to the lair. Raph was getting impatient and every time he wanted to call him and yell at Casey to move faster he would have to take a breathe. He had to remind himself that Casey was going through a lot as well. It wasn’t fair of him to scream and holler especially when the human was already doing a huge favor for them.

In the meantime, they packed. Put together their food, rolled up bedding, and was selective on the things that they chose to bring for entertainment.

Most of the time Raph kept an eye on Leo while Mikey and Splinter went around. He paced as his brother tapped a kunai against the cement floor that served as the backing of their makeshift seating arrangement. The series of tapping was starting to get on his nerves. He wanted to kick the kunai
away. He wanted to yell at Leo for allowing himself to spiral so out of control. He was their leader!! He was supposed to be the strongest out of all of them, he… he… Raph ran a hand over his head taking in a deep breath.

Leo had his breaking points just like everyone else.

All Raph could do is remove Leo from this place. Get him away and… maybe they would never come back… it was a sacrifice that he was willing to make.

When Splinter had finished he came up to Raphael. He smiled softly, “I will wait for Casey. You should pack.”

Raph’s eyes went to the open turnstiles over to Leo. Knowing the conflict Splinter put on his best smile. “Do not worry. When Casey arrives I will send for you. Michelangelo is currently packing a bag for Leonardo.”

The red banded turtle nodded. He knew Mikey wouldn’t disturb anything that was Donnie’s. It was his main worry with Leo packing for himself. That Leo would go take some things that had once been held by his brother and this plan of healing would go up in flames. It took some of the edge off of his shell knowing that Mikey was in charge.

As he went to pack he looked to his eldest brother once more. Leo’s knees were drawn up, arm over his knees, a dark look of contemplation soured his features. He wished he could do more in order to get him to smile and be his old self. He felt a pang in his heart when a little voice whispered in his head, “It’ll never be the same.” He hated that voice, and how right it was.

It was roughly ten more minutes before Casey came in. He offered Splinter a smile and even a respectful bown that he’s seen the turtles and April do, his hands stuffed in the pouch of his hoodie. Splinter smiled and returned the bow.

“It is good to see you, Mr. Jones.” Splinter said.

“Sorry that it took so long to get here. I had to ask April to babysit my sis.”

“You have a little sister? I did not know.” Casey shrugged. “Don’t blame ya. Casey Jones is a private sort, humble, and pure of heart, yo.”

Splinter chuckled. “I shall go fetch Raphael for you.”

“No hurry, Master dude.” Casey started to go over to Leo. “We got all night.”

The ninja master shook his head, enjoying the light tone of the human as he went to get his son. He liked how Casey flopped down next to Leonardo and acted as if he was not broken.

“Hey, Leo.” Casey kicked up his feet onto a milk crate that was being used as an end table. The comics on it wrinkled under his heels. “What’s you up to?”

Leo didn’t respond, only continued to tap in that rhythm. His mind mulling over different options he had to help Donatello. The only conclusion he could come up with is that he had to get a hold of a more powerful radio. Maybe then he could properly talk to Donnie. Would a CB really work? What if the type of radio really was a factor? Did he need a crystal radio? Or something that is distinctly used in the military? After getting a hold of Donnie… what then? How could he reach across the vast cassum that was the line between life and death? How could he save Donnie?
Casey smiled that weird grin of his. It seemed that only Casey could make a mouth full of teeth look toothless. “You got a new hobby? I would suggest something with more action like hokey, but if Morse Code’s your thing then-”

Leo’s eyes snapped over to him, focused and deadly. It made the words die off of Casey’s tongue.

“What did you say?” Leo’s voice was gruff.

“Whoa, dude…. Bro, I didn’t mean any offense. Hockey’s just better in my opinion.”

The kunai scrapped over the cement, leaving a small groove as Leo brought it forward to point at Casey with it. “Not what you meant. What did you say?”

“M-morse code?” He leaned back from the deadly object.

Leo’s eyes roamed to the side as he delved deep in thought. “I don’t know Morse Code. How much do you know about it?”

“Only what my grandpa taught me. He was a world war vet.” Casey was quick to answer.

Blue eyes snapped back to the human. He flipped the kunai and started to tap it once more. “What does this say?”

“I-I uh… I’m a bit rusty but… I think it’s numbers.”

“Write them down.”

“You could ask me nicely.” Casey scoffed while he sat up. He had to get out of his seat to find paper and pen. He listened to what Leo was lining out. He would write, then wait and listen before writing again. When the sequence repeated he double checked his work.

“Think I got it,” the human frowned as he scratched his chin.

“Let me see.”

Casey shrugged and ripped a page out of the notebook he held. He handed the paper over. “You really need this vacation, bro. You’re super tense.”

Leo’s brows knitted together as he stared at the numbers. “Vacation? What vacation?”

“Nothing big,” Casey started to write down some more stuff on another page from the spiral notebook he held. “Just something to help you relax and get your head in the right space.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” Leo growled. He folded the paper and tucked it into his belt.

“I don’t think you got much choice.”

“What does that mean?” The feral look in those blue eyes made Casey take a step back.

“I mean everyone is going, are-aren’t you?”

“I’m not going anywhere!!” Leo shouted.

“But-” Casey cringed when a green hand shot out and grabbed the front of his hoodie. He was yanked down to Leo’s face. The tip of his kunai held up in a threatening gesture.
“I left him once, I won’t do it again. Do you understand me?!”

“I-I get it!” He didn’t know what to say. He had no clue what Leo was going on about. He thought if he agreed with the mutant turtle he would be less likely to get stabbed.

Leo shook Casey hard. “No you don’t!!! I won’t leave, Donnie again!!”

There was a sudden sharp pain in Leo’s neck and shoulder. The world started to tilt before turning black and he slumped over, letting go of Casey. Master Splinter was crouched behind his eldest son, having to reach down to hit the right pressure points to knock him out.

Casey panted.

“That… was… totally messed up!!!”
Mikey wiped his nose with his wrist and a sniff. The bumps of the road didn’t help his mood, it reminded him too much of when the Kraang invaded. Having Leo in the back of the van, prone, and quiet set a familiar fear. Nothing was going to be the same, only this time, their father was there to try to help instead of Donatello, April’s dad was driving with Casey next to him instead of Casey driving with April sitting shotgun. A warm arm around his shoulders was the only thing that kept him from slipping away from sanity. He was confused. He was hurt. He was scared. This was all too much for him.

“Don’t worry, he’ll be okay.” Raph rubbed his little brother’s shoulder, squeezing him up to his side. He knew what Mikey was thinking. It was hard not to, after all, this situation felt much too similar to their past events. There were only few differences but that terrible feeling of fleeing was nipping at him. He felt as if they were running away with trouble chasing them down… or maybe it wasn’t trouble but Death riding his pale horse.

He pressed his cheek on the top of Michelangelo’s head. The actual thought that Death may be following them scared him, but he couldn’t show fear. Mikey needed him strong, strong as Leo had been for them in the past. Splinter needed him to give the hope that Mikey once supplied. It felt as if everything was on his shoulders now. They would get through this. He would make sure of it. There were no more options. He wouldn’t let any of them slip away from him, not any more. Even if he had to sell his soul to the devil. He would keep his family safe and sound.

“Raphie?” Mikey’s voice was tiny.

“Yeah, little brother?”

“You’re squeezing me too tight…”

“Sorry. I…” The words died in his throat. Seeing Leo tucked in next to them, seeing their sensei’s ears pulled back as he cradled his eldest’s head… it made him feel as if it was a now or never situation. He twisted and pulled Mikey into a full embrace. He squeezed him as tight as he could. He nuzzled his cheek against freckle kissed skin. “Don’t you worry about Leo. Don’t worry about anything. I love you. Leo loves you, and I know Donnie did too. So… so be strong for us, okay?”

He pulled away and rubbed away some tears that slipped out from under the wet orange mask. “Be the strong ninja I know you are.”

Michelangelo nodded as a breathless, “Okay” was pushed out from between his lips.

Raphael smiled, it was sad, stressed, and tired, but it was a good smile.

Mikey sniffled while pulling his mask down to his neck. He took in a deep breath then let it out slowly. Raph was right. He had to get a hold of himself.
“You look tired. We got some time before we get there.” Raph shifted himself so that Mikey could stretch out. When his little brother gave him an unsure look he understood immediately. He smiled and rubbed the top of Mikey’s head. “Go saddle up next to Leo.”

“Raph?”

“Yeah?”

“I love you too.” Mikey smiled and leaned against his brother for a little bit. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the strength that Raph offered.

“Get some sleep, goof-ball.”

The youngest turtle crawled across the moving floor. He slipped himself alongside his eldest brother. He wrapped his arms around one of Leo’s and tucked his head onto a tone shoulder. His father’s hand stroked over his head as he stifled a yawn. If he tried, just for a moment, he could pretend he was a little turtle once again, too young to know what the outside world was like, and Donnie wasn’t too far.

~

It was barely an hour later. The bumps in the road felt more soothing, the night air flowed in through Mr. O’Neil’s open window. The man had been quiet most of the drive, only asking Casey a few things from time to time to make sure he was going the right way. He had understood when Casey came to him to drive, after all, Casey may know how to drive but now that there were regular police patrols it was best to have an adult behind the wheel. He had stayed quiet mostly because he didn’t know what to say. His own daughter had… had killed the smartest person he knew. The one that never gave up on him besides his own little girl when he had been kidnapped. The one that figured out a cure to turn him back to normal when he had been mutated. The least he could do was give the suffering family a lift.

He glanced behind his shoulder. Splinter was hunched over, neck relaxed as he slept sitting up. Raphael had found his way over to Mikey and Leo, bending around them as if he was trying to protect a clutch of eggs. Mikey clung to Leo as if his big brother was a teddy bear… and Leo? Leo looked empty, even in his sleep.

He looked back to the road, memories of the time he lost his wife surfacing.

“Do you think this will work?” Mr. O’Neil asked softly, as to not wake the others.

Casey scratched the back of his head. He honestly had no clue. “It’s… better than just waiting around.”

“It’s really hurt them… especially the blue one.”

“Leonardo.” Casey supplied.

“He must have been close to his brother.”

“They’re all close.” Casey leaned against the van door, looking out to the inky black mess that whipped by.

“It wouldn’t surprise me, they’re Endlings after all.”

“Endlings?”
“The last of a species kind.”

Casey never thought of it that way. At first he freaked out when he met them but now… now they were simply normal people. They may be green and have shells but to him they were every bit human as his next door neighbor. Thinking of them as Endlings… it hurt him to think there will never be anything quite like his friends again. It scared him too.

“Sorry… I didn’t mean to bring you down.”

The teen shrugged. “It’s okay. There’s not much to look up to nowadays.”

“How much farther?” The balding redhead decided to change the subject.

“Another hour’s worth.”

“We’re headed towards the coast?”

“Yeah. There is an old Military base there, decommissioned or something. It’s been left to just sit there since World War II. Not many people know of it.”

“Then, how do you know?”

“My dad took us camping last year. My sister and I were exploring and found it.”

“Do you know what it’s called?”

“Nah, most of the words on the sign are all messed up.”

Once again they fell into a silence. Curby followed along the dotted yellow and white lines that determined his lane until he had to slow down to turn onto a freeway junction. They were taking a tight loop around a decline of road. He could only hope that these creatures that have proven to be more reliable than most humans would be alright.

~

When Leo woke up, they were almost there. The rest of his family was still asleep. He could feel Mikey’s arm draped over him as Raph snored, his face not far from Leo’s own. From the gentle movement he could tell he was in a vehicle. Splinter had uncurled enough to get blood back into his legs that he had stretched out next to his sons, while he rested his back against the bench seat. Leo’s jaw clenched. His hands gripped into a tight fist.

They had taken him.

He wasn’t home. They had taken him away from resources that he could have used to help Donnie with.

He glared, his body became tight and rigid. Judging from the last thing he remembered, to his current situation, he could surmise what had happened to him. He knew now that they would be watching him like a hawk ready to dive down on a field mouse. It didn’t help his situation that he did not know where he was nor which way to walk to go home. He was stuck for the time being.

Silently he moved away from his family, pressing himself up against the back corner of the van. He drew up a knee and rested an arm over it. He would just have to find another way to save Donnie. There was no way he was going to leave him in that hell. He had to think.

What would Donnie do?
Create a timeline?

Maybe… but he was uncertain when it would start. Gathering clues was hard enough. He knew in one dream he was shown some parts. In the past… or… another dream, he wasn’t certain, but Donnie himself had told him what tubes where. He found a manual for radios dated back to the 1940’s in Donnie’s things. The taps or beeps in his nightmare, or the state he was in that Donnie could reach out to him, Casey said it was Morse Code. That meant they were dots and dashes. So far, everything was pointing back to World War II, but why? Donnie only recently… Could something have happened back then? Something that would have triggered such specific current events? This was where he needed Donnie. He would have been able to research everything, dig through all the piles of information of the past and make sense of them. They weren’t really taught history, Splinter never really intended to let them out of the sewers. Human history was not essential to learn. But from what he knew from a few TV documentaries there were nuclear capabilities at that time. Strange experiments that were happening in every country. There were more mysteries that the war itself either created or covered up than any normal citizen would care to know about.

So… in conclusion… he had little to nothing. Except… He reached into his belt. The feeling of paper greeted him as he pulled out the folded piece that was tucked into a hidden pocket. He didn’t have much light to see Casey’s sloppy handwriting, but he had the numbers. Two different lines, probably spaced due to the pause that was between the dots and dashes he had fed out.

He squinted at them. There was something familiar about the numbers. The more he stared at it the more he felt the bothersome taunt of a thought just out of reach.

The van started to slow, the change in pace made his family stir. He quickly tucked his piece of paper back to where it had been. He kept a hard eye on the others as they woke. Raph complained that Mikey had drooled on him at some point. Mikey gave a sheepish smile before seeking out Leo. Seeing his brother’s gaze he didn’t say anything, only looked down. Splinter got on his knees and turned around to look out of the windshield between their two human escorts.

“We’re here, yo!” Casey tried to sound more excited than tired.

Splinter had opened his mouth to say something only to have his words halt on his tongue by the sound of the back doors to the van opening when they came to a complete stop.

“Leonardo, do not wander far.” He cautioned as he caught a glimpse of a shell and the tails of a blue bandanna disappear into the night.

“I’ll keep an eye on him.” Mikey was quick to follow his brother, his hands grabbing two backpacks from the back as he went. He slung one over his shoulder, stepping out into the cold night air. His body shivered, goosebumps rising on his thighs and arms. He saw Leo’s form standing off to the side in the tall grass that was almost as high as his knees. He picked up his feet, while stifling a yawn and went up to his brother’s side. If he was quiet and closed his eyes he could hear it, the rolling of waves.

“Hear that, that’s the ocean, bro.” Mikey’s voice was quiet and calm. “Doesn’t really smell all that salty, but you know, we live on an island anyway.”

Leo didn’t reply, only stood still. His arms were folded over his chest, his eyes focused on the old military base in front of them. It’s buildings were mostly squat, maybe two stories at the highest. There was about three buildings that had more floors, each varying. The tallest was about six to seven floors. There was evident structural damage in the buildings he could see; fallen sections of walls, cracks showing roof cave ins, brick and mortar scattered in piles. Most floors wouldn’t be safe to stand on.
“Leo?” Mikey touched his brother’s arm only to have it shaken off. As a desperation to not be shut out he quickly looked around. Splinter and Raph were currently grabbing lanterns as Casey and Mr. O’Neil worked to open the neglected chain link fence that surrounded the place. They were all busy. It gave him some cover. He opened the bag in his hands, the one he had packed for Leo. He dug out a book and pressed it up against his big brother’s arm. That got the attention of his sibling. He looked down, seeing Mikey hold out to him the book he had left in Donnie’s room. The one with his name encompassed in a heart.

He turned, unfolding his arms as he gently took hold of the book.

“I… I saw what Donnie wrote in there.” Mikey clutched the backpack in his hands. He pushed back one of his feet so he could dig his toes into the ground in an anxious motion. “… I think I get it now… why you’re so hurt.”

Leo’s shoulders sagged a little.

“I think Donnie tried chasing April so bad to try to not mess things up with you.” Mikey pulled up the backpack in his hands in favor for wrapping his arms around it. It hurt to talk about Donnie. “He liked you the most, you know? I think he was too scared to do anything because if you said ‘no’ then you may have treated him differently. He would have had to live with you knowing you didn’t love him back… but you do… don’t you?” Mikey’s big eyes turned up from the book to his brother’s face.

Leonardo’s once hard expression softened. He nodded while taking in a sharp breath.

Mikey’s lips tugged into a little smile. “I brought you the book because I thought you need it. You need to remember Donnie more than I do. He loved you and… and… I know we’ll see him again, but it just may take a lot longer than we really want it to.”

“Yo!” Raph’s voice carried over to them. “Will you two bozos come and help?! We need more eyes to scout out a good place to set up for the night!”

Mikey handed Leo his backpack, he stepped around his eldest sibling to head toward the others. Leo looked down at the book, thankful he had one thing that could help him in this whole damn mess. He stuffed it into the bag and secured it. He slung it over his shoulders. In front of him was the old military base, rising high in the night sky were red lights that gently faded in and out. There were radio towers close by, and with a little luck, maybe Mikey just had handed him the one thing he truly needed to save the love of his life.
Leo kept his distance from everyone, each understanding for a different reason as to why. Splinter would keep his ears perked, twitching forward and back as he kept track of the sound of his eldest son. Raph wouldn’t let the sight of Leo’s single flash light wander too far. Casey simply stuck close to Kurby so that April’s father wouldn’t get hurt in the ruins. Mikey stayed close to Raphael. He wanted to talk to Raph, tell him what he knew about Leo and why their brother was so broken. He didn’t know what the others would think about it when he, himself, felt conflicted with the knowledge. Splinter had never said anything wrong about it, but then again, when does the subject of sexual relations ever come up in a mutant turtle’s life? It left him with media as an educator. From what he was allowed to watch and read it was never really brought up. There had been one movie and they made it sound like a really bad thing to have a relationship like that between siblings. And if that was true then he didn’t want people to put any more stress on Leo than he already had.

He didn’t want his big brother to hurt any more. He was already the shell of the turtle he had grown up with, if he had any more trouble Mikey had the deep fear that Leo wouldn’t be around any longer. No more scent of jasmine and green tea. No more Space Heroes merchandise placed in random spots of the home. No more judge-free smiles. No more late night lectures about watching scary movies… No more safety-net… no one would be there to catch him… no one…

“You okay?” Raph’s light shifted onto his baby brother.

Mikey tried to nod but stopped. He wasn’t okay. None of this was okay.

“Raph? …w-what if Leo doesn’t get better?”

“Don’t talk like that! Don’t even think like that!” Raphael stepped up to Michelangelo. He raised his hand in a fist as if to whack his brother on instinct. Mikey flinched but the only blow he got was a soft pat on his shoulder. He looked to his brother who looked older than he really was.

“Listen Mikey… If there is one thing that I learned from you it is to look on the bright side of everything. It may look like there is no bright side to this now, but… but we gotta have faith that something will come of it. We gotta have hope, bro.” He squeezed his hand, thumb rubbing against green skin. “I can’t hope enough for all of us. You gotta help me out with it. Can you do that for me?”

Mikey smiled a little, “You sound kinda like Leo before…” He took a deep breath. “Before.” That’s all that needed to be said.

“I don’t know if that’s a compliment or a jab.” Raph smiled while he pulled his brother into a walk.

“You know me, I do both, I’m talented that way.”

“I wouldn’t call it a talent.”

“…hey… c…can I tell you something and have you promise to -never- say anything to anyone about it?” Mikey played with his fingers, blue eyes flicking a gaze over to his stoic sibling.

Raph’s brows creased. “Uh- yeah, sure.”

“You have to promise, Raph.”

“Okay, okay. I promise.” Raphael stopped walking in favor of looking at his brother.
“I...I think I know why Leo’s so messed up about Donnie.”

A hard lump formed in the red banded turtle’s throat. His heartbeat drummed. Mikey’s expression... it was hard, frustrated. Did the youngest find out? Did it disgust him? What if he decided to give Leo a hard time over it? It would only cause Leo more problems, he would-

“Now, don’t freak out when I say this, because if you do I’ll knock out your teeth!” Mikey threatened. “Leo doesn’t need any more trouble, you got that?”

Green eyes widened as Mikey stepped into his personal space. He wasn’t expecting that.

“Keep to your promise and you keep your teeth.”

“Okay!” Was all Raph could bark out, trying to sound like he was in control of the situation.

Mikey eyed him for a bit, making sure he would keep his word. When satisfied the younger of the two pulled back, his soft features returning with a ting of worry. He took a deep breath and pressed his palms together.

“I think… they loved each other more than brothers…”

A silence fell over them. A rolling thunder could be heard in the distance. The smell of ozone was ushered in with a gust of wind that slipped through the broken walls. There was a tenseness that was almost tangible. Raphael’s stomach knotted. Mikey knew. He knew and... he was being protective of Leo. That had to be a good sign, yes? It would seem so, but how did Mikey really feel?

“How… how do you feel about that?” Raph finally spoke up. His gaze was lowered and to the side.

Mikey shook his head before rubbing at his temple. “I... I don’t really get it... but looking back... they always were together. When Donnie couldn’t sleep it was Leo that would get him to bed. When Leo wouldn’t laugh Donnie would find a way of making him. Leo doesn’t like coffee but he’ll drink it for Don. Don doesn’t like apples but he eats...he ate them because Leo likes them. I-it was like they were always... um…”

“Dancing?”

“Kinda… giving and taking, leading and following, b-but then April showed up and I think Donnie just... What if he told Leo and Leo didn’t like him back, you know?”

“...So... you think Donnie was in love with Leo too?”

Mikey nodded. “I saw it in one of his books, Leo’s name with a heart drawn over it. Even -I- know what that means.”

“Does Leo know?”

“...Yeah...”

Raph felt his shoulders sag as if he had a bag of rocks on his back and someone had added a few more heavy stones to it. It was no wonder he started to lash out before they left. Not only did he love Donnie, but now he knew he wasted his chances.

“How do -you- feel about this?” Mikey turned Raphael’s own question around and onto him.

“I think… it’s weird... but I don’t care. I just want Leo to be himself again...” His breath quickened as his eyes stung. His voice was a low whisper as if sharing a secret. “I just want Donnie back…
They could kiss right in front of me and I wouldn’t care because they’re both alive and healthy and this whole thing was nothing but a nightmare.”

Warm arms wrapped around his neck. He was held in a soft embrace that only tightened when he practically snapped his baby brother up and clung onto him. It was almost a relief to know that Donnie had loved Leo as well, that Mikey knew and didn’t care as much as Raphael, himself. It was a burden to have this knowledge because now they would have to protect their brother even more. What if someone else found out and they resented Leo for it? It could make things worse. It could drive Leo in so many directions and none of them were the path of healing.

Mikey pressed a hand to the back of Raph’s head, his other slid down to rub over shell.

“It’s going to be okay, Raph… I’ve got your back.”

Raph hugged his brother even tighter, burying his face against neck. Mikey could feel the heat from the sai wielder’s breath. He looked up at the overcast sky that was black as soot. He felt tears on his skin as Raph grumbled out, “Is it raining?”

The orange loving turtle patted his brother’s shell. There wasn’t a drop in sight.

“Yeah, it’s raining.”

Leo looked around the room he had found. So far he had only came across places that had three walls or fewer, lucky if part of the roof clung onto itself enough to create a broken awning. Grass and bramble ate at carpet and floor, creeping further inside like a rising tide. He shined his flashlight over to an ivy covered wall. The only reason it had not collapsed was due to the tree branch that fed through a broken window, keeping the section of the building from crumbling. Most things were broken, torn apart by weather and animals. Shards of glass, twisted nails and screws reached up from beds of dirt. Books and binders would fall apart like sand in his hand when he tried to pick them up. He found part of a barracks, bed frames just as rusted and twisted as the nails in the ground, mattresses were bug infested, torn apart for bedding by birds or other creatures.

He let out a long breath. His light training up high as he scanned his surroundings.

“You gotta help me out here, Donnie.” He mumbled to himself. “Where do I go?”

All that met him was a silence.

Cold wind brushed up against him causing his skin to raise in goose bumps. He closed his eyes. He needed to concentrate. He needed to think like Donatello. What should he do?

The plan of action was to build the radio, right? Mikey had been an unknowing savior and had gifted him with the one thing that could help him get his love back. The only problem was… even in a military base, there wasn’t much to salvage, it would seem. He needed to figure out what to do. He needed a safe place away from the others in order to read the book, to think, to… meditate. ... Maybe, he should stop asking himself “what would Donatello do” and start asking, “What would I do?”

He would meditate on it. Talk to Splinter about it, devise a plan, use the abilities of the others to execute the plan… unfortunately the others wouldn’t believe him. They all thought he was on a slip and slide down to madness. Meditation seemed to the be only thing he had left in his arsenal.

Blue eyes went to the dark, warped, doorway to his right. He would have to find a decent place to
settle down. He needed it clean enough that when he sat down he wouldn’t get rusted metal or glass cutting into him.

Leo pointed his flashlight to where he wanted to go. He slipped into the dark room, it was darker than the others. This one actually have four walls, a hole in the roof that allowed the spidering light of lightning come in from overhead. It was messy, but some things looked intact. There were a few, bulky, machines attached to the east wall, the dials chewed, glass to the gauges broken or cracked. A set of old wires slithered around on the floor, a heavy looking contraption attached to one. Leo walked over, carefully picking it up to look it over.

A… microphone?

He looked around the area. It was cleaner than the other places, actually had four walls. It was a good enough place to meditate. He used his feet to move dust and debris, clearing an area for him to take a seat. Crossing his legs, he unceremoniously plopped down on the dirty and dust covered floor. He set the microphone in front of him, standing it up. On it’s thick base were two buttons. He pushed down one with a strained click. The other wouldn’t budge.

He took in a deep breath through his nose and sighed it out. He rolled his shoulders into a comfortable position. He needed to rest his mind. Let the thoughts come and go, he couldn’t chase after them, try to interact with them, or any other form of distraction. He needed to let them flow, in and out, come and go. The ones that came up for attention were not important. The ones that zipped by could be ignored. He was looking for a different type of thought. The one that is illusive, it hides like a cunning rabbit illuding a sniffing hound. These were the thoughts he needed, they were his rationale, his hope, his determination. Once gathered, he would be able utilize them into figuring out what his next step should be.

He took in another breath, releasing it slowly. He could smell the storm over head. It was comforting, the first time he had seen a storm was only a few days after the first time they went up topside. Mikey had been scared of the lightening and loud sounds. He had wedged himself effectively between Leo and Raph, holding onto one arm from each of his big strong brothers. Donnie was on Leo’s other side. The only reason he wasn’t out in the heavy rain was because Leo had an arm around his waist, keeping him close under the small awning that was on the utility shed of the apartment building. The four of them had sought shelter as soon as it started to rain and thunder came along with it. The shed had been the only place on the roof tops that they could find that would allow them to experience this new phenomenon and keep all four of them safe and dry. They didn’t know anything about storms other than what media has told them. And from what Leo knew, lightning could strike at any moment at any time and he just wanted to keep everyone nice and safe. It had not stopped him from watching his brother though. Excited and happy, he was filled with the sort of wonderment that was purely Donnie. Eventually, Donatello’s wide wondrous eyes turned to Leo, catching his brother’s admiring gaze. There had been a small blush on Donnie’s cheeks as he smiled then talked about the different types of lightning that could be created. What lightning was actually made of and its effects on the ozone. When he was finally done talking he had fully leaned up against Leonardo’s side, thin… warm… smiling… perfect. He should have kissed him then. Cupped his round cheeks, pressed lips over his. He should have tasted his skin, tasted his mouth.

Leo took in another breath. No, let that thought go. He would get Donnie back. He would…

He felt a long lost warmth beside him. So similar to the memory he just had, yet, something was distinctly different. It pushed at him, hurriedly.

There was another crack of lightning, thunder rolled, rain began to come down. He went with his heart, focusing on that warmth, trying to understand it. Why was it so urgent? What was causing the
heat on a cold night? It was almost as if someone was beside him… it felt a lot like Donnie the more he thought about it.

He was so focused that he didn’t hear nor feel the presence of Michelangelo. His youngest brother gave a little huff. After his heart to heart with Raphael he realized that they had lost sight of their big brother. They couldn’t see the shine of his flashlight any longer and split up to search for him. And while he was glad to see Leo was doing something that was some semblance of normal, he was aggravated with the fact that his brother had just disappeared on him.

“Leo, you know you can’t just run off on your own.” Mikey sounded old. He carefully stepped over debris while making it over to his brother. “You know everyone is worried about you, so don’t…” There was a strike of lightning, within the ghostly glow where familiar eyes. They shifted from looking at Leonardo over to him. A mouth opened and tried to say something but the lingering glow of ethereal light disappeared.

Mikey’s blue eyes were wide. His breath choked in his throat as he stared at the spot next to Leo. After a few moments, he was able to find his voice.

“D…Donnie?”

The storm broke with another another bolt over head. It split the sky like porcelian, thunder giving a war cry above that was so loud Mikey could feel it in his bones.

Donnie, once again, an image of light projected unto dust. He was next to Leo, trying to talk. No sound came over the thunder, only its deafening clap. The flashlight in Mikey’s hand dropped, clattering to the floor. This time, Donatello wasn’t alone. Surrounding them, filling in the room like poured in tar, were silhouettes. Large, thin, distorted and hunched, eyes glowing as red and bright as brake lights. They reached out, all at once, a whirlwind of darkness fluttering like raven wings. He kept his eyes open, waiting for a blow that he would have to dodge or deflect. He watched in horror as the dark shapes with those terrible red eyes, clawed at Donatello’s soft light. They ripped and pulled him into their darkness.

“DON!” Mikey rushed forward, he knocked into Leo pushing his brother to the side and just like that, everything was over. There were no shadows, no more red eyes… …. No more Donnie.
Chapter 11

Michelangelo’s hands shook. At least, he thought that it was his hands. The world trembled around him. Sound muffled and sharpened in strange waves of clarity. He could hear rain. The insistent drip, drip, dripping of water seeping in through the broken roof. There was another sound, distant, just at the edge of his hearing that he couldn’t identify.

It wasn’t until he felt something hit his knees that he moved, feeling stiff, rigid. He knees… they were hitting each other, knocking together like branches in the wind. It wasn’t until then that he realized he hadn’t even taken in shapes or colors around him. His vision was fine, it was as if his brain couldn’t identify what his eyes had been taking in.

He felt something press against his shoulder. The pressure was soft, reassuring, gentle, but he pulled from it as if it were a hot iron burning into his flesh. His heart suddenly leapt into action, a machine that had stopped only suddenly jerk into life. He could feel it pulsate in his throat as he raised his hands in a battle ready stance.

Leo.

There was only Leo.

A burning pain seared through his throat, down into his chest, igniting a strange heat. It had felt as if someone had taken the remote that controlled the world and hit the pause button then slammed on the fast forward.

“Mikey. Mikey, look at me.”

Leo’s voice sounded as if it was under water.

His watched leaf green hands reach for him, slower this time. They touched his shoulders. Thumbs rubbed, soothing circles. It was comforting as worried dark blue eyes watched him. It anchored him, gave him something to focus on.

“Breathe with me. In.” Leo took in a purposeful long breath. “And out.” He did the same on his exhale.

His breath was warm, almost sweet. The feel of it barely touched Mikey’s skin as his older brother kept himself close as if the short distance would match their breathing. Leo’s inhale left a cold feeling before being washed with warmth once more, adding to another sensation that he could slowly process.

The gentle ebbing of warm and cold, the soft touch of his older brother, both helped the world from shaking. His throat and chest no longer stung. His heart slowed in beat.


One of the hands on his shoulder shifted, moved up to his cheek. A pang clenched his heart. It was noticeable how much thinner Leo’s hand was from the last time his brother had soothed him. Yet… he still had those hard earned calluses and his hold was firm and strong. He leaned into his brother’s touch as Leo spoke in a voice that was so much like the turtle he had once been.

“It’s okay, Mikey. Just breathe.”
“Leo. I-”

Dark blue eyes searched his face, narrowing slightly. It was…

“You were hyperventilating.” Leo took a step back. His warm touch leaving his baby brother in favor of folding his arms over his chest. A frown pulled at leaf green lips. “You know… it is okay to leave me alone for a while. I…” He felt the pack on his back shift. The flat surface of Donatello’s book pressed up against his shell lending an odd sort of comfort. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“That’s not-’ Mikey tried but words failed him. He wasn’t sure what he had seen. Usually he would have been so confident as to what was going on around him. He would have defended himself and told Leo right then and there what he had seen. He would have tried to push it, get his sibling to see and understand what he had witnessed. But… there were the facts… Donatello was dead. He had been watching for months almost a full year, of Leo slowly wasting away. It had caused him so many nightmares awake and asleep. He, himself, had taken to slipping into Raphael’s bed at night, scared and lost, clutching onto his big brother for any sort of reassurance that things will be alright causing Raph to lose sleep countless times.

“Mikey! Did you find him?!” Raphael’s voice was close to being panicked as it drew closer.

The youngest looked away from his eldest brother. “Y-yeah, dude! He’s over here!”

Within moments Raphael’s thick form came rushing into the doorway. The sharp light from the lantern he held splashing the room with a contrasting eerie glow that washed away the fleeting terrors as he held it up. He gave a deep sigh of relief seeing both of his brothers together before his temper snapped to attention, making his teeth grind.

“Don’t do that again, Leo.” He growled out.

A sharp glare from the eldest only set Raph more on edge. A hideous emotion came writhing up, bubbling like an overcooked pot of stew.

All he wanted was to be home. Be close to Donnie while he figured this all out! But no… no, they took him away. Kidnapped him!! It was only because of Mikey that he even had a glimmer of hope left in saving the love of his life and now he’s being threatened?!

Raph had some balls.

“I’m warning you.” Raph nearly hissed.

“Warning me about what? What will you do, Raph? Huh?!” Leo let his hands drop from his chest, in a ready stance. “You already helped kidnap me. You took me away from Donnie!! You’ve taken me away from the only way I can help him! Now you’re threatening?” He gave a strange laugh, one that teetered on the edge of sanity. “What more can you possibly do?!”

“DONNIE’S DEAD!!!”

Dark blue eyes turned hard, and deadly. “Don’t you EVER say that again.”

“What? That he’s dead? Because he is. You watched him just like I did when April ripped him apart into nothing!!”

Leonardo leapt forward, coming at his brother low. He braced himself as he slammed his shoulder into Raphael’s plastron. The velocity took them both to the ground. Leonardo straddled his brother, fist reeling back as Raph coughed and threw up his arms to block the sudden punches.
Bucking his hips as hard as he could, he managed to catch Leo off balance. He swung out a fist only to have it easily blocked. Instead of pulling his fist back, he kept pushing, spreading out his fingers so he could grab a hold of anything. He caught a fistful of blue fabric and yanked as hard as he could while bucking once more. It was enough to get Leo off of him, rolling himself into a crouched position.

Raph scrambled up enough to mimic his brother’s stance. Both crouched like feral cats waiting for the other to make the first move.

“Will you two stop?!” Mikey shouted.

His words went ignored as Leo sprung forward. Raph watched him come, he thrust out his fist only to feel Leo’s hand slide under his wrist and throw the punch upwards leaving his side vulnerable. A shout caught in his throat when a sharp elbow cracked into his ribs.

He quickly brought his own down, catching onto carapace. He winced before a shout came out of him when Leo’s lightening fast reflexes landed in two regular punches right into the same spot effectively bruising his ribs.

Changing tactics, Raph leaned over his brother, arms circling around Leonardo’s middle. He braced himself as he lifted the eldest up into the air. With a roar he slammed Leo down onto the dirty floor; neck, head, and shoulders connecting with a satisfying crack.

Leo went still.

Taking in a few panting breaths, Raph hesitated in letting go. Leo wasn’t pulling any punches. He was skinny and hadn’t kept up with his training, yet it felt like he did a number on Raphael’s ribs. He was also heavier than he looked.

Him going still… This was a ploy.

Get out of the hold and attack again. That’s what Leo was doing. Waiting for him to loosen his grip.

No way he was going to fall for that.

Thighs suddenly snapped around his neck, holding tight and squeezing hard. With his current hold around Leo’s middle, it left him defenceless as Leo proceeded to land several punches into Raphael’s face. He was forced to let go in favor of trying to fling his assailant off.

“I said, Stop!” Mikey tried again.

Raphael couldn’t rip Leo off of him, he had to do something else to give him the upper hand. He pushed forward, intending to ram Leo against a wall when his toes tangled in the cord of the old heavy microphone. The two tumbled down to the ground. The hard jerk jostled Leo enough for Raph to free his head. He moved quickly, cover Leo’s body with his own, delivering a punch of his own to his brother’s jaw.

Suddenly something had grabbed him by the back of his mask. He barely had enough time to register Leo’s startled expression coming full force towards him. White blisters of light popped over his vision as his head was violently connected with his big brother’s.

“I told you to stop!!” Mikey was yelling at them.

He had grabbed both of them by the mask and had slammed their heads together. It was… it was a good move.
Then came the smack.

“You idiots done?!?”

Blue and green eyes looked up to the round baby cheeks of Mikey’s puffed out with anger. A sense of shame gripped them, their gazes shifting anywhere but towards the youngest.

“Leo!! You look at me when I’m talkin’ to you, yo!!”

Leo’s eyes snapped to attention as he gave a rather timid nod.

“We didn’t kidnap you! You’re goin’ crazy and I get it! You love Donnie more than anyone in the whole world, but you can’t be killin’ yourself over it!!! We’re not your enemies. Raph’s just stupid, bro. He’s worried, we’re all worried!”

“Hey!” Raph protested.

“And Raph!!” Mikey hissed at him. “Leo’s lost the love of his life so you get into a fist fight with him after telling him how dead D is?! What’s your damage?! You don’t rub that junk into a man’s face!!”

“I…” Words failed him. Mikey was right. He was absolutely right.

“He… he’s not dead.” Leo spoke up.

“He’s not dead.” Leo shook his head while rubbing at the sore spot on his neck caused by the fight. “He can’t be. I heard him.”

“Grief does weird things to people, bro.” Mikey moved in close looking all the world in need of a hug. “You see them. You hear them. Master Splinter said he smelled Tang Shen for years at random after she died.”

“No. No this is different.”

“No, it’s not.” Mikey sighed. “ Heck, even I’ve started seeing ‘im.”

Leo’s eyes grew wide. “ W-when?”

“Before Raph showed up. I was super scared that we had lost you and the lightening started up and I thought I saw him next to you.”

“Next to me?”

What was he doing? What was Leo doing? Meditating. He was meditating!! But, what about Donnie?

“What was Donnie doing? Mikey! What was he doing?!” He grabbed small shoulders and shook.

“Cool it, Leo!” Raph got up and pushed at him to get him to let go of their brother. “Didn’t Mikey just tell you that we’re not the enemy?”
“B-but Donnie, what was Donnie doing?”

“Nothing! Just trying to talk to you before-”

“Before what? What happened?”

Mikey flinched from his older brother. He didn’t really look like Leo any more. He looked like some crazed stranger.

“Knock it off! You’re scaring him, and quite frankly me too! You’re going nuts, Leo, you need to stop this!”

“I’m not crazy!!!” Leo screamed at the top of his lungs. “I’ve talked to Donnie in my dreams! I’ve heard him on the radio!! Now Mikey’s seen him!! He’s in trouble and you guys just want to go fucking camping while he’s being held hostage by those red eyed devils!!!”

“Y-you just cussed.” Mikey’s mind swirled around what Leo had just said, gripping to the only thing he could make sense out of.

A terrible chill ran up his shell. The mention of red eyed devils brought back the memory of the room filled with shadows, eyes burning bright like hot coals.

He didn’t tell Leo about those things.

Did that mean… Leo’s not going crazy?
Splinter was an understanding father, as much as he could be. He raised each and every one of his sons to be a respectable young man with honor and dignity. Though some times the last part would slip from time to time, especially with Michelangelo, he gave them some slack, as they were teenagers. He gave them the space they needed. Guided them when they were lost. He stayed strong to provide them with a pillar they could lean against in hard times as they, unknowingly, have done this for him. It was when he found that he had lost one of these little treasures of his life that he felt everything quiver.

Donatello…

His sweet baby. The little turtle that was always so eager to learn. Splinter could still remember the weight of the boy on his chest when he was no larger than a cantaloupe, the feeling of the action of pulling a thumb out of a suckling mouth. He had loved hearing the little cooing sounds, the excited noises of accomplishment that went from little blabbers of nonsense into full shouts of complicated words of victories. He remembered the time when his boy wasn’t too happy to be given the bo staff and how it progressed to how he became protective of his weapon.

It was difficult for him to openly grieve, his remaining sons needed him. In private he shed tears and felt the same pain he had endured so long ago when tragedy first had struck him. Most times he found himself welcoming anything that made him physically active, it gave a welcomed distraction especially with the decline of his eldest son.

He didn’t know what to do for Leonardo. He was confused at first at how hard the loss had struck him. He was certain it was simple as his boy blaming himself as Leonardo tended to shoulder the weight of the world on his shoulders and always felt responsible more so if it was his brothers. But while his other sons began to show signs of healing, Leonardo declined. He slipped further and further away from them, closing almost completely off.

It was disturbingly familiar.

It was exactly how he acted when he had lost his beloved wife and daughter. Leo was not a parent… love for one’s child would always be different from the love of someone… you wed. At first he pushed it aside. Decided not to see it, but it presented itself time and time again. He could no longer look away. It seemed to be a fact that was stranger than fiction to him. When did this happen? How did it happen? What could he do to help his confused son? Was he confused? After all, the pain he felt was raw and pure.

He knew he had to speak to his son some time about this. Help him understand that he is not alone in experiencing such pain, it was the reason why he requested Mr. O’Neil to drive them. He wanted the other man there, a man who had also lost his wife, to show Leonardo that this anguish he was going through was shouldered by others and that is was okay to press on with life even if that special
someone was no longer there to walk beside.

For this to happen, he knew he had to be in a private place where Casey and his other sons could give them their space without eavesdropping. He did find a few rooms that were still intact in one of the buildings, keeping above ground. He didn’t trust the stability of this place to risk slipping into a basement only to have the only exit suddenly cover with debris if a wall decided to crumble under the stress of time. For this same reason he stayed clear of intact rooms that were in buildings that were more than one floor. Though they seemed sturdy, he did not possess the knowledge to tell if it was structurally sound in case a floor gave under weigh.

Eventually he did find a few rooms that were adjacent to each other that would at least provide them with cover as the sky above opened up.

He heard shouting in the distance that pulled a sigh from his lips. His sons were squabbling again it would seem.

He grabbed the lantern he had been using to help guide himself through the ruins. The bright LED light cut through the darkness as he turned around. He should collect his children. It was getting late even for himself and a decent rest should help calm tempers.

He gave another sigh as the lantern flickered. One problem after another it would seem.

The bulb strobed a bright blue before dimming to a low red colour.

Lifting up the lantern, Splinter’s ears folded back as he squinted at the object.

“I did not know this had such a feature.” He murmured. It was strange, eerily dim. It wouldn’t make sense to build a feature like that in something made to be bright.

In the corner of his eye he saw a flash of legs, skittering by as fast as possible. He looked up fast, ears standing erect. His breathing went shallow as he listened for footsteps. Those legs, they were one of his sons… but if he wasn’t mistaken, then he could still hear his boys off in the distance.

Something dreadful seeped up, wrapping itself around his heart. This terrible doubt hissed like water on a hot pan. It had sticky, thorn covered vines that grew quickly, rooting itself firmly.

Slowly, he raised up the red lantern. Carefully, he walked in the direction that he had seen the legs go.

A whisper of hope cried. It sobbed and begged confusing his senses. Even if this was an illusion he wanted to see it. A glimpse of his child, just one more time, to come to peace about his passing, to say goodbye.

Then, there was the terrible creature sinking its thorns into him. It made his heart quicken with a possibility.

A crazy one.

A sad one.

A horrific idea.

He went through a doorway catching a flicker of toes quickly turning and racing back into the darkness.
Instinct took over. He raced after. There. He could see a full leg! He pushed himself, pumping his legs as fast as he could, skidding as he saw the one he was following suddenly turn. Splinter twisted, hurrying after. Whatever he was following had lead him into winding dark hallways. The ground was ankle deep in water, slippery ground that made it difficult to pursue. Slicked mud seeped between his toes as he twisted and turned after the apparition.

A particularly hard turn made Splinter lose his footing. Sliding, he had a brief moment to see the horrified expression of his son. Dirty, bruised, cut and bleeding. The turtle twisted around, hands gripping at a wall and crawling up. A broken bo staff was tucked into his belt in pieces.

Splinter collided with a chunk of wall so hard that his lantern broke. A flash of lightning cut the darkness around him revealing nothing but broken and open ruins. There had been no hallway. No wall for the turtle to climb.

It wasn’t until his eyes started to water that he had realized he had not blinked for a while. He sucked in a breath, lungs burning telling him that he had even ceased breathing. His hands tremed. No… he shook, he was shaking. All he could see was that terrified expression. So afraid. So alone. Running for his life…

This wasn’t an illusion, not like he had experienced when he had lost his family before. This was something completely different. This was…

“He… he’s not dead.” He could hear Leonardo. He had ran towards his sons while chasing another.

That creature inside of him, the emotion he couldn’t tell what it was suddenly screamed at him. It was disgust. Disgust in himself for not sitting his eldest down and talking to him, listening to him, even humoring him. Leonardo… he… he could be right… if he was then… then this whole time… Donatello had been trapped, alone and afraid… for so long…

His ears flattened against his head as he took in several breaths. He had failed as a father. Failed two of his sons.

No more.

He took in a deep breath, steeling himself.

“BOYS!!” He shouted. It was time for them to talk and not just humor themselves into the idea that they were helping Leonardo. They -had- to listen to him.

It didn’t take long for them to show up, lined up proper. Leonardo and Raphael had scratches and bruises over their bodies, both glaring at their feet while Michelangelo fidgeted as if something was bothering him.

Raphael’s lantern flickered with a happy flame as Leonardo and Michelangelo’s flashlights pointed in random directions. Splinter took a moment to try to think as to how to approach this sensitive subject.

“Yo, Splinter, we heard you callin’ for the guys,” Casey climbed over some debris. “Everything okay?”

“A good question.” Splinter did not even look to his children’s friend. “It would seem that there is something I have neglected for far too long that must be addressed.”

“Well, if it’s that important then it must be a long talk.” Mr. O’Neil spoke up nearly tripping.
“Yeah, it’s getting crazy wet. Wanna talk where it’s dryer?”

“No!” Splinter’s tail thrashed causing everyone to jump and go silent. “We will speak here and now.”

The rat turned his dark eyes to his eldest son. “Leonardo, are you aware as to why I had asked Mr. O’Neil to come with us on this journey?”

“No.”

Kurby smiled sadly as he came up to Splinter’s side. He had figured it out a while ago, during the drive. Splinter had only asked him for his help with his son through his depression. What kind of psychologist would he be if he couldn’t pick up on what kind of sadness that Leonardo was going through.

“I’m here so we can talk.”

Leo frowned. “I’m not sick.”

“We know you’re not.” Kurby kept his voice low and comforting. “We’re not accusing you of anything, we simply wanted you to know that we can relate. You’re father and I.”

“You… can?” He looked confused, unsure as to what they were getting at.

“Yes, Leonardo.” Splinter reached forward, placing a firm hand on a green shoulder. “My son… I understand as to why your grief runs so deep. I too, as well as Mr. O’Neil have lost the loves of our lives. It is a terrible pain, one that consumes an individual until there is nothing but darkness.”

Kurby gave an understanding smile.

“Wait… you… you’re not mad?” Raph gawked while Mikey stared bug eyed and Leo just looked like he had been slapped by Captain Ryan himself.

“No.” Splinter pulled his hand back.

“Actually, it’s understandable.” Kurby directed his attention to Raphael. “After all, there are only four of you. You’re so unique and having lived the majority of your life secluded, it was eventual.” He looked to Splinter. “Not to say your parenting techniques are bad.”

The ninja master chose to ignore the human’s comment.

“… I had failed two of my sons.” Splinter reached forward again, this time his hands taking both of Leo’s into his. He looked deeply into blue eyes, ears flat as he almost pleaded. “Tell me… Tell me how you know Donatello is still alive.”

Taken aback, the turtle wasn’t sure what words to use nor where to start.

“I—I saw him in dreams… I saw him…” Leo’s eyes started to water. “I saw him die over and over again but he would reset, like a broken record and he was trying to build something… I touched him once….” He started to shake as shame and grief filled him. He looked at his father in desperation to be understood. He squeezed his father’s hands painfully tight. “I couldn’t protect him from them! They won’t let him go and I don’t know what to do in order to help him! He-he told me about a radio but I don’t know how to make it!”

“Who are ‘they’?”
“Oh, come on! You can’t encourage this-” Raph started only to be cut off by Mikey.

“They’re all messed up, dark… with red lights for eyes.”

Leo looked to his baby brother, eyes wide, mouth slack. “You… you’ve seen them?”

Mikey bit his lip nodding slowly. “Remember when I said I thought I saw Donnie when you were meditating earlier? I… I saw those things too. All inside the room and super creepy… they… they grabbed Donnie and I thought I was totally wigging out because of stress or something!”

The pained look on Leo’s face made Mikey quickly look away before he could cry.

“They grabbed him? They… they…”

“Calm yourself.” Splinter soothed. “What has brought this talk to fruition was the fact that even I had a moment of seeing your brother.”

All eyes turned to the rat. Thunder rumbled angrily over head.

“He was running and I had followed before… it ended. It was too real to be a vision.” Splinter stroked his son’s cheek with a small brush before pulling his hands away. “I am sorry that I had not listened to you sooner, my son.”

“Then…”

“We will work together to find a way to bring your brother home.”

“Don’s… alive?” Raph shivered. He felt a strange laugh crawl up his throat as he clutched a hand to his head. “This whole time? A-and you’re saying I just gave up on him? I-”

Mikey moved to his brother. His hand was warm, lending a stabling comfort. “We all did, bro.”

“B-but if he’s alive… where is he?” This didn’t make sense. None of it did.

“I don’t know…” Leo said sadly. “What I saw was the inside of a submarine, I think. A metal hull that would… break and… … Everything Donnie has told me has pointed to World War II and radios.”

“Numbers!”

Everyone looked to Casey who had been uncharacteristically quiet this whole time. He quickly sputtered, “Leo, you said you heard that tapping, the Morse Code! Was that from Donnie? The numbers?”

“Yes!” The blue banded turtle reached into his belt to find the hidden pocket he had stuffed the paper into.

When he produced it the whole of their group crowded around, Mikey holding his flashlight up to show the scribbled numbers that were getting wet from the rain.

“What’s it mean, dudes?”

“How would I know?!” Raph barked.

“Strange… why would he send you this? I must be significant.” Splinter poundered.
“It’s longitude and latitude.”

Everyone looked to Mr. O’Neil. He stepped back a little, feeling out of place in the group.

“Can you find where it leads?” Leo held out the paper.

“S-sure.” He pulled out his phone and opened up a map app. He quickly typed in the slowly smudging numbers. He tapped a few options and waited. He frowned and looked up from the small screen.

“What is it, Kurby?” Casey asked.

“It leads to the ocean, close by too. It’s not that far from shore but we’d have to wait for the storm to pass in order to get out there.”

Raph folded his arms over his chest trying hard to look as if he wasn’t holding himself. He felt horrible. Was there a possibility that Donnie was alive? If so, then he had ditched him. He had literally left him for dead. It made his stomach twist into a tight knot. The thought alone made him feel sick. If it was true he would throw up. He knew it if was true, that he would never be able to forgive himself for abandoning his brother. There had to be a hole somewhere in this whole thing. A hole that would blow it wide and prove that he was right in assuming Donatello was dead.

“If… this is all true, then how come he’s only been talkin’ to Leo?” Raph finally pressed bringing the conversation from false hope to something more grounded in reality.

The stab instantly placed Leonardo on the defensive. Right when he was about to get help, Raph was going to sabotage it?! Like hell he was going to allow that.

“I don’t know, Raph! Maybe because I wasn’t so willing to think he was dead!” Leo snapped, whirling on his brother and baring his teeth.

“Don’t push it, Leo! I’m just talking some sense into everyone before we go completely nuts!!”

“Completely insane, like me.” The blue eyed leader snorted. He didn’t care if Raph wanted to assault his character, but he would not allow him to prevent aide to Donatello.

“That’s not what I meant and you know it!!”

“I don’t care what you meant!! I care about getting Donnie back and if you even think for one moment that you’re going to sto-”

“Enough!!” Splinter snapped.

The two went silent, glaring at each other.

“Raphael, I understand your hesitation. It is a frightening prospect that we have left one of our own in a dangerous place and unwittingly abandoned him. It is a thought that even scares me, my son, but we must try to have hope. And Leonardo, we are not your enemy, we are here to help.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying!” Mikey quipped.

Splinter looked to his youngest. “I have no doubt that you have, though it is something else you had said earlier that I wish to ask you about.”

“Ask me? But I don’t know anything about all this messed up junk!”
“Had you not seen Donatello yourself?”

“I… yeah…”

“Tell me exactly what had happened when you had seen him.”

“Well, Raph and I freaked when we lost track of Leo so I was all, ‘Don’t worry bro I got this!’ and we split up. Like usual I was right because I found Leo first. He was meditating and then lightning lit up the whole place and I saw Donnie by Leo’s side. I think he was trying to say something but I couldn’t hear him. Then there was another flash of light and there were all those freaky demon guys and they all tried grabbing Donnie so I tried to get to him first but I just ran into Leo. Then it was all over.”

“It stopped when you had broken Leonardo’s concentration?”

“I… Maybe?”

“And earlier, I heard fighting. What was that about?”

“Raph—” Leo tried to cut in.

“Leonardo, I am talking to your brother.” Splinter said harshly, shushing his eldest son.

Leo glared at the ground. While Mikey fidgeted under his father’s gaze. “Well… Leo was saying that Donnie wasn’t dead and Raph was saying he was and they started to fight. I had to stop them.”

“Leonardo, during this fight, where was your mind?”

Dark blue eyes continued to glower at the ground. “I was thinking of Donnie. I-I couldn’t let him down, I needed Raph to see that Donnie wasn’t dead.”

“Oh come on!” Raph barked. “Am I the only rational person left here?! You can’t possibly be telling us that because of some love connection that neither of them knew about is the whole reason why only Prince Leo can hear Princess Donnie!”

“Actually,” Kurby cut in before anyone else could. “I believe Splinter is hinting to something much different.”

“Indeed. It is only a theory for now… I would like to try something. Leonardo. I would like you to meditate, focus solely on your brother. Raphael, Michelangelo, I would like you to do the same, as will I.”

“And us?” Casey asked.

“I must ask you to remain quiet and observe. There may be reason for the two of you to help us out of our meditative state.”

“That sounds ominous.” Kurby folded his arms. “But may I suggest we settle for his experiment to be conducted in a drier environment?”

“Very well. There are rooms not far from here that will provide the shelter we need.”

Splinter lead the way, Leonardo closely following. The young turtle’s heart was hammering in his chest. What little hope he had was growing. It was brighter and stronger. He was one step closer to helping Donnie. One step closer to seeing him again, to touching him, to hearing his laugh and sassy quips.
Mikey walked beside Kurby. He glanced up at the balding redhead. Unsure what to think. The guy seemed… so chill about everything, then again the guy had been mutated twice and managed to bounce back from that. Turtle bro loving turtle bro must be extremely tame for this guy by now. But something still bothered him.

“You gonna tell April?” Mikey asked quietly. “You know, that Leo and Don had or even still have feelings for each other?”

Kurby smiled down at Mikey. “No. It’s not my place.”

“It doesn’t weird you out?”

“In my line of work, talking with the patience that I have, this is nothing. Being mutated was a rather good excuse to not have to deal with their chaotic state on a daily basis.”

“Being mutated was better than going to work?!”

Kurby chuckled. “I could have done without being kidnapped by the Kraang in the first place, the rest isn’t all that bad.”

“Dude, you need to find a different line of work.”

Behind them was Casey and Raph. Raph seemed to stomp more than walk.

“This is stupid,” he said while kicking a small bit of rubble sending it tumbling over the wet ground. “Don… he’s gone… why are we doing this? Feeding into Leo’s delusion.”

“....”

“So stupid!”

“Is it?”

“What?” Raph looked at his best friend.

“I don’t know. Knowing you guys has been the best thing ever, always doing stuff and getting in the most epic fights, yo. Is Donnie being somewhere else like another dimension so far fetched? I mean, we met a robot with a human brain in it! You have the hots for a space lizard. Heck, man, we’ve time traveled before! How is this so weird?”

“One, Mona has nothing to do with this and she’s god knows where so that’s a dead end relationship. Two, Honeycutt was from another planet, not really human. And Three, we had to travel BACK in time in order to save the world! It wasn’t like we used time to reanimate the dead like Frankenstein! This just- It doesn’t make sense!!”

“Does it? Or is it that you’re scared to find out that Don really is out there and you have to face the fact that the only one that believed in him was Leo while you and even me thought he was cuckoo for coco puffs?”

“That-”

“Look, Raph.” Casey stopped walking, looking at his best buddy sternly. “If something like this happened around the time my mom died, I would do it. Even if it was to amuse my little sis. Some things… you just gotta try out, bro. Leo may be more crazy than we think, but what if he isn’t?”

Raph went quiet, glaring at his feet. His eyes were stinging. He really didn’t want to face the fact that
he may have abandoned one of his brothers.

A warm arm wrapped around his shoulders. In the gentlest signs of affection, Casey half hugged the turtle.

“I know it hurts, bro, but you’re not the only one… Mikey and your master… they did it too. It wasn’t like you were being a jerk. Leo’s just a little different, he’s always had a hard time letting go.”

“Since when did you get so damn philosophical?” Raph scrubbed at his face with his rain slicked hands.

“Since I wanted to show I wasn’t as much of a bonehead as most people like to think. I got some brains, yo.”

“I wouldn’t call it brains.” Raph elbowed Casey lightly.

“Raphael, Casey!” Splinter’s voice reached out to them making them move.

They quickly went to the one room lit with small circles of light from flashlights. Raph’s lantern helped illuminate the room further. It was good to get out of the rain, though the feeling of the wind set a chill in the bones. Kurby and Michelangelo were already scavenging pieces of wood from the rubble around them and piling it in the middle of the room. Raph blew out his lantern in order to pour some oil over the wood. Leo dug out a lighter from one of the pockets of his pack and lit the oil on fire. The warm light was bright and welcoming against the raging storm.

Splinter took a seat on the filthy ground. His sons gathering around the fire and sitting as well. Kurby and Casey stood, hands out to the flames to keep warm.

The rat looked at his family.

“We will all meditate on Donatello. Focus on him, invite his spirit to make contact with us. If for any reason you start to feel danger bring yourself back. Mr. O’Neil, Casey, tend the fire, stay as silent as you can. Keep an eye on our surroundings incase the roof shows signs of collapse or the walls wish to give. Wake us if you sense any danger.”

The area chorused with mumbled, “Yes, Master Splinter.”

“Then… Let us begin.” He took in a deep breath through his nose and closed his eyes.

It was a small hope that he had. A hope that would be overturned with fear.
Leonardo pulled in a deep breath through his nose. He sighed it out through his mouth.

Donnie… It was easy for Leo concentrate on him. He started by remembering his soft presence, calm, smart, strong. Donnie had a way to make everything alright. Hearing the genius laugh would signal to Leo that all his siblings were safe and relaxed. The smell of coffee was comforting, it showed that Donnie was awake and it gave a sense of home. The basic action of resting his hand on Leo’s shoulder grounded Leo when his mind was whirling with doubt and confusion.

A warmth wrapped around Leonardo as he continued to think about his brother. The way he whistled through his teeth. The quark of sticking his tongue out from the edge of his mouth while he concentrated. Seeing those beautiful redwood colored eyes looking at him bashfully while Leo would try to lecture him into eating more in the morning other than some sugary toaster pastry.

His train of thought ushered him forward towards his desires. To be able to gently caress his brother. Hold him close. Hear him breathing. Feel the beating pulse that kept his body warm. Nothing else mattered, only that. Donnie home, safe and sound. He wanted him. He needed him.

There was a sound.

A heavy, rapid foot fall approaching.

His senses spiked, anxiety of a fight sparked up his shell as he ripped open his eyes. A terrible dread clutched at his heart as he tied to scramble up to his feet. Adrenaline surged through his system as his limbs almost flailed to find purchase in the wet ground.

There was a bright light off in the distance. The singular roaming eye swiveled in the dark sky. It’s gaze illuminated everything it landed its sight on.

Leo dove behind a cluster of barrels. His shell pressed hard against the metal drums in an attempt to keep it from making noise from clattering due to how much he was shaking. The tip of his beak was cold. The joints in his fingers and toes shot pain throughout his limbs when he tried to move.

He rubbed at his fingers trying to get any other sensation back into them besides that terrible ache. He flexed the digits testing his grip. It was weak, shaky. There was no way he would be able to efficiently hold his swords, not like this.

To add to his misery, his stomach felt sunken in. He was hungry. His lips were chapped so badly that when he ran his tongue over them he could feel the sting of saliva rubbing into several splits.

When was the last time he was able to find a scrap of food? He could still taste the sweat and mud on his tongue from drinking out of puddles. Not much was keeping him going, a hope that was quickly starting to fade into a dream.
He held back a swallow as he watched the light pass by, it lit up buildings that looked freshly built. Windows had white painted sills, the brick was a bright ruddy color until the light moved on. He watched it go, bringing to life several more buildings before stopping and repeating its pattern. A predictable one at that. The only variables he had to contest with were the ones that came in the form of shadows that refused to be banished by the light. He knew all too well to keep away from those things with their long reach and endless appetite.

He felt the familiar ache of his leg. He placed a hand on it, holding in a hiss when pain lanced through him from the contact. He rubbed at the purple bandage trying to soothe the displeasure away. He would have to move soon. He always had to move. If he didn’t, he would be caught.

Oh how he wished he wasn’t there. He wished he was back at home hearing Raph beat away at his practice dummy, Mikey screaming at the top of his lungs over a video game, seeing Sensei meditating in the dojo… feeling Leo’s subtle touches of encouragement. To be told by his leader that everything was going to be okay… Give him direction… Keep him safe… He wanted Leo…

Wait… wasn’t he, Leo? Why would he be…

He moved, shifting onto his knees, keeping low. The light was coming around once more, the edge of it caught on the rain slicked barrels allowing for a brief reflection.

He could see tired redwood eyes looking back at himself. The face of Donatello was littered with scratches and bruises, lips split, chapped and swollen.

Leo was seeing through Donnie’s eyes. Hearing his thoughts, feeling his pain.

Donatello closed his eyes, resting his forehead against a barrel. He was so tired.

He took in a few breaths as he counted. The light passed again. He took this chance to heft himself up to his feet and make a run for it. He was halfway across what looked like a courtyard when an ear piercing wail sounded overhead. It wound itself into his ear drums forcing him to wince. His heart rate shot up as that all seeing eye above jerked to the side stopping a few yards away from him. From this angle he could finally see that the light, that blazing eye in the darkness, it was a spot light. He looked to what had caught its attention.

The shadow stood against the wall, stretched out long and thin. It made a garbled sound of someone struggling to breath. The noise jerked and spasmed as if it was choking on air.

A horrible, terrible, primal fear grasped his heart. He pushed his body to run as fast as it could as the shadow twitched and choked.

He needed to get out of there. Put as much distance between himself and that thing. Stealth was abandoned when he collided with a chain linked fence. The rattling was muffled by the siren blaring overhead. Numb fingers and toes dug into the fence, the metal ribbons cutting into him as he tried desperately to climb with tired and frail limbs.

That creature, it was getting closer.

Everything inside of Leonardo wanted to pull away from Donnie, push him over that damned fence he was struggling with. He wanted to draw his swords to take a stance between that THING and his brother. The heavy desire to protect his loved one screamed in despair as all he could do was watch while terrible emotions that were not his own bombarded him. It reminded him with each painful second that passed, with each slip of Donatello’s fingers that he couldn’t take him away from that situation. He couldn’t hide him away until the danger had passed.
Instead all he could do was be useless as Donatello finally tumbled to the ground on the other side of the fence. The sickening crack was felt as Donatello’s ankle bowed at an unnatural angle. The turtle screamed grasping at his leg just above his injury. He hissed his breath through his teeth trying to push the pain to the side. Tears blurred his vision as he swallowed down another scream.

He had to keep moving.

Donatello pushed himself up onto his hands and his good leg. He fumbled as he propelled himself forward in a clumsy ramble.

The thing was behind him. He could feel it.

A terrible whimper welled up through his throat.

He was going to be eaten.

It was going to sink its teeth into him like before. Biting down in intent of ripping off a hunk of bloodied muscle. It had already tried before with his thigh and his arm. The wounds stressed and bleeding as he struggled to move faster like a three legged stray.

In his desperate attempt to reach safety his mind had become so focused on simply getting away that he didn’t see the movement to the side. The wailing of the siren made it impossible to hear the heavy stomping until it was too late.

A terrible pain suddenly struck, the impact of knuckles was unmistakeable. Donnie’s vision blurred as he stumbled, trying to keep himself on shaky arms and leg. He didn’t have enough time to recover before another fist connected to his jaw. The world twisted around him before it reached up and grabbed him. Though a short distance the disorientation stretched the time to feel like minutes before he hit the wet ground. He scrambled to take hold of anything when a hand grabbed his broken ankle. A bloodied scream ripped out of his lungs. White lights blossomed in his vision as his head swam with the shock.

His mind was reeling, all thoughts were scattered leaving him empty. Fear spurred him on to struggle. He kicked his leg, his thigh screaming in pain. He twisted, fingers digging into the mud. The pain from his ankle made the world swim. His stomach churned as bile and muddy water spilled out from his cracked lips.

Leonardo was shouting as loudly as he could for whom ever had a hold of his bother to stop! To let him go! Couldn’t they see how much Donnie was suffering! He was to be cared for, protected, not dragged along the ground like road kill to be cleaned off of the road!

“Donnie! Fight back! Please!!” Leo shouted.

All Donatello did was throw up again. Unable to hear his brother’s words as white and black spots took over his vision. He felt a tug on his leg and one moment he was retching the next, he was sucking in shaking breaths of cold air. It felt as if the world had skipped. The slick earth scraped against his cheek, slipping into his mouth, mixing with the sweat making him cough.

He had blacked out. Now he was being dragged. The hold on his leg had been moved up and off of his ankle. It was a small blessing, and one that he took with great relish.

He was so tired. He tried kicking once more only to have his captor yank on him harder making his joints ache and his ankle hiss in protest. The fight in him had been exhausted. He rather rest in the dull numbness of the cold and lesser pain than make things worse by trying to free himself.
He was pulled over something sharp, he shouted as it cut deep into his leg before it skipped and jabbed into his side, up to his shoulder before it hit his cheek slicing into the tender, mud coated flesh as he was dragged over the object.

His leg was dropped. The sharp shock of his ankle hitting the ground made him groan.

With a lot of effort he pushed himself, rolling onto his shell to stare up at the sky.

What was he doing any more? In this world of perpetual shadows, he had tried so many times to figure out where he was and how to get home that he had actually lost count. Him. Hamato Donatello had stopped counting.

That was the start of it. A piece of himself sloughing off like wet cake. Mikey and Raph probably would have argued that it was a small piece, that it didn’t matter, but he knew better. He had revolved his life around being accurate. He kept count on how many times Raphael had quit the team. He had tallied how many times Leo had thrown a fight so Mikey would feel better. He had records on how many cheesicles Master Splinter had eaten.

To not count how many days have gone by, to neglect the accuracy of how many times he had tried to escape this hellish world, it was a large chunk of what made Donatello… Donatello.

With that gone other pieces slowly slipped away. With each wash the once solid, reliable, road that made up Donatello’s conviction eroded. The edges dropping off of the path he was blindly walking leaving him with little to tread on. It gave to the term “wearing thin”. How much could one person take before hope would be abandoned? How much farther could he run? How many more placed could he hide before those -things- would sniff him out once more? Food… water… where would he get those? He was barely surviving. He already knew he was dangerously close to starvation and dehydration not to mention his injuries. Moving caused a constant pain now. It drained him of his energy.

Donnie put his hands on the ground and tried to push himself up. His limbs gave, unable to support his own weight. He was too tired to try to get up. So tired… so much pain. He wanted to close his eyes and never open them again. Little hope was given to him. For a moment he thought he had that glimpse that things would change. Then… it was all taken away.

Leonardo was now crying. He was so helpless… useless. He couldn’t get through to Donnie. He was trying to tell him to lean on him. Take his energy, his life, take everything, just as long as he could continue to try and come home.

He wished he could touch Donatello. Hold him.

He begged for whatever god out there to allow Donnie to feel him. To give him some hope.

He wanted to be beside his brother. Tell him to hold on, to keep trying. He wanted to take his place and live through all of this in his stead. But all he could do was hear with his sibling’s ears. Feel the suffering of his body. Look through his dry and tired eyes.

Donnie stared up at the inky sky. There was no natural light here. No sun. No moon… not even a star.

A small sniffle pulled at his nose. He really wanted to see stars again, just one more time. Like his first time, leaned back in tall grass his head resting on Leo’s arm as his brother pressed up against him to keep him warm. The smell of smoke from Mikey and Raph’s camp fire tickling his senses as he pointed out the different constellations for his older brother.
He wanted to see a star again.

He squeezed his eyes tightly shut, tears burned as they slipped over his temples. Though, all he wanted to see was a star, in his mind, all he could see was Leonardo. See his smile, feel his warmth.

A shudder ran through his body as he openly cried. He really had fucked up his life, didn’t he? He should have listened to everyone and taken a step back from April. He should have been brave and told Leo how he felt. He would be glad to live with the consequences be it bad or good. He should have told Leo how his heart skipped when Leo geeked out about Space Heroes. He should have said how he liked watching Leo sip his tea after meditation. He… He should have told him how much he respected him.

He should have told him that he loved him.

Now, he’ll never get the chance.

Leo shouted through his frustration only for it to not be heard.

Donnie felt the twist of dizziness wrench his thoughts and emotions to the side. Intense nausea overcame him. Twisting onto his side a mixture of bile, sweat and watery mud spilled past his lips once more onto the wet ground. His stomach contracted forcing his body into another violent pull of vomiting.

He whimpered and cried as he continued to empty what little liquid he had left.

He was going to die. Wasn’t he?

Die afraid, cold, and alone like a stray dog in the streets… maybe it was for the best. He had a good run… sure he was young… but considering he was a mutant turtle that wasn’t even supposed to exist… he had done some pretty amazing things, seen some pretty amazing things…

His vision was growing less defined, blurring, darkening.

Maybe… this time… he wouldn’t have to wake up. All he needed to do was let go. Let go of that small flickering hope he would get to see Leo again. All he needed to do was give in to the embrace of the reaper.

Slowly blinking, he saw boots approaching him.

His captor returned, grabbing his ankle once more. A lovely darkness overwhelmed him, chasing away his pain and despair.

Leonardo had tried to yell and scream. Tried with all his might to reach out and grab hold of Donatello, tell him to hold on! That he was going to come and grab Donnie and bring him home! But Donatello couldn’t hear him, couldn’t feel him.

When the darkness came, everything fell away. Leonardo was pulled away from Donatello, his brother’s form lying still at his feet.

It wasn’t how still he was, nor how pale, it was the sight of his image flickering that seated a deep fear into the blue banded ninja. It was like a flame, struggling to stay lit.

He fell to his knees, scared to touch the turtle he loved. He didn’t know what to say. His throat constricted as tears burned his eyes.
“Ho-old on,” he managed to push out in a long breath. “You gotta hold on, Donnie. Please. I-” His hands hovered over his brother, terrified. “I love you so much, please, Donnie… please don’t give up. I-I need to tell you… I need-”

Donnie flickered once more.

Then he was gone leaving only a tendril of smoke behind.
Chapter Notes

I want to apologize for how long it took to make this chapter. There are several factors that made this late, and I am sorry for that. I hope you enjoy this chapter, as it is an explanation chapter. It does not explain everything, but should clarify some things. If you have any questions, please comment so I can clarify in future chapters!!!

Also, to everyone whom has commented thus far; thank you so much for your support. You truly are amazing individuals that I treasure!

His spine felt as if it was covered in spiders. He could feel eyes on him from every direction and he couldn’t locate it. At first he tried to use rational thinking. Believe that it was his imagination trying to creep him out over the old military base.

Kurby shifted his weight from one foot to the other. The flashlight in his hand roamed over the dark corners where the fire light could not reach. There was a strange feeling within the lurking shadows of lingering eyes. For a while he had a familiar feeling that set him on edge. The same feeling he got when he was within the cells of the Kraang. For him, a man who had been a captive for months, he had to carry around that fear with him wherever he would go. When he went to the store he could feel where the cameras where. When he took April to school or the park he -knew- when someone’s gaze lingered for a little too long. He knew it was a sort of paranoia driven home by the Hawthorne Effect. Yet that knowledge held little comfort as his palms began to sweat.

As he slowly moved his flashlight, he heard the clinking thud of wood tumbling down and into the fire. Casey picked up a long, thin, piece of board and stoked the fire to make sure the fresh wood would lite.

“Did you know that this Military base was used during World War II for a sort of think take for the Manhattan Project?”

Casey frowned as he looked at his friends, their faces calm as stone.

“What’s that? And did-ah!”

“Huh?” Kurby quickly turned, his light shining into the teen’s eyes. “Did you see something?”

Throwing up his hands to block the bright light, Casey winced, “Dude, shine that somewhere else, would ya? I didn’t see anything and now I can’t see even if I wanted to.”

“Sorry.” The man turned his attention back towards the surrounding shadows.

“I was asking what the Manhattan experiment thing was. Plus, I thought you hadn’t been here before.”

“Oh… Oh! You don’t have to have a visited a place to know its history. And, really? You haven’t heard about the Manhattan Project?... and you’re in what grade?”
“Hey! Just because science is boring doesn’t mean I’m an idiot.”

“I do believe I have been talking about history.”

“Yes, well, they’re both boring.” Casey poked at the burning fire. He shifted the debris around before throwing some more in. Speaking of boring; it was boring waiting for these guys to do whatever they were doing. How was meditating supposed to help them figure out what’s going on with Donnie anyway? The more he thought about it, the more it sounded kind of insane to even try to believe in. But… if it helped Leo in playing in this fantasy world then so be it.

Kurby frowned for a moment, eyes focused on one spot. Had he seen movement there?

“Mr. O’Neil?”

He could have sworn he had seen something twitching within the shadows.

“Kurby?”

“Huh?”

“You zoned out. You okay?”

“Yeah…” The man kept his sight on the spot he had sworn he had seen… something. “Yeah, I’m fine.”

Casey didn’t like talking about history or science or whatever subject that April’s dad was trying to strike a conversation with. The only thing worse was the waiting. It was making him feel like he was being watched. Watched by something twitching just out of sight, fumbling, crawling on broken limbs as it circled around on its hungry belly.

He felt a shiver shake up his back, raising the flesh on his arms into bumps at the imagery. If there was any guess as to if he was getting sleep tonight before there wasn’t one now. Maybe a distraction was in order.

“So… uh, you were talking about that Manhattan thing, from history?”

“The Manhattan Project was the project that Albert Einstein, as well as many other noteworthy scientists, worked on that had brought to life the atomic bombs; Fat Man and Little Boy.”

“Those were the bombs dropped on Japan in World War II, right?”

“Exactly.”

“And that E equals M C squared guy helped think it up in this place? You serious?”

“Einstein, and yes. Working on a project like that you would expect to be moved often from place… to… place…”

Kurby trailed off. The equation that every child heard about rung like a church bell inside his head. Suddenly, information that he had not bothered to take notice of started to fly forward from the recesses of his memory. They rushed up, one bit of information right after another, presenting themselves in a scrambled order. Overlapping, shoving and pushing trying to gain his attention all at once.

\[ E = M C^2 \]
Mutagen.

Properties of molecular dispersal.

Telekinesis.

Half life.

The unknown properties of psychical research.

Instability of radiation.

The unknown factors of foreign elements.

Variables.

So much came forward. His eyes grew wide as he whirled around looking at Leonardo. The variable. He hastily fished his phone out of his pocket, turning it on with a swipe of his thumb. The map with the cordance stared back up at him. It was the other variable.

“My god.”

The equation lined itself up, perfect and prestien.

“What? What is it?” Casey froze. His eyes narrowed as he scanned the area, slowly straightening himself up as tall as he could stand. He dropped the volume of his voice, “You see something?”

“I think… I know what happened to Donatello.”

Casey almost flinched in his sudden confusion. “We know what happened to him, Mr. O’Neil. He died.”

“I don’t think he is… not if I’m right.”

The teenager frowned. He hated beating around the bush and that remark got under his skin, heating up his temper. “You weren’t there! You didn’t see… What the hell would you know, anyway, huh?”

“I know one of the most fundamental things in science is that everything has a reason, a cause and an effect. The Kraang brought mutagen into our world from theirs. If made here, in order to achieve the same effect it would have to have some sort of radioactive properties. Radiation has a half life.” He looked to Casey. Remembering that the boy wasn’t much into science he went ahead and explained. “A half life is the duration of time it takes for radioactive molecules to deteriorate. So, um… let’s say you have four apple trees, and they are radioactive molecules. Within a certain amount of time, let’s say two days, half of those apple trees will decay, die off. In another two days another half will die, and so on and so forth.”

“Oh…kay.” Casey folded his arms. Trying hard to keep himself from yelling out that this had nothing to do with Donnie. “So the mutagen should have this half life stuff?”

“Exactly.”

“But wouldn’t that make the turtle’s radioactive, as well as yourself? You know, since you’ve been mutated.”

“I’m not too sure about myself, as I’ve never seen Donatello’s notes on the retro-mutagen. As for the turtles I believe their mutated cells reproduce and replenish so quickly that they simply replace the
decayed cells."

“Isn’t radiation super deadly? Shouldn’t I be going bald if they are radioactive?”

“If it was radiation from OUR world. I don’t believe the radiation in the mutagen has the exact properties of ours, thus why it could create such creatures as mutants. Our radiation cooks the cells while corrupting them while theirs only transforms living tissue giving extraordinary properties to the subject.” Kurby turned his attention back to the turtles. His eyes resting on Leonardo. His voice became soft. “There is also the factor of psychic abilities… I never knew April had them until… well, she made friends with all of you. But now… where was I?”

“I have no idea. You said you think you know what happened to Donnie then you started to talk all this geek stuff that doesn’t make sense.”

The balding man ran a hand over his face. Why was April interested in this boy?

“Okay.” Kurby took in a deep breath. “Try to follow me on this, what if April’s psychic powers actually didn’t kill Donatello? What if she only took apart his molecules and dispersed them?”

“Dude… that would mean he’s dead. No one can live through that.”

“True, technically he IS dead, but he’s not quite alive either. He’s somewhere in between. You said earlier, E equals M C squared. Energy equals mass times the speed of light, squared. What if the energy that is produced by simply living was pulled away from his scattered mass?”

Casey looked into the fire before him, brows furrowing. “His soul, right? The energy that is produced by the living? His soul.”

“If his mass is scattered then the mutegan would be no longer in a stable form. The very thing that may have kept the mutagen from having a half life.”

“We would have to pull his molecules back together, right? And put his soul back into him and that would… we would have Don back?”

“Theoretically. We collect his mass into its original format and insert the appropriate power source and he should be back.”

“Okay Dr. Frankenstein, how do we get a hold of his soul?”

“That, I believe, lies with Leonardo.”

“How do you figure that?”

“Listening to their conversation before our friends had started this meditation session it sounded odd. Master Splinter said he had an idea as to why Leonardo is the one that can reach Donatello. If April can be telekinetic through the influence of mutagen… why couldn’t Leonardo be clairvoyant?”

“Clara-what-ant?”

“He can communicate to ‘spirits’ or interact with ‘energies’.”

“That…” Casey gave a bit of a chuckled a bit uncomfortably. He shot a glance over at the blue banded turtle. “That would actually not surprise me.”

A grunt halted their conversation. Both humans snapped their attention over to Raphael who was now unfolding his legs. Green eyes blinked a few time before squeezing shut.
“Shit.” He whispered, pulling his knees up as he ground one of his palms against an eye.

Casey swallowed. The saliva felt oddly cold slipping down the back of his throat. Seeing his friend awake made him nervous to hear what might have been found out. The conversation with Kurby held a heavy weight to it, more possibilities than he actually wasn’t ready to accept.

“Raph?”

He could see that the turtle was trying to keep it together. It reminded him too much of the day that Donatello had been taken away from them.


“...what did you see?” Kurby asked using a soft tone.

Raph pulled into himself. “He-He’s… dying.” Tears darkened the cloth around his eyes. “He’s dying, cold... a-a-fraid...” He sucked in another breath. The next words held the sinking weight of torment. “Alone.”

Mikey woke next.

The young turtle’s eyes opened. He didn’t move, didn’t make a sound. He looked fragile as bone china, face neutral and pristine like a victorian doll.

It was a sharp inhale from Raphael that made Mikey move. His expression remained hollow as he pushed himself up onto his hands and knees. He crawled over to his older brother. The two snapped together like puzzle pieces. Arms entwining, bodies pressing close together. Raph buried his face into Mikey’s neck, the whole of his body trembling as he silently cried. He took in a few breaths. His mouth working against skin, breathe hot and heavy. The sound that came out of him, the pathetic squeak of a tortured soul was silenced by Mikey who only nuzzled his brother encouraging him to let it out.

Hands shook violently, fingers curled stiffly, clawing down Mikey’s shell. Raphael sucked in a breathe before a wail ripped through his throat. It was so loud, so haunting that Casey would find it in his dreams for a long time to come. It was something no one would ever be able to forget.

“It’s okay, Raph.” Mikey’s little voice was drowned out. He hugged and nuzzled, his own vision blurring. “It’s okay, bro.”

“It’s not okay!!” Raphael screamed, rocking his body into his little brother. “I left him!! I left him to die!!”

Mikey pulled back, his hands taking hold of his brother’s cheeks. That fragile exterior cracked as his lips curled, his chin wrinkled. A cry hissing through his teeth. His blue eyes shed large pearls of tears that rolled over the cloth of his mask onto his cheeks.

“We.” He corrected his brother, shaking him slightly to emphasize. “We left him.”

“FUCK!!”

“Raphael!” Master Splinter’s voice was sharp, hard. He was standing himself up, the look in his eyes distressed as he breathed hard to try to stay calm. He took his walking stick, putting it in front of him with his hands folded over the knobby top. His knuckles turned white from the grip. His ears flatten against his head seeing two of his children, so scared... so small. All of them were facing their worst
fears once more, the death of a loved one. But there had to be some way to save his lost boy. His little boy covered in a blanket of pain and despair.

He took a steadying breath, “Raphael… Michelangelo, Leonardo, we…” His ears perked up noticing there was no movement from his eldest son. “Leonardo?”

The remaining turtle remained still as stone, eyes closed.

“Leo?” Mikey reached out for his brother, hand halting in the air. Something was wrong.

“Leo.” Raph leaned closer. All he could do was stare at his brother, his senses setting into an alarmed state. This wasn’t right. They should have all woken up together. That’s how it always was with group meditation, focusing and pouring each other’s energies into one another through the comfort be sitting close. For one of them to not wake up when the chain was broken, it was trouble.

“Papa… why isn’t he waking up?” Mikey sounded scared.

“Ho-old on,” Leo managed to push out in a long breath. “You gotta hold on, Donnie. Please. I-” His hands hovered over his brother, terrified. “I love you so much, please, Donnie… please don’t give up. I-I need to tell you… I need-”

Donnie flickered once more. Then he was gone leaving only a tendril of smoke behind. His hands slammed down where Donatello’s visage had been, patting his hands, stretching out in circular motions as if he could scrub against the inky blackness and find Donnie once more. The scrambled desperation was only fueled by each stitch of a wretched thread of fear. Fear that this really was the end. Fear that the last image of Donatello he had was of him giving up hope.

It wasn’t until the taste of copper flecked his tongue that he realized he had been screaming. He slowly started to become conscious of the words that tumbled out of his mouth. Begging. Begging for Donnie to hold on, for him to come back, for Donnie to hear him. He shouted that he was right there! Why couldn’t Donnie hear him?! Why couldn’t he feel him?!

He stilled as a feeling rushed forward.

He wasn’t alone in this void.

A sound started. Choking, shuddering.

His hands automatically reached back for his swords only to find air.

In the darkness the sound grew closer, echoing around in a perfect circle preventing him from telling where it was coming from.

Fear rushed threw him when a sudden, sharp pain lanced his leg. He threw a fist down automatically to try to protect himself. It connected with solid black mass that had white teeth. The creature bit down harder on his leg, the teeth sinking in further, cutting into flesh. He shouted, trying to throw another punch. Before he could a similar pain gripped at his arm. He yanked hard pulling his arm out of a mouth of tar, white teeth stained red slipping, slithering along the darkness.

It lunged forward, maw opened wide. Terrible teeth sunk into his shoulder, putting as much pressure as it could as it pulled.
“What’s wrong with him?” Casey asked.

“I do not know.” Master Splinter knelt by his son. He put a hand on his arm. It was almost as if something was preventing Leonardo from waking. A heat welled up under his palm. He pulled his hand away, his sensitive nose filling with an all too familiar scent. He looked at his once white palm. Wet red glistened in the fire light. A wound had manifested on the turtle’s arm. The smell of blood rushed into his nostrils. Too much for only the one wound. He looked his son over finding another wound, bleeding heavily on his leg.

He grabbed his son by both arms shaking him. “Leonardo! You must wake up!! Wake up, now!”

Upon seeing the sudden wound appear on their brother, Mikey and Raph surged forward. Each with their cry for Leonardo to open his eyes.

“What’s going on?!” Casey scrambled over to them. A bite mark pierced Leonardo’s shoulder. His skin started to flex and pull as if an invisible mouth was eating his meat right off his bones. “FU-!!!”

Mikey raised his hand, snapping it as hard as he could across his brother’s face. “Wake up!!” He let out a terrible scream when his hand came back wet with blood from a new wound coming forth on his cheek. “I SMACKED HIS FACE OFF!!”

“This is no time to be stupid, Mikey!!” Raph scrambled for his pack. He ripped open the zipper, reaching in he scrambled for a first aide kit. “Wake him up, damn it!! He’s bleeding out!!”

Splinter reached into the fire. His fingers wrapped around burning embers that ate away at a plank of wood.

“Move!” He ordered his youngest.

Mikey pulled back as the flaming piece of wood was suddenly pressed up against Leonardo’s shoulder. He covered his mouth as blood sizzled and boiled. The smell of cooking turtle flesh carried on a breeze into his face.

Leonardo’s eyes snapped open, his mouth pulled open in a feral scream. His limbs suddenly found life, jabbing out in punches and kicks as he tried to defend himself.

“Leo!!” Mikey and Casey shouted.

“Leonardo! Leonar-” Splinter caught his son’s wrist before he could get a fist in his face. “LEONARDO!!”

The sear panic slowly ebbed away from Leonardo’s features. The feral look of a warrior struggling to survive slipped away as the world went quiet save for the panting breaths of the eldest son of the Hamato Clan.
How did it ever come to this?

Leonardo asked himself the question so many times, tonight it was just as hollow as before. He leaned against a crumbling wall, arm held in a makeshift sling as Michelangelo held up his leg. Raphael’s head rested on the shin of his other while he reached up with his nimble fingers to run a sharp needle through the flesh of his calf. They were the pit crew and he was the blown out race car.

Splinter, Kirby, and Casey were talking around the fire, speculating as what to do next. Mikey and Raph didn’t say much while they patched up their big brother. They were lucky that Raph actually took in the medic lessons that Donnie had tried to pound into all of them. They weren’t helpless without the lessons but after them they were more efficient. Raph excelled at sewing flesh together and stopping most wounds from bleeding. Donnie still was better at it. He was better at so much more than any of them. He was even better at surviving and while he had been trying to draw breath Leo had slipped into despair. Raph took his place as the leader of their brotherhood, possibly even the clan while Splinter took his time to grieve for a son that had not passed. Mikey even had accepted this lie and had begun the steps of moving forward. They had all given up while Donnie continued to live finding mud puddles to drink from and possibly grasses to eat.

He tilted his head back looking up at the carmel colored light on the ceiling dancing to the melody of the crackling fire.

Donnie was stronger than any of them.

The tug of the thread through his meat didn’t even make him wince as Raphael finished with the stitches. Mikey handed him padding and gauze. He wrapped up Leo’s leg before grabbing an ace bandage and using it for an outer layer to make sure dirt doesn’t get trapped in the gauze. Once he was done he rolled out from under Leo’s leg and Mikey gently lowered it down onto the bedroll that seperated the injured turtle from the dirty floor.

There was as heaviness. Tangible troubled minds trying to work out what they had all witnessed from what had happened with Donnie to what had happened to Leonardo.

Mikey sat on the ground, voice stuck in his throat. He didn’t know where to start. Which one to address, looking across from him towards Raph he could tell his brother was sharing a similar struggle.

What should they address? What should he even think about?

When they had meditated he could feel Leo’s emotions, he understood them completely now and it felt… odd. These emotions lingered within him and he knew they were Leo’s, this relentless love and devotion. It would dissipate, over time, like any other time they had group meditation and they felt each other so completely. Usually it didn’t last long, part of him could say that it was because of Donnie and Leo being so calm, another part knew it was only because it wasn’t him and his body
just let it leave. But while he held them within his own body it gave him a little insight with his brothers. Raph’s anger was the only thing that lingered for longer than his liking, that was because he was a positive person. He liked looking at the bright side of things.

The bright side of this was… was there one? Maybe… possibly. No, he had to believe there was one, but he needed to chase some shadows away first.

“You truly love him, don’t you?” Why was he asking this? He already knew it. That was a terrible way of starting up this conversation and he knew it, but he needed something, anything to say. But, why that question?

Leo rolled his head enough to look at Mikey through the corner of his eye. He didn’t say anything, only stared. Then Mikey understood why he had asked. It was a lead up to the real question. “What… will you do if we can’t get him back?”

Blue eyes closed slowly, when they opened again Leo was looking back at the ceiling. “We’re getting him back.” Raph growled as he packed away his supplies. “No matter what.”

“But what if…”

“What if what?!” Raph turned on his little brother hissing, bearing his teeth, daring Mikey to finish.

Still on edge, feeling the tail ends of adrenaline from seeing what had happened to Leo, witnessing the despair that Donatello had been living through for almost a year, it made Mikey into a turtle he didn’t like.

“What if he dies and we can’t get even his body back?!” Mikey barked. “I don’t want Leo going off and killing himself!!”

“No one is killing themselves, Mikey!”

“You felt it yourself! It’s the whole reason why he’s been wasting away! He can’t- He-” He took a few deep breaths, fighting back the tears. He was done crying. No more crying over this! “He won’t live without Donnie! And I don’t want to lose another brother!!”

“Shut up!” Raph shouted. “He’s not going anywhere and we’re getting Donnie back and I don’t know about you but I won’t sleep until we do!!”

“No, Raph, you shut up!! You’ve been so-”

“ENOUGH!” Splinter’s voice forced the boys into silence. “Gather your things, we believe we have a plan to help your brother.”

Leo shifted, pushing off of the wall he was resting against. He spoke up for the first time since he had come out of meditation. “What is it? What’s the plan?”

“We are going home.” Splinter came over to his sons. He squatted down, hands careful as they went around shell and under the knees of his eldest. He lifted his boy up. “We shall use Donatello’s turtle submarine to brave the waters and see what is important enough for your bother to send us the location of.”

“That’s a five person sub, and we have to use those stupid bikes to power it most of the time.” Raph complained slightly as he grabbed up the bedroll as well as his pack. “Leo can’t really pedal and I don’t think any of us know how to turn on the engine when there is enough kinetic what’s it.”
“We have enough people to power it, my son.” He started to carry Leo out. “Now hurry.”

They all scrambled to grab their packs and sources of light, leaving nothing but a dying fire behind as they ran upon the slick, tall grass to the van.

Leonardo watched the darkness slip away into shapes around them. The cold driving rain pelted hard enough to sting. He could still see it, the base standing tall in its prime every time one of the flashlights caught the rain. The memory of the searchlight was fresh in his mind offering a pool of insanity to haunt him. He allowed himself to dive into that pool. He had to pick apart what had happened. Make sense of it. He had to understand all of it in order to help Donnie. All it took was some discipline. He couldn’t allow his emotions to overwhelm him, sit him in a throne of panic. Not any more. He was a ninja, a warrior of the Hamato Clan and nothing was going to stop him from getting Donnie back.

He had to think. Make a plan B, in order to do that he had to know his enemy, analyze what had been already presented in their actions. What had they already shown him?

First off.

He had seen through Donnie’s eyes. Feeling what he was going through. There were few memories attached to that. Nothing solid enough to understand everything but there was enough to understand that there were two factions in that place. The first one were those creatures trying to eat him, the same ones that had enough power to harm Leo in the real world. These were the dangerous ones, far as he could tell. Their primal drive to feast was what motivated them. Then again, they only seemed to be interested in Donnie, and himself. There had to be a reason… He focused on that. What would make those… demons go primarily after Donnie? What did Donnie have to offer them that they could achieve by consuming him? Far as Leo could tell, they had no mind about them, only an emptiness that needed to be filled… unless… Donnie could fill it, like he, himself, could. Maybe they weren’t eating just to eat, but to obtain what they had that those things didn’t? What could that possibly be? Also, why did they not attack the rest of his family?

Substance? Energy? ...Life?

It made an odd sort of sense. It was a possibility. Life had substance. Life had energy. And unless he could think of a better reason later on, it was what he had to go with. To answer the last question; Why did they not attack the rest of his family? They were concentrating on him, seeing through him. He was their window, those demons possibly could not sense them beyond himself acting almost like a two-way mirror, shielding them from detection.

That, in itself, made sense.

Second- His thought process was disturbed by the sudden lancing pain of being laid down on the floor of the van. His hands balled into fists as he groaned through tightly clenched teeth. He breathed sharply through his nose trying to will the pulsating away.

Splinter gave an apology, knowing full well what it felt like to be picked up and put down when injured.

“Here, Leo.” Mikey’s voice was soft as he lifted up Leo’s head and pushed a rolled up bedroll under his head.

Leo grunted once more before he was allowed to settle. Raph was already tossing a thin blanket over him. He nodded his thanks before closing his eyes.
“Get some sleep, Leo.” Raph settled himself next to Mikey, both watching over him.

He wouldn’t sleep, not until he had figured out what he needed to know. He relaxed his muscles as much as he could as the van rocked from the doors being shut. He had to ignore the sounds of the engine, mute out the rumbles of the storm above and think.

Think…

Second faction… The red eyed beings. They were more defined, more fleshly, not strange shadows with teeth. They had the spot light, air raid sirens. They did not like the “demons” or whatever those creatures were. These red eyed people wanted Donnie, wanted him bad enough to injure him in order to capture him. He knew from his own dreams that these things spoke strangely, like a radio program from the 60’s… or would it be the 40’s? …World War II. Everything pointed to it. The dreams of being in the hull of a boat with red emergency lights, the radio and its parts. That strange interaction of Donnie in the past… or had that been a dream too? Either way, it had been connected to that time period as well, same with the base they had visited. What had been so special about World War II that would connect all of this?

What was it?

Leo took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. The hum of the engine reminded him of Donnie, how he worked so hard on every machine he could find. It brought back memories of watching his brother working on something at that little wooden table before the hull broke washing him into pain once more. It filled with water, no where to go…

A submarine? That could be it. But what was so important about that one? Why was Donnie on it? Where were the crew? Unless… those red eyed beings were the crew. A crew that used terms such as “is leave possible” as a term to request freedom. Soldiers trapped, living the same repeating hell that Donatello was forced to endure.

If that was true, then they had been there for nearly 70 years… If he had been in that situation, stuck in that terrible place for so long, he would be desperate to escape. He would try anything. And the prospect of having something so new to that grey world suddenly emerge, like Donnie, it would be a beacon of hope. That strange creature had gotten in somehow, that meant there should be a way out. And he would do whatever it took to get information out of said “creature”. Finding out Donnie’s intellect would be easy. Upon that news, Leo would put him to work, get him to figure out a way to save him and his crewmates and keep him alive.

Leo’s eyes snapped open at the last thought that lingered in his head.

Donnie was their only way out. They wouldn’t risk him dying on them. Thus the searchlight, trying to find Donnie. The punches were only there to subdue not harm. Dragging him by his injury would make sure Donnie wouldn’t try to escape, not until they had him in a secure location.

That made sense, a lot of sense. But, how did they get there? Is that event key to getting Donnie back or was it trivial enough to become a hindering distraction?

He would have to explore that thought later as he had nothing to give him clues as to how they got to their current situation other than World War II.

So, he’s got two factions the demons and possibly the crew of that submarine. One wants to eat Donnie and the other would want him alive, work him to the bone.

What about his dreams? How were they connected? And the radios? Electronics? He could guess
that the radios would be something that people of that time period would be familiar with. It was the height of technology back then besides nuclear weaponry.

Nuclear… weaponry…

Subs were nuclear back then.

He swallowed as something started to crawl over his skin, an anticipation to understanding everything. He had to calm himself, he could be wrong.

“Mr. O’Neil?” He spoke up in hopes that the human could hear him all the way in the front of the vehicle.

“Y-yes?” He seemed startled. Leo didn’t blame him, he was actually quite impressed by the balding man. He was usually skittish when bad things started to happen. He had actually kept it together rather well.

“What would happen to the crew of a nuclear submarine if something happened to the engine?”

“Well, they would be cooked by the extreme heat from the core exploding, shrapnel would penetrate their bodies at an alarming rate, the force of the explosion could also crush them against the metal hull before it burst.”

“They’d all die, Leo. Duh.” Raph groused adjusting his arm around Mikey who was dozing off.

“But…what if it imploded?”

“Imploded… Well… I… I’m not too sure beyond the fact that they would be sucked into it, crushed by the metal that way, pinned inside. Survivors, if any would drown on leaking sea water.”

“And the ramifications of the nuclear core?”

“What’s with all these Donnie-like questions?” Raph interjected.

Sapphire eyes looked at him. Leo’s expression was neutral. “I need to know if it could have an effect on radios.”

“You mean like wave lengths? Well, yes, very much so. Both are a form of energy in a sense, but also they are both waves. Everything has a wavelength, every sound does, even atoms in their rotation produce it. There are a lot of researchers out there currently exploring the interactive qualities between radio waves with electricity.”

A swell filled Leo’s heart. “Thank you, Mr. O’Neil.”

“Kirby, call me Kirby.”

“Kirby.” Leo nodded.

He closed his eyes. Donnie, he had actually heard Donnie’s voice over the radio, not something in his head, not a haunting memory, not a blind hope. Donnie had actually reached him through the radio as Leo had done through meditation and his disjointed dreams. While he supplied the spiritual connection, Donnie gave a physical one. The radio. The radio in his dreams. The radio Donnie told him about in that surreal moment in time. He was headed back to where he was certain he could build it. He wasn’t good at machines, that factor was not lost on him. He simply had no choice. He had to do it, for Donnie.
His Donnie.

Leo shifted, feeling sore all over. Maybe he could take some aspirin… not that pain pills really worked on him. Donnie always complained about that. Leo never could take regular medicine like the rest of them. He always had to make up something new or a combination of medications to gain the same effect as a normal pill would have on his brothers. It was the reason why he didn’t bat an eye when Donnie had given him new medicine after he had woken up from his 3 day comma. He could still remember the taste of that nasty, lumpy, liquid. It really did taste terrible.

There was the sound of shattering glass that made Leo’s eyes snap open. Warm air rushed around him picking up the tails of his mask. It carried the scent of pine and chicken feed. Before him was the warped wood of the barn walls bathed in bright sunshine. The barn on April’s old family farm. He placed his hand on the rough graying planks, bits of red paint stubbornly clung on, flecking off under his touch. He heard something else break within the structure. Leo found the metal hoop that served as a doorknob. He pushed on it feeling his muscles strain. The atrophy had not been strenuous, for that he had been grateful, but he still felt weak from misuse. He felt a little light headed too, hobbling out to the barn had been a lot more work than he had anticipated.

But… wasn’t he just in a… A van?

He frowned, brows knitting together. It was night… raining and he had been hurt, not like this a different sort of-

There was a loud crash of metal from within the barn stealing his thoughts away from him.

His brows pushed up in worry. He could hear Donnie inside. Crying.

Blue eyes looked through the crack of the door seeing his brother throw another bottle against the barn wall shattering it. Long limbs shook as Donnie gritted his teeth, shaking his head trying to rid himself of a terrible thought. He balled up a fist slamming it down on the edge of his makeshift desk. He pushed his free hand up to his face, crying into his palm.

A pang resonated in Leo’s heart as the gentle breeze slipped past him into the barn. The warm air felt like a gentle push to his shell, urging him on even though his mind felt slow, sluggish. Thoughts were hard to formulate as the world around him seemed surreal, almost as if everything around him felt like the fragile surface of a dew drop. While his thoughts seemed to have trouble with time his emotions reacted quickly. That pang grew from one beat, lingering onto a second and third, developing into a true pain that he wished he could wipe away like a thumb to tears.

“Why can’t I do anything right?” Donnie’s cracked voice floated over to Leonardo. “I-I can’t get up the guts to tell April how I feel so I try to show her but she tries to help Bigfoot, BIGFOOT to get my attention. Then she kisses me?”

Kissed? A dark feeling gripped Leo’s heart. April had kissed Donnie? And she… with Bigfoot? What had she been thinking?! How could she have been so cruel to have done such a thing?! To Donnie of all people!!

Leo pushed open the door, the recently oiled hinges not making a sound. It opened enough for him to slip through. His heart started to beat hard, anxiety and helplessness mixing together in a noxious cocktail at seeing his brother in such a state.

Donnie threw both of his hands to his sides, his head falling back as he shouted up at the barn roof. “What the hell am I supposed to think about that?! And then Leo. FUCK!” Don folded his arms, hugging himself tightly, shoulders hunching. His narrow shoulders shook. He rubbed at his face with
the meat of a palm. “Fuck… I almost killed him. Way to go Don. Real great there, huh, Donnie-boy?! You couldn’t just listen to him, no you had to push such a stupid idea. Turtle-mech.” He squeezed his eyes shut so tightly they hurt. “Stupid, stupid boy. Then you almost kill him again with that damn medicine you made.”

Leo couldn’t stand the sounds that his brother was making.

Donnie pulled in a ragged breath a sob falling away from his lips. “Stupid, stupid child. Stupid, useless, ugly, idiot.”

No. Leo hobbled forward. No, he was none of those things!

“All Leo.” He whimpered, feeling the weight of his distress. A full cry finally breaking free to soak his mask with tears and rake his lungs with stinging breath. “I’m sorry, Leo. I’m sorry I’m always a screw up. I’m-I’m sorry that I-” He choked on his words unable to say them before he pushed out something that he only said to himself in times of great self loathing. Something that he would only say in the dark of his lab, or deep in seclusion, a way to vent without being a burden to his family. “You would be better off without me.”

Leo raced forward, memories flooding to him of a time far after this. Where darkness ruled his world because there was no light to fill it. His heart pounded quickly as he made more noise in a frantic shamble forward, propelling himself to his brother as if he was being chased by the very image of Donatello alone in that world of shadows with beings of red eyes and monsters of tar and teeth.

“NO!!”

Donatello startled. He jerked, his tear stained eyes opened wide to the vision of his eldest brother abandoning his crutch. Leo’s hands reached out for him as his bad knee strained to keep him going. With one last push he threw himself onto his brother, he clung tight and hard. He nuzzled his beak into his brother’s neck, a hand going to the back of that precious egg shaped head gripping the knot of Donnie’s purple mask.

“Don’t you ever say that!” He shouted against flesh.

He felt Donatello’s rigid body, stiff even though he was helping Leo stay standing. He pulled back, petting at the side of Donnie’s face, frantic. An odd sensation started to wash over him, a faint whisper slipping over his skin.

He was running out of time.

“Le-Leo?” Donnie’s eyes were wide, stunned.

“I-I don’t have much time, but you listen well, got me?”

“What are you-”

“Please, Donnie!!”

His desperation must have been written on his face because Donatello only nodded.

“Never give up hope.”

“What-”

“Just listen to me!! Never give up hope Donnie. I’ll always be here for you.” He cupped his brother’s
face in both hands while putting all his weight onto one leg. He could feel Donnie’s fingers curl around his belt, shifting it to help him in case he started to fall. “I will always hear you. Understand? I will always be here you and I will always find a way to get to you. Do you understand?”

“I- y-yeah, Leo. I… I understand.” Donatello held a look of the remanence of his hurt as well as recent confusion.

“Always, Donnie. I will always find you.” He didn’t care that he was repeating himself. He had to. He had to make sure Donnie understood. “I-

He pulled on Donatello’s cheeks pushing their lips together as that terrible feeling of a timer was counting down. When his tall brother opened his mouth in surprise, Leo opened his own, delving his tongue within the moist cavern. A terrible fear inside of him started to sooth when Donatello’s tongue softly pushed against his own.

Leonardo could taste him. It was something he couldn’t describe, there was no real sweetness, nor bitterness as stories would lead one to believe. Instead it was like drinking from the freshest spring of crisp water, and he was a man dying of thirst. It was satisfying. It was delicious.

It was also sloppy and hard to maneuver into a correct angle with their beaks. So inexperienced in the art of kissing Leonardo could only do what felt natural and swipe his tongue over Donnie’s teeth before pressing up against the fellow warm muscle that seemed to caress him in return. He pushed his body against Donnie, arms gripping him tight Donnie stumbled a few steps back against the barn wall. The olive ninja kept them steadily on their feet as his knees began to tremble.

It was a nervous kiss. A kiss that the leader poured his desperation into. Donnie couldn’t go.

Leonardo pulled away, slowly, reluctantly. Their lips separating as they panted upon each other’s skin.

A hand touched his good shoulder. The warmth of the sunny day. The feeling of Donatello’s body against his own, the smell of his brother, it all was swept away by that one touch. Back he went, to the present, in his mangled body. He was no longer in the van, instead he was back home, underground where he could see everything that his brilliant brother had once touched. There was a lingering feeling of Donnie’s lips, the taste of his saliva mixing with his own. He reached his good hand up tracing his lips with his finger tips.

Something had changed, he felt slightly… altered. Adjusted? Like he was always once on a radio station that was staticy and someone came and twisted the tuning dial, gently fixing it so he could hear the music clearly. Or maybe it was the fact he had kissed his true love when time was superfluous. It might have been a crazed dream. It may have been that he was able to spiritually reach back these two times and have actually touched him. Whatever it was, he was thankful that it happened. He silently hoped, prayed, that it had been real. Donnie needed to know that Leo would always hear him and would always strive to be by his side.

“Leo?”

Blue eyes looked to his baby brother. He gave a soft smile, the first real one in a very long time. Mikey smiled back. He reached up and fluffed the blue mask tails in an affectionate manner.

“We’re going. But we didn’t want you to be alone, so, uh… don’t freak out, okay? Promise you won’t freak out. We brought over some friends to keep you company while we go and get that important whats-it of Don’s. And remember, no freaking out. You don’t need your stitches pulling, dude.”
“Freak out?” Leo’s smile fell away. “Why would I-”

He looked over Mikey’s shoulder to the front of the lair, his eyes narrowing into a hateful glare. Standing with the others was Karai. She was speaking with Master Splinter while Raph and Kirby talked to… April O’Neil.
Donatello’s smile.

His pretty eyes flashing with something Leonardo couldn’t identify when he praised the genius.

The smile disappearing into a thin line of pressed lips.

Once sparkling eyes looking down, brows knitting together as once again he was rejected by the female he was devoted to.

Mouth open, screaming, trying so hard to have April listen to him as cold rain beat down.

Eyes open wide as realisation overcame.

Leonardo could feel the cold of the rain. Every drop stung, numbing him as April screamed, squirming from fighting her possession. Blue eyes flickered across the sky trying to see anything of Donatello. His heart stopping, breath choked in his throat. The rain drummed down, hitting the ground so hard that it bounced back up. His chest heaved with a short breath, then another and another. April was no longer in the sky, having floated down like some divine angel. He didn’t know what was happening as he stared at the endless darkness of the storm above. He held a blind confidence that Donatello would reappear and he would have to catch his brother’s fall.

Where was he?

Why wasn’t he reappearing?

A slow, disgusting emotion pushed its way into his stomach like a bloated slug. Donatello was not coming back. He was… gone… He… was…

The sharp sound of metal hitting cement tore his eyes away from the sky. He looked at his trembling hands. He had dropped his swords. He held up his hands, looking at the back then turning them to look at his palms. He didn’t recognize them. They couldn’t be his, he didn’t shake like this. He-He couldn’t be here. Donnie was… was not here because he was in his lab. That’s… that’s right. They left Donnie with Master Splinter back at home. He couldn’t have-

“What?” Mikey’s voice, tiny and scared.

Something about Michelangelo’s simple tone cemented everything into reality. Leo’s hands shook violently as he fisted them, he bent over, almost curling into himself as he screamed. It was such a terrible sound that Mikey covered his ears.

It was that same scream that rang throughout the lair; a feral rage blanketed in the madness of grief. Leonardo had moved so quickly, his skin stretching, stitches pulling. He was on top of April, hands squeezing around her throat so tightly that if she tried to use her telekinesis he would either snap her neck or rip out her jugular in the process of being flung from her. He was shouting something, the
blood rushing through his veins was so loud he couldn’t tell what he was saying. He could feel her legs kicking as she uselessly tried to pry at his wrists. Blood from his shoulder wound splattered down on the ground the wound on his cheek soaked through the bandage as he screamed and screamed splattering blood over her pale face.

All transpired in one quick moment, seconds that had stretched into long minutes between Leonardo and April as he tried to squeeze out every last breath in her. Splinter, Raphael, and Casey had acted quickly. Splinter had hit a few pressure points forcing his son’s hands to open, Casey and Raph tackled Leonardo dragging him away from the coughing girl.

Leo kicked hard at the air still trying to reach the redhead. Already the wound on his leg had soaked through the bandages to the point of fanning a spray of red liquid into the air from his motions. He struggled against his brother and friend, the slickness of his blood was making it easier to defy their hold.

He was still screaming at April blinded by hysteria.

Mikey joined in, laying down on Leonardo’s chest, using his legs to pin Leo’s. Raphael and Casey had him by the shoulders and arms up against a wall in a sitting position.

He bucked against Mikey, tried to wrench his hands free from the others.

The youngest started to scream as loud as he could to try to be heard. He was trying to comfort his eldest brother. Sooth the pain that made him crazy. The only part that Leonardo actually heard was Donatello’s name. His wide, maddened, gaze snapped to his baby brother. Blue eyes were shining with unshed tears as the raging noise in his ears started to subside.

“Just think of Donnie, bro.” Mikey adjusted his grappled hold on his brother, toenails scraping over his shins, one slipped against his bandaged wound, the sharp pain made Leo’s leg twitch. He pressed his forehead against Leo’s, their eyes locked. The youngest lowered his voice as if he was talking to a wild animal. “We’re getting him back, bro. Remember? We’re getting Donnie back. We need to focus on that. Okay?” He nodded a little trying to get Leonardo to do the same.

Leo’s eyes darted to the side as if he could catch a glimpse of April.

“No, no. This is all about Donnie, right? It’s not about April, right?” Mikey nodded a little once more using combination of words and body language to try to get through to his deranged sibling, “Don’s the goal, right?”

“Rrrright,” it came out as a growl through clenched teeth.

“So we’re going to be calm about this, right bro? For Donnie?”

Leonardo gave a hard jerk against Casey. He grunted hard, lips pressed tightly together. He took a few breaths before he could push out, “For Don.”

“No killing April, for Don.” Mikey hand a soothing palm over his older brother’s bald head.

Leo didn’t say anything, instead he nodded slowly at first before giving a sincere one.

Raphael gave a heavy sigh next to Leo, his grip relaxing. Casey was more hesitant. He narrowed his eyes on the leader. It wasn’t until he saw a bloodied hand wrap around Mikey’s shell that he felt secure enough in the situation to let go of the green arm he had pinned. Leo’s arm instantly snapped around his little brother. He moved his other hand away from Mikey’s shell and over to Raph, wrapping around his shoulders and he pulled his brother close. Taking comfort in their presence.
They all were going to try hard to get Donatello back. He would wait, put up with April being in their home as long as she stayed away from his family. She had already done enough damage, stole his treasure away. She wouldn’t get Mikey or Raph. His precious brothers.

No one would take them away from him. He glared even at his own father whom had firmly placed himself into a fighting stance between the two groups in case Leonardo had broken free. Hard eyes, the same color as Donatello’s glared back. He wasn’t challenging, wasn’t reprimanding knowing full well that if he had seen Saki so closely to the tragedy of his own wife’s death he would have done much worse. He understood. He could relate. But he had to keep the peace, April was not fully innocent but she was here to help, to make things right. They needed her help and nothing was going to stop him from trying to rescue his son. He would knock Leonardo out if he had to.

“You okay, Red?” Casey had gotten up at some point, crossing the room to her.

“Yeah.” She croaked out. She hissed as her father lifted her chin to look at the already darkening bruises around the soft skin of her neck.

“I think you should go home.” Kirby frowned.

“No, dad.” April coughed a little, then tried to clear her throat. She tried to speak again only to swallow a few times. “I- cough- I have to do this. I- I... I just have to.”

She looked up at her father, eyes determined. “I’m going to stay.” She said finally.

“Maybe you can come with us in that-”

“I’m staying!!” Tears filled her eyes as she pulled away from her father. “And you should hurry! You said you’ve got little time, right? So why are we wasting it??”

----------------------------------------

The needle that stitched together his flesh was sharper than the one in Raphael’s med kit. Of course it would be though, it was Donatello’s. He always kept his instruments and tools in top quality, at least as high as he could. He glared at the redhead that waited outside the room, keeping her distance. April hugged herself with one arm, the other holding onto the door jam that lead into Donatello’s lab that served as a sort of infirmary at times.

“Last time I was here, we were in this room, right?” Karai made small talk as she pulled on the thick thread closing one of his wounds a little further before plunging down the needle back into his flesh. She was thankful that Leonardo was now sitting still. It had been hard to get him to stop trying to move around. He needed his brothers to hold him still for half of the stitches and cleaning blood off of him. They made him promise to allow Karai to finish working on him. He started to get worked up when they were leaving. He had insisted on trying to find his pack. It wasn’t until Mikey had given it to him that Leo had calmed, clinging onto it like a lifeline. He had been quiet since. Allowing Karai to fix him up to the best of her abilities having to cut out old stitches to make room for the new ones.

Now it had been very quiet for most of her work, the others left, leaving in a strange contraption. Too quiet for her liking considering they should be more excited with the prospect of Donatello returning to them.

“Donatello really kept his things cluttered, but it seems that he achieved what few clutter bugs could; keep his stuff in good repair.”

“He wasn’t a clutter bug.” Leo grumped, eyes staying on April. His slinged arm gripped tighter
around his pack. He could feel the rectangular shape of the radio manuel press through the fabric to his chest.

“Organized chaos then?”

Leo shrugged his good shoulder.

Karai created a few more stitches before tying off and cutting the thread. “There we go.” She put down some gauze before starting to wrap the wound. “Almost done. You really did a number on yourself when you reopened these…” Her voice tapered off, fingers lingering on green skin and gauze.

Her mind slipped from her task, wondering slowly as the past events began to process. She took notice of how the room smelled musty but the copper scent of the turtle’s blood was fresh and prominent. This room though, last time felt busy even though the occupant had long been missing. Now, it felt… silent. Like a tomb. A place that no one should be welcome to, and when she touched Leonardo something inside of her became frightened. It was a feeling that was there when she had been called for a visit, laying beneath all her confusion and fear. Now, it was out in the open, blossoming like a flower on a grave. Only, the flower was Leonardo and the grave was Donatello. Inseparable yet so different. One alive the other… she had her doubts but she wanted to believe. Yet this didn’t describe the strangeness that she felt. It was only a portion. No. The real thing that bothered her was that he looked so perfect in this setting. His determination, his passion, his… love for his brother. A part of it disgusted her. Another part felt as if she had wasted her time flirting with him when he was so secretly devoted to another that it was even a secret from himself. And now, he had planted his feet, like roots of the flower, not willing to move, forever content in the silent realm of the dead. This in itself scared her; how much he looked like he belonged in this tomb.

She swallowed a lump that had formed in her throat. A sting ran up from her stomach to her heart. She had wanted him to see her, chase her, prove that no matter what he would follow her to the ends of the earth. She had wanted him, all of him and it was starting to sink in. He had never been hers, ever.

It hurt. This new information was crashing down upon her as she rubbed her thumb over the feel of his warm skin.

It held a pleasant leathery feel. She mused how his strong arms had once been so willing to hold her close. She had rejected them preferring to tease him but looking back she found the memories to be that of warmth and comfort. She had really messed up. She had…

A hand came over hers putting a halt to her stroking thumb. Leonardo carefully removed her hand from him. His eyes were on her. Her heart skipped a step. She leaned forward. A perhaps whispering in the back of her mind. Perhaps if she kissed him he would see his error. Perhaps he simply needed her touch one more time to snap him out of his grief that was playing tricks on him.

Perhaps.

Perhaps…

...Perhaps…

She was so close now, almost able to taste his breath, her eyes sliding halfway closed as she offered her lips to him.

He leaned back and turned his head, no longer looking at her.
“Don’t.” He said firmly.

Karai felt her heart beat harder, each time hurting. “Then… you meant what you said.” She whispered.

“What did I say?” The question was genuine. Leonardo had said something during his manic moment but he couldn’t remember what.

Karai swallowed. Why did this hurt to say? Why was it a part of reality she wanted so fully to refuse? She was raised with such a messed up “father” only to find out so many twists and turns. She had taken the reality of the situation well, adjusted everything so she may know her true father. But this… this she didn’t want at all! She wanted Leonardo! She wanted him to kiss her, hold her, be with her! Not with Donatello! He should be with her!

She leaned back, away from him, seeing his tense shoulders start to relax. He had always done that with her. Stiffened up. Beforehand she thought it was cute but now, now it hurt. It felt like rejection. Why did that hurt?! Because she had fallen for the turtle in blue. His goofy smile. His sharp gaze. His honor, his merits and vices. He was a good person. He had helped her over and over again. Trusted her over and over again while she played cat and mouse with his emotions.

“You had,” She took a breath, trying to steady the shaking inside of her. “You had said that April took him away from you. That… that you loved, Donatello.”

“You took him from me!! My LOVE!! MY LIFE!!! MY DONNIE!!!”

The memory of Leonardo’s screams faded as the turtle pushed her farther away gently. She could tell that he wasn’t going to explain anything to her. Instead she closed her eyes and took in a steadying breath feeling the sting to her eyes.

“Am I good to go?” He asked trying to sound a little more light hearted than his grim expression gave.

“Yeah.” Karai set to work on putting supplies away. “Leo?”

“Yeah?” Leonardo was already starting to squirm himself up.

So many questions ran through her head. Did he actually have feelings for her at some point? Had he used her to try to run away from the knowledge that he was in love with his brother? What if they didn’t get Donatello back? What would Leonardo do then? She couldn’t deny the fact she had seen him so utterly, pathetically destroyed over the death of his sibling. Would he slip back into that dark depression or would he become a fanatic obsessed with the unachievable?

The unachievable...

Even with all of her play, her demands for his attention, asking for his help… it didn’t amount to anything other than a companionship that couldn’t develop past that point. The possibility of being with Leonardo was just that, unachievable… Just as Donatello was to Leonardo’s reach. It made her mind race, flutter pages of the book of her past fluttering stopping only to show her memories that had always left her feeling a little hopeful for a relationship with the turtle, things that made him seems sweet and special. At the time the events had had confused her, now made sense. Why Leonardo changed tune so quickly when he had helped her all those months ago with getting back at the Shredder. Donatello had gotten hurt. She had never seen him change his mind so quickly about a mission and yet he did. His beloved had been harmed, because of a juvenile mistake. Such a strange change of his behavior that she knew that it was out of character, at least the character she had grown
to know. There were other times, little things that would seem off. She hadn’t thought much about it. Always insisting on going home when it was too late, talking about how he had to make sure Donatello had gone to bed. He asked her to pick up coffee grounds from time to time and she knew that Leo didn’t drink coffee. When she stroked his cheek he never leaned into it. When she saddled up next to him he would try to scoot away. She had thought it was him being shy, but… it had seemed his heart knew what he wanted and it had not been her. She understood now, with everything laid out in plain sight. It still hurt though, now fully aware of her feelings that she couldn’t act upon.

“I don’t…” She took in a slow breath. “...Do you really love your brother? In that way, I mean.”

“Yes.”

“Aren’t you scared of what people will think? What your family will think? What I would think?”

“I had, once.” Leonardo limped, going towards a table with a dusty desk lamp on it. He spoke his next words loud and clear. “And I don’t care what they or even you think. All I want is Donatello back.”

That stung worse than anything he had said before. He didn’t care? She stood up from the stool she had been on. Her fingers gripping the small metal bowl full of bloodied tools and gauze. She felt her temper raising as she barked out, “And what if he doesn’t approve? What if Donatello doesn’t feel the same as you do?!”

Leo closed his eyes, remembering Donnie’s eyes. How he would look at him with such trust and warmth. He had taken it all for granted. He could remember the feeling of his skin, his smell. When he opened his eyes he looked to the young woman that he held such respect for. He smiled softly, something about it made Karai’s cheeks redden as she balked.

“That doesn’t matter as long as he’s home, safe and sound.”

Karai looked away. She felt jealousy worm through her heart. What person would ever look at her like that? With such devotion? Why didn’t Leo look at her with that expression of such… such… love?! Didn’t she deserve it?! Why was Donatello more deserving of Leonardo than she was?!

She excused herself with nothing but silence, taking the small tray of supplies out of the lab. She could clean them in the kitchen, separate herself from the situation for a moment.

This wasn’t about her. This was about the turtles, about getting back Donatello… if they could.

Leonardo didn’t pay her much mind now as he pinned his pack between his thighs and dug into it using both hands to find the World War II manual. Pulling it out caused other items to fall to the floor. Soon as he moved the pack fell to the ground, heavy with items spilling out from the top. He put down the book and flipped it open. The fluttering pages pushed a small cloud of dust into the air in the small neglected space. He found the page that showed all the parts to the radio from his dreams. He pressed his hand down on the seam, cracking it to make it lay flat. He looked at it carefully. Some of the parts he wasn’t sure where Donnie would keep them, others he knew right off the top of his head. He wasn’t even sure what it really meant by “soldering” but he knew what a soldering iron was because of Donnie and some of the little wire coils that he had used with it. It couldn’t be that hard. Even if it was hard, he was going to get this thing built tonight, no matter what.

April watched Leonardo set to work on something before turning and following Karai into the kitchen. She wasn’t sure about being alone with the turtle as of yet, even though she could sense that he wasn’t going to harm her now it was best to be cautious. While Leo felt calm Karai was the
opposite, especially when April walked into the kitchen. It was like a wall of distress.

There was a loud bang as Karai dumped the metal tray into the sink. She gripped the edge of the sink, hunching her shoulders as she rocked herself very subtly.

“Why him?” She murmured. Tears filling her eyes.

April carefully approached her fellow kunoichi. She raised her hand about to touch Karai’s shoulder then thought better and lowered it.

“I…” April’s voice was rough even after all this time. “Karai… I’m sorry.”

“For what?” The dark Japanese woman gave a quick bitter laugh. “That I’m the butt of some joke that the world keeps playing?”

April leaned her hip against the counter, leaning over she tried to get a look at Karai’s face. “I’m sorry that I can’t do more than listen.”

Karai rolled her eyes. “Figures you would say that.” She sniffed and pushed away from the sink only to cross her arms. “So perfect, April O’Neil, the only kunoichi of the Hamato clan. You were handed everything in your life! Taken in by my father, treated like his daughter, having special powers, being adopted into a ninja clan for no other reason than your big eyes, having a love sick turtle following you to the ends of the earth—”

“I killed him.” April looked straight into Karai’s bitter expression. Hers, in turn, showed a defensive spite. “You wanna talk about everything being handed to someone then look in the mirror. You were treated like a princess, a literal one where she was spoiled rotten with praises and raised with private tutors, taught how to defend your ‘kingdom’, groomed to be a warrior since you could stand! While me? I had no clue anything was going on until one day I was kidnapped while going on a walk with my dad!! I was only taken in for ninja training because of Donnie, who pushed his brothers and father into letting me know how to defend myself because I couldn’t even aide them when they were saving me or my own father! Donnie saved me and he saved my dad and what did I do? Thought I was too good for Donnie. Donnie of all people who was patient with me, encouraged me to work hard, helped me. Not just Donnie but Raph, Mikey, Leo, they all helped me time and time again and in return I betrayed them by bringing a friend into their home who turned out to be a Kraang spy! Leo almost died because of me. I watched Master Splinter fight the Shredder and be beaten within an inch of his life. We had thought he had died all because I made a bad decision. Did they hold it against me? Not once. Instead the turtles held me closer to their hearts as if scared of hurting my feelings. I had a crazy mutant creature that looked like my mother eat my friends before my powers came out!” April sniffled, eyes starting to glisten. “When you talk about being perfect, talk about yourself, because I’m far from it.”

Karai’s nose wrinkled as her lip pulled up into a snarl. “It’s not like I hadn’t tried to take their lives, April. That’s nothing special… nor is Donatello. I don’t see what’s so great about him in the first place. If he’s such a genius like everyone keeps saying he is then he should have figured his own way out of whatever place they think he’s in and if he can’t, then maybe he’s better of staying there!!”

The redhead growled. Before Karai could act a snap of pain from a slap across her cheek forced her head to the side. She blinked several times feeling the sting, surprised that April could ever move that fast.

“Don’t you ever say that again.”
Karai’s dark eyes turned to the glowering kunoichi. Her voice quelled in her throat.

“I understand that you’re hurting right now. I can even respect it Karai, but don’t you take it out on him. And if you can’t, then you need to leave. I’ll take my chances with Leo, but I won’t allow you to get in the way of getting Donnie back.”

April gave her a final warning glare before turning on her heel and storming out of the kitchen leaving Karai alone to rub at her still aching cheek. She made her way across the lair to the large doors of Donatello’s lab. There she slowed down her steps, took a deep breath then entered the one place she felt most forbidden from. Inside was Leonardo, his eyes fixated on a book, brows knitted together as he read carefully.

She wasn’t too sure what to say or what to do. She watched him get up, pick up the book and limp over to one of Donatello’s shelves that held the baskets that she knew held spools of wires. It was down on the floor and he struggled to sit down.

“H-here, Leo. Let me help.” April automatically said as she came up to his side.

Blue eyes looked at her sideways making her pause. He looked her up and down before turning his attention back to the basket. His grip tightened on the book in his hands. His jaw moved as he swallowed. She could feel the impression of his thoughts racing, trying to put themselves into an organized line. She could feel his rage starting to boil, especially when he looked back at her.

“Leo… I…” April gripped her hands into tight fists, her head bowing down. What was she supposed to say? How could she ever make things better? It wasn’t like she could magically make everything back to the way it once was. This was all her fault and she knew it. What could she do? Leonardo, so traditional, so quiet about his feelings. He was so much like his father that anything she could say would never be enough. That was when she became conscious of the weight of her weapons. Hard earned, gifted to her by this very family. They were her most prized possessions. Symbols of acceptance, of dedication and so much more and it was then that she knew what she needed to do. She had to take responsibility. Not just say that she was sorry but show him how sorry she truly was. The idea that formed as she felt the weight of her weapons was the only one she had and she hoped that he could finally understand how very sorry she truly was.

She slipped to her knees under his burning gaze. She reached into her jumpsuit pulling her tessen out of its holster and gently placed it onto the ground in front of her. Reaching behind her she unclasped the sheath for her tanto. She carefully arranged it alongside her first weapon before scooting back a few steps on her knees. She lowered her hands and head down to the floor, completely submissive to what he may do.

“I’m sorry.” She said softly, her voice shaking with genuine emotions. “I’m so sorry, Leonardo. I…” She took in a few sharp breaths, tears threatening to spill onto the ground. “I should have listened to you, to him, to Sensei. I should have never taken that crystal. I take full responsibility. I am so, so sorry. You can do whatever you want with me but, but before you kick me out of the Hamato Clan or kill me… just let me help you get him back. Please. ...Please.”

There was a long silence. The more it pulled along the harder April’s heart beat.

“...I need to make this radio but I don’t know how to solder. Do you know how?” Leonardo’s voice was almost delicate in its state; confused, angry, hopeful, accepting.

April raised her head. “Y-yeah, yes. Donnie taught me how…”

Leo turned his attention back to the book in his hands. “Then let’s get started.”
Peddling in the damn submarine was always difficult. It worked him in a way that made his lungs burn, sweat run down odd places and make his legs feel like they were going to explode. He hated this damn machine and would curse the brother that had made it so kinetic energy was its main powersource if circumstances were different. As it was he grunted as he pushed himself as fast and far as possible on the horrible stationary bicycle, across from him was Casey who was red as his mask. Then there was Mikey who was panting with his mouth open and tongue out. If Raphael could have enough breath in him he would have told Mikey that turtles don’t have the same benefits as dogs when they pant. Instead he glanced over to their father whom looked like he was having no trouble at all peddling away.

Raph turned his head to look over his shoulder, at the front of the sub was Mr. O’Neil his balding head reflected the dim glow of the lights shining in from the portholes in the front. A wall of darkness churned outside, a sea of ink. His eye twitched as memories rushed forward. Memories of meditating, channelling through Leo who saw through Donatello’s eyes. A world dark, rain almost black as it pelted down. The water outside, merky, alone… cold…

He closed his eyes while shaking his head. He gripped the handlebars harder and leaned into his peddling. He wasn’t going to let Donnie stay in that horrible world any longer than he has to! He was going to make sure he got home and he was going to let him watch whatever shows he wanted to! He was going to get him a whole bunch of new tools and find a new subterfuge or whatever that spinning thing was, and he was going to make him so much coffee, with lots of fancy creamers, and he was going to see Donnie happy and healthy again no matter what!

“The light turned on.” Kirby suddenly said.

The older man flipped a switch then pressed a button, the engine rattled for a moment before it took hold of the kinetic energy. Raphael slumped over the handlebars, rubbing at his sweaty head as he panted. Mikey yelped when the pedals kept spinning only to smack into the back of his calf. Master Splinter dismounted and crawled up to the front of the small sub.

“How much time until we reach our destination?” The rat asked, peering out into the darkness before them.

“According to my GPS, only a half hour. It’s quicker to reach here by water than having to take all the different roads over land.”

“Will-” Casey gasped, gulping down air. “Will we have to- to pedal again?”

“No. Donatello did an amazing job on this. Once you get the engine started it’ll generate its own energy until you turn it off.”

The submarine passengers went quiet save for heavy breathing that slowly began to even out. Time seemed to span longer than usual. The anticipation of finding what Donatello had reached so far out for them to find was difficult to inappropriate. There was a desperation for it to be a cure-all, a little button that could be pressed and Donatello would be there with them but the reality of it was simple; things never went as planned. Whatever they would find was most likely something that would make them work for it. There was also a dread that this was time sensitive, whatever down there… they may have missed their window of opportunity. If they had… what could they possibly do next?

“Raph?” Mikey’s voice was quiet, a child’s whisper in the darkness.

“Yeah?” Raph was no better, everyone feeling the strange weight of their task.
“...What...do you think might be down there? What would Donnie want us to find?”

Raphael moved off of the bike he was still sitting on. He pressed himself up against the cold metal wall. He didn’t know. He didn’t know anything of what was going on. Donnie knew what was happening, Leo barely had a clue, him? He was just as lost as everyone else. He couldn’t even begin to guess what kind of things that Donatello would find useful in this situation. He barely knew what Donatello found useful in a normal situation.

“I… don’t know. But if Donnie wanted us to find it, then you can bet your shell that it’s important.”

“I think it’s some kind of Kraang tech, like one of those triangle portals.” Casey piped up, louder than the brothers.

“Like one that goes to wherever he is?” Mikey looked hopeful.

“Yeah! It would make sense, right? I mean, that Kraang ship from a while back, it blew up, pieces went everywhere. Something from that landing way over here, it’s possible.”

Raph’s lips pulled into a smirk, “Not a bad idea, Jones. Who knew you had some brains in that thick skull of yours?”

“More brains than you’ve got.” Casey snorted out playfully.

The large turtle chuckled. “Keep telling yourself that.”

Before Casey could give a snappy reply Kirby spoke loudly, “Were here!”

Everyone rushed forward trying to see over each other as the scientist tried to move the submarine to give the area a look.

“Keep an eye out for anything.” Kirby dove further down towards the sea bed.

“It’s nothing but darkness.” Mikey murmured, what little hope he had in his chest was held as tight as bated breath.

“There’s not even fish.” Casey put a hand on Michelangelo’s shoulder. He didn’t know if he was trying to comfort his friend or himself more.

“There’s not even a wrecked ship! It’s just… black…” Raph flexed his fingers, curling and uncurling them.

“Actually… I… think I know why.” Kirby pushed on the helm making the sub dive to the sea bed. The light from the sub caught the incline of dirt. It pushed in sharply only to come to a tiny bulged point. “This is a creator. From how deep this is, it came in hard and fast… Possibly a meteorite, if so then there is radiation that would have either killed the local sea life or scared it away…”

“A meteor? Then… Then it could be Kraang tech?” Mikey reached up, unconsciously grabbing hold of Casey’s wrist as he felt his brother press up against his other side. Their tiny hope welling up.

“Well…” The human looked around on the console before he found what he wanted, a few levers that would allow the mouth of the turtle sub to open without firing missiles. It was a small feature, to scoop up something to send it into a small compartment under their feet.

“Let’s try this. If… I can get it going.”

“I can do it.” Mikey moved without being invited.
Kirby slipped back as Michelangelo took over, using the crane game like controles he manipulated the mouth. With as much care as he could he dug the bottom plate into the soft ground around the center of the creator. With a little giggling he got a good amount of earth. He closed the mouth.

He swallowed, looking over his shoulder to his father and brother and friend. “I-I think I got it.”

“Let’s see what you caught.” Kirby crawled on his knees over to the small hatch that lead to the bottom compartment. He opened it finding it hard to see, no light within.

Mikey pulled out his T phone and turned on the flashlight option.

“Thanks.”

Kirby lowered himself into the thick mud below, the area was so small he was forced onto his knees, sinking chest deep. Mikey slipped down after him to continue to give him light.

“See anything?” Casey asked.

“Not yet.”

The human shifted through the muck, his hands brushing over small rocks that he would fish out to look at before casting it to the side. He started on one side of the compartment and slowly made a line, shifting and moving through trying to find anything. Michelangelo tried to help while keeping the light available for both of them. He felt helpless as salty mud got into his mouth. He spat it out, they were almost halfway through this mess and nothing, only rock after terrible rock.

“What’s this?”

“You find something?” Mikey turned shining the light towards Mr. O’Neil.

“It’s white, smooth. Is it a Kraang orb?” Kirby turned it around in his hands. “Doesn’t feel ri-”

Mikey stared at the object that the man was trying to wipe off. The tears he had sworn he would not shed any longer welled up. They fell freely as he awkwardly waded through the muck and fish smelling grime.

“Raph!!” He shouted up. He dropped his phone into the mud as he reached out his hands, taking hold of the object. He laughed as he pushed his face against it. So much hope welled through him.

“What? What did you find?!” Raphael asked.

Mikey worked his way back to the hatch. He was sobbing by the time he got there, it had been so bad that Raphael and Casey had to help him up. The three looked at what he was clutching. Raph choked on a laugh as his eyes misted. Casey gave a strange laugh, one of a grateful man uncertain how to show his gratitude to the fates. A light came on, blinked and flickered from the object.

“There was a little noise that came from it.

“Why, hello, my friends. It is very good to see you again.”

“It’s good to see you too Professor.” Raph grinned down at the head of Zaiton Honeycutt, the Fugitoid.
Leonardo and April worked together, finding pieces and parts around Donatello’s organized chaos that was his lab. While April soldered, Leo continued to scour through boxes, bins, drawers, and anything else that could hold what they would need. He came across a handmade booklet, pages pressed together precisely, the spine held stitching that was measured out to exact millimeters. He blinked at it, it was so different from everything else, metals and wires where typically what Donnie had dealt with. In fact he was very prideful of his metallurgy. It made this little book out of place. It was plain papered, nothing special for the cover. It was thick and had different colored binding threat that showed it had been added on to several times. He had found it in a plastic bin, pushed behind a metal box that contained six pairs of jumper cables. The little bin had a few odd looking things in it, small cylindrical items with prongs on the bottom. He had screw tinized them, trying to read the scratched labeling paint; Mallory, 12 volts. He had to double check, tucking the booklet into his belt.

“I found the vibrators.” He brought the bin over. “I don’t know how many are good.”

“We’ll try as many as needed soon as the rest of this is put together. You find the vacuum tubes and dial knobs yet?”

“Put them on the desk, right here.” Leo nudged one of the tubes so she could see where they were.

“Good, I think,” She leaned over to the side, squinting down at manual beside her. “Yeah, I should be done with most of this pretty soon, it won’t take long before I can put in the transistor. Oh and we’ll need a power source too.”

Leonardo felt something crawl up his shell. An inclination to look to a particular object. He walked up to it, the late 70’s style ham radio with Kraang enhancements sat quietly.

The psychic-neurotransmitter.

He narrowed his eyes. Why was he thinking that could work?

“April? Do you think we would be able to hook that thing up to Donnie’s psychic helmet thing?” Leo walked over to it. He picked up the cream colored helmet leaving a clean ring in the dust that had formed over time.

“I… maybe? I-I’m not sure, but I-we can try. Casey would be better at this than me… him and Donnie were always good at this kind of thing.” She gave a sigh, putting down the soldering iron for a moment while she rubbed at her tired eyes. “Honestly, I’m glad that they became friends.”

“A strange one at that.” Leo smiled down at the head piece in his hands. “Do you need to take a break?”

“A little one.” She admitted. She reached over to turn off the soldering iron. “Would asking for a little caffeine be out of the question?”

Leo’s blue gaze rested on her, eyes scrutinizing. He looked away. “You can use Donnie’s coffee pot… There’s still a small can of grounds in the freezer.”

April stood up. She rubbed at her shoulder as she bowed her spine back getting it to pop. “Thanks.” She grunted a little before walking. She had no idea how Donnie could ever stay limber after hours of work. She’s only been working for a few hours and she felt like a statue learning how to move for the first time.
“Anything I can do while you are gone?” Leonardo asked as she passed by.

“You can take the casing off of Donnie’s Psychic Neurotransmitter.” She called out through the doorway. Then she mumbled, “Let’s just hope I can figure out how to connect the two stupid things.”

“Connect what two stupid things?” Karai asked.

April looked up at her fellow kunoichi. The Japanese woman stood with her arms crossed over her chest, it seemed to be her favorite position. The American rubbed at the bridge of his nose and under her eyes.

“Connecting two machines together so they can share the same power source.”

“You mean splitting the wires.”

“What?” April gave Karai a funny look, her features scrunch up as she tried to process what was just said to her through the fog of fatigue that had been created due to a task of continuous repetition. She slipped into the kitchen seeking out the coffee pot that still held its own section of counter. It was remarkably clean, taken care of by Leo so that it wouldn’t gather dust.

Karai followed the redhead. “Splitting wires. You can open up the casing, take half of the wires and feed it into another area of the machine or to another wire, twist it together to make a connection.”

“You know how to do that?” April opened the freezer and smiled at Ice Cream Kitty who mewed and purred. “Hey kitty, you know where Donnie’s coffee is?”

The little blob of ice cream purred and shifted around in her little home. She moved over some pizza boxes and bags of frozen fruit before grabbing the small tin to present it happily. April took it, reached in to pet the mutant before closing the freezer door.

“Well, yeah. Don’t you know how to?”

“Why would I need to know how to do that?”

“To disarm security systems.”

April went silent her thumb brushing over the lip of the cold tin. It was several heart beats before she said in a whisper, “You know why I never learned that.”

Because Donnie had always been there to do it.

It was left hanging, the words unspoken seemed almost solid.

“Do you...need me to help with whatever you two are doing?”

“That would be nice.” April set to work on making coffee. “I’m not ready for that splicing just yet.”

“Splitting.”

April laughed a little. “Really? You’re going to knit pick words now?”

Karai gave a small smile. “Just a little bit.”

“Well... I’m just making myself a cup of coffee. I’ll meet you in Donnie’s lab?”
Karai nodded. “Okay.”

She had been timid in going into the lab, unsure of how to approach Leonardo. He sat quietly by some machine that had its casing removed and set to the side. In his hands was a small, yet thick, book. He slowly flipped a page completely immersed in whatever was written. As usual, he looked perfectly in place as if awaiting Donatello to walk right in at any moment.

“Okay, Leo, I got my coffee.” April came announcing herself. Karai watched him flinch ever so slightly and smirked. He had been caught off guard. “Karai says she knows how to connect these two machines together so we’ll have it up and running in no time!”

“Good.” Leo turned his attention back to the book.

Good. Good? That was all he could say? April was already sporting burns on her fingers and Karai was gracious enough to offer her services and all Leonardo could say was, “Good”? 

“Karai.” April was sitting down, giving her a stern look upon sensing the woman’s anger. Karai looked over to the redhead who only shook her head as a warning. They didn’t need this. A conflict now would only make things worse. Leo was only starting to calm down, he had been slowly slipping into madness through his anxiety, through his grief. April could still feel his twisting emotions, the thoughts racing in layers so sickeningly fast that when she opened up it made her feel queasy. He was twisted inside, broken down into an unrecognizable creature that was caged in a crate of anxiety that was forcing him to heal in an unnatural shape. This… creature, that was once Leonardo was in perpetual pain. To have Karai poke at the beast that was finally allowed out of its cage would only result in unpredictable backlash. A backlash that was best avoided.

Karai grabbed a stool and seated herself next to April. She crossed her arms and frowned, scowling at Leonardo as he read. She would adhere to the warning, but Leonardo would eventually owe her and April an apology for his actions.

Leonardo, in his own right, was engrossed. He had found a secret journal of Donatello’s. Once he had finished removing the casing from his brother’s invention he had nothing else to do. He felt useless as he had to wait for April to finish her part of this endeavor. He had located all the parts, brought them to her, put in screws and wrapped wires due to the instructions, all April needed to do was carefully solder things into place. Leo had even made the casing for the radio out of different sheets of metal around the room. His fingers held dried bloody wounds from using metal shears for the first time, one of his fingers was purple from being smashed by a hammer when shaping the curves. It didn’t help them that holding his hands still was a difficult matter. He was exhausted, lost a lot of blood and in the need for a good meal. He was weak, waning thin in his ability to keep awake let alone work. He had done what he could, now he had to wait. Reading the carefully printed letters on the pages before him helped his eyes from shutting.

It was a journal. Donnie’s, added onto through different years. He kept detailed observations of everything he had encountered. It also delved deeply into his mind, how different he had felt from his brothers. How useless he felt in his ability to fight. It laid out ever wretched thought he had compiled to lie to himself making him believe he was lesser. From what Leonardo was reading, his precious brother had low self esteem. He practiced to sound confident, to sound as if he was perfectly normal as to not upset his family. In actuality, he was tired and worn thin, something Leo could associate with. He had to grow up too fast, shouldering so many responsibilities while the others played and pursued what they enjoyed. Entries of such self destruction were few, then, they increased. It pulled at Leonardo’s heart, piercing him with pain as he tried to understand why Donatello was becoming depressed. If Donnie had been really like this then why had Leo never caught on? Yes, they had their troubles as any sibling would, but he had been certain that when Donnie smiled that everything
had been resolved between them, a silent acceptance, a quiet mutual forgiveness. Why did he think everything was okay?

Because Donatello had mastered the art of disguise. He painted on a face, each and every morning to seem well and happy. He deceived them so perfectly. With his brilliant mind, carefully laid plans, Leo held little ability to see the true state of mind of his fellow turtle.

He felt his heart flutter as he read a particular entry;

_I get it now. Puberty isn’t a kind stage of the life cycle. One top of my bones aching, muscles pulling, and skin hurting from stretching out rapidly to my unusual height. “Bean pole” as Raph would say. This physical pain has been triggering much of an emotional response that I do not particularly care for. Words hurt more than they should, I take them to heart too easily. It’s irrational. In order to lend myself aide I had to separate myself more from my brothers, which in turn made me desire to be around them more, especially Leo. Something about him had been of a curious nature to me, his calm temperament and silent strength has always been a trait that Mikey, Raph, and myself had always sought out. It calmed us as children, in our adolescence and dealing with “growing pains” it’s the one constant in our changing world. But I get greedy for his attention, possibly just as badly as Raphael. While Raph tries to “push his buttons” to gain a reaction that is different from Leo’s normal calm, I want everything. I want to see his smile, hear his voice. I desire to feel his arm over my shoulders or how he holds my hand when he leads me away from my projects. I want to smell him clean, I want to smell him dirty with sweat and dust. He fascinates me beyond anything else due to his strength, inner as well as physical. It makes me act out when I don’t get enough of him. I make up reasons as to why he wouldn’t be around me. I rationalize that I am not doing enough to gain his eye. This unusual behavior of mine I can now say fully that it is… love. I am in love with my brother. This desire of mine only amplified by the ravages of puberty. I had to look back at it all, find the cause and effect. Why Leo? What happened? What will happen in the future? I was able to summarize it all to one event. I had been singled out by Raphael once more to be his victim of the day as Sensei had forbidden him from being around Michelangelo due to his excessive bullying. I thought I had taken it well trying to brush it off, to be the adult of this situation. I had walked away as he called me names, he came up behind me and pushed me hard enough for hit the ground. I wasn’t wearing my gear as I had been headed for the shower. Leonardo jumped in, seemingly out of nowhere, and defended me. He helped me off of the floor, my knees scraped and bloodied from the cement. He followed me to the bathroom. I told him I was alright but he insisted to “tend your wounds”. He had never done that before, it had always been myself or Sensei. I didn’t even know if he could put on a band aide correctly. …I still remember his touch on my legs, how gentle he was as he cleaned the blood away with cool water and soap. He talked the whole time, telling me how I shouldn’t take such treatment from Raph. Then he looked up at me. My heart, it actually fluttered when he said, “You’re a genius, Donnie. My genius. You do so much for us, you deserve more respect.” For once I felt as if I belonged. Belonged in this family… belonged to Leo.

That was it. The moment that Donatello had fallen in love with his brother years back. He took a moment to reflect back upon the memory of that day. Raph had been particularly vicious for days before, his actions coming to a boiling point. Leo had kept an eye on him after he twisted Mikey’s wrist in some particularly bad rough housing that he wouldn’t calm down from. He could tell that Raph regretted it but it didn’t stop him from looking for a fight. That was when he focused on Donnie. He tried to get to the pair before any harm could be done only to be too late to see Donnie connect with the floor with a grimace. Leo had blamed himself for Donnie getting hurt. If he had acted sooner he wouldn’t have blood on his knees. It was because of that guilt that he tended to Donnie’s wounds. He tried to speak encouraging words to him. They had been barely hitting the age of thirteen at that time. Young and unprepared for the sudden shift of hormones that puberty would bring. They were still kids… Donnie had loved him since they were kids…

Leonardo smiled. It made him feel rather good knowing that.
He skimmed a handful of pages before something made him halt. An unusual sensation rolled up from his stomach as he read and re-read the entry. It... this wasn’t right. There was something wrong with this one. Not because it was in different ink, nor the penmanship flowing better from the development of writing for so long. It was what had happened that gave a strange sense of validation to Leonardo in pair with disbelief.

**Leonardo had done something strange today. He had been walking towards the kitchen, telling Mikey not to take too long with his game because he wanted to watch the new Space Heroes episode that was going to air today when he suddenly stopped in mid stride. There was a loud sound that burst through the radio in my room, the sound was... it was almost like sharp static, it caused everyone to jump. We all listened to see if it would repeat but it didn’t. I had turned my attention back to Leo and saw him rubbing his hands over his face as if he was trying to stay awake. He recently got over the flu, I was worried he was having a relapse. The last time he started to have the flu he had had a headache out of the blue only to develop a terrible fever a few minutes afterwards. I asked him if he was okay and things got... strange. He looked at me with such shock that I was certain he was delirious with fever. I checked him but he felt normal.**

**His expression... I’ll never forget it. How he grabbed my hands and buried his face into my palms. It made my heart skip a beat. He was nuzzling my hands as if... as if he... he wanted me to touch him more than just brothers. I ashamedly kept touching him for a while after that. Taking any opportunity I had for the next several minutes to have this contact from him that I have been craving for a while now. I didn’t care that Raph and Mikey were watching. I just wanted to touch him... feel special to him... I couldn’t over do it though. I couldn’t risk chasing him away. I wouldn’t be able to live if Leo ever tired of me, felt disgusted with me. No, my love for him... I’ll never be able to act upon it or say it, not if I want Leo to stay in my life.**

I... got distracted. Leo had taken my hands and buried his face into them. I was delighted and surprised but then he said something that made my skin crawl. “You died.” That’s what he said.

**Why would he say such a strange thing?**

Leonardo read over the rest of the entry before his shaking hands started leafing through the rest of the entries. He had thought that was a dream. He had dreamed of Donatello, before they saw April, before they- he found the entry of when Donatello had first learned April’s name.

**April... Leo told me about an April when he had displayed a bout of madness. He had said that he had seen me die that “April just with one thought and you were gone.” I had attributed his moment to his recovery of the flu, to pushing himself to train too much, him meditating instead of sleeping. It probably still is, after all, April is harmless. She’s got a fire in her kind of like Raph, probably can hit just as hard as him too if provoked, but she’s no fighter. I fail to see how she could kill me, after all, if nothing else, she’s my best friend... I hope.**

He had remembered. Donnie had remembered him talking about April. Which... which meant...

He thumbed through the pages. Eyes focusing on the dates. His heart began to pump harder, the closer he got to what he wanted to see. Closer to the present.

**He kissed me.**

**We...**

**Leo and I, lips together, kissed. Tongue in my mouth, heart racing, my toes curled. I... I have no words for the experience of this. How terrible I was feeling before, then he surprised me, told me to never give up, that he would always hear me and will find a way to me. To have him kiss me after he said that, I... I’m speechless.**

**Then, then something strange happened once again. It wasn’t the fact that he said he was running**
out of time, that was pretty weird in itself, no, after we kissed. We were holding each other and
suddenly he was staring at me confused. It was as if he couldn’t remember what had just happened.

I didn’t know how to respond to this sudden change. I felt numb afterwards. I asked if he recalled
what had just happened and he couldn’t. I did what any rational person would and helped him get
his crutch back. Once he was settled I… kissed him quickly on the lips and ran off to hide myself for
the rest of the day. I know Leo, we won’t speak about this again.

Leo touched his lips. He… vaguely remembered that kiss, but he also remembered it not happening.
Why would that be?

“Hey, earth to Leonardo.” Karai snapped her fingers in front of him earning a small jump. “Move
over so I can get to work.”

“Oh, sorry.” He pushed himself up onto his feet allowing Karai to take his seat. He made sure to give
the women room as they set the WWII radio next to the psychic neurotransmitter.

“We’re almost done.” April stepped up beside Leo. “You think this is really going to work?”
Leo gripped Donatello’s journal. “It’s the only thing I have to go off of right now. There has to be a
reason why Donnie wanted this to be built… you… you put in the quartz?”

“Yeah, Karai found a CB radio mic and put it in. She said, if he starts talking then maybe we’ll be
able to talk back.”

The turtle smiled a little. “Very smart.”

“This won’t take long,” Karai spoke up as she stripped casing from wires. “You guys gonna be
ready?”

“Yes.” Both said at the same time.

The kunoichi was right. It didn’t take long before she looked over her shoulder towards her
companions. She reached over and turned the radio on.

Static gently hissed over the speakers. Leonardo turned the volume up, he closed his eyes and leaned
his head towards the radio. He strained to hear any sound underneath the static. He moved his hand
to the tuning knob, carefully rolling it painfully slow. His heart pounded, blood rushing throughout
his body as anticipation held his breath. The tuning needle slipped down the face of the radio as time
ticked by. He reached the end, no more stations to scan for. Nothing but static not even a broadcast
of music.

Karai closed her eyes as April gritted her teeth to push out a, “Dammit.” Leo picked up the CB mic.
He held down the button on the side, “Donnie.” He waited for a reply, nothing. He turned it to
another station. Clicking the button on the side of the mic, “Donnie.”

Karai shook her head. She stood up. She felt disgusted, even more so as Leonardo sat down in the
seat she had just left to repeatedly call his brother’s name into a useless machine. The turtle was
insane. He had tipped over the edge, completely gone. This wasn’t the ninja that she had cared for.
This was the hollow shell of a madman.

“Where are you going?” April asked softly.

“I’m leaving. I...I can’t-”
“It’s okay.” April drew in a shaky breath. Her chin crinkled as her bottom lip shook. “We tried. Th-that’s all that we could… could do…”

Karai put a hand on April’s shoulder, giving a reassuring squeeze. April pushed herself up against Karai, her arms wrapping around the kunoichi seeking any sort of comfort. Karai hesitated before holding the redhead.

“Donnie.” Leo said once more having reached the other end of the stations.

He drew in quick breaths. He held the mic hard in his hand. “Donnie!! Answer me!!”

Static.

“FUCK!”

“Leo…” Karai bit her bottom lip.

“This can’t be it!! THIS CAN’T-” He paused as his eyes rested on the psychic neurotransmitter’s helmet.

When Donatello had used it on April it had amplified her abilities. He wasn’t able to talk to Donnie when meditating but maybe, if he used this then he would have a shot.

He grabbed the helmet. Shoving it onto his head he heard April gasp.

She pulled away from Karai’s embrace. “Leo, don’t mess with that thing. Trust me that thing is dangerous it’s got some crazy Kraang parts!”

“You still trusted Donnie to use it on you.” Leo secured the helmet.

“That was with Donnie around to monitor it! Even then it flipped me out to the point I felt like scrambled eggs and I have psychic powers you don’t. I have no idea what it’ll do to you!”

“Leo, you need to listen to April.” Karai tried to talk some sense into him. “If it can do that to her then-”

“I don’t care! If it fries my brains then fine! As long as I can get to Donnie this will be worth it.”

“Not if you’re a vegetable!” Karai screamed.

Before the girls could react Leonardo turned the power on the psychic neurotransmitter. The once soft static on radio blared loudly. Leonardo turned the tuning dial until a sound other than static could be heard. A hum, sounding as if it was going up in octave only to remain the same, a winding loop. He pushed the dial over more, static over taking while the hum transcended from station to station. He stopped, another hum, louder this time, higher in pitch, it over laid with the first, matching, corresponding. Leo shook, his body trembling as he pulled the dial the opposite way. Something in his mind whispered that this was acting like a lock, he needed to find the last digits to open it.

Static once more washing over the twinned vibrations as he continued on. He found a third, higher in pitch once again, tone fusing with the others. Leo lurched forward, his stomach twisting making him want to vomit as everything around him spun violently.

“LEOOooo.”

“LEOoooo.”
April and Karai’s calls faded away as quickly pulled into a far off distance, dying off into a deafening silence.

Everything was dark around him. It felt as if he were standing on a solid floor. A yawning void stretched out on all sides. He had seen this place before, in his dreams.

“Donnie?” He called out. Leo picked up his feet, walking forward. He cupped his hands around his mouth shouting out, “Donnie!!”

He squinted, in the distance was some color. Hope pushed him forward. He ran as fast as he could towards it slowing as he could make out the shape. A table with something on it. It looked like the same type of table he had seen Donatello working at, trying so desperately to assemble the radio before he would die only to repeat the actions. The same table that held his first vision of the parts of the radio, only… only this radio was complete. It didn’t look like the one that he built with Karai and April, this one looked genuine as if freshly presented by the military in the 1940’s. He quickened his pace. Maybe this radio would be the one to work.

The microphone attached to it was large and heavy, sitting calmly in front of the radio. It was like the one back in the dilapidated base. He pressed one of the buttons and leaned into the mic.

“Donnie?”

“Hello.”

It wasn’t Donatello’s voice. It sounded like an old radio announcement, scratchy with an unusually chipper sounding man.

“Dear.” A woman’s voice, same quality.

“Tell everyone hello!” Now it sounded like an old game show host.

Leonardo took in a shaking breath. “Hello.” He replied.

“Sleepy time gal. Tell everyone here. Everything fine. Hope things there are same. Don’t know if Leave is possible.” Each sentence switched voices, each different. Some women, some men all reminiscent of old radio programs.

“I need to talk to my brother.” Leo tried.


Leave… leave possible… Is leave possible. Leo squeezed his eyes shut trying hard to remember. What did that mean? He had to know, it was a military term. He knew some of those, he didn’t use them often enough to remember right away.

Leave. Leave… Releaf! They were asking if they could be relieved of duty! But… if they were relieved of duty then what would happen to Donnie? What were they expecting to happen if he said yes? There was no guarantee that they would be able to come back with Donnie. He had to play this right.

“I’m working with others to make leave possible, but I need to talk to Donatello. The one that is helping us talk…”

There was static.
“If you want leave then you’ll let me talk to my, my correspondent!”

“Leo?”

Leonardo snatched the microphone off of the table. “DONNIE?!”

He heard his brother pull in a deep breath, his voice starting to shake. “Is that really you?”

“It’s me, Donnie. It’s me.”

“I was starting to-never mind, Leo, did you find him?”

“Find who?”

“Honeycutt. I found the cordiance and sent them to you through Morse Code.”

“I… don’t know. The others went in the sub, I-”

“Find him Leo. I… time is running out… I don’t have much left in me.”

Leonardo griped the microphone tight. “Don’t give up on me, Donnie.”

Nothing.

“Donnie… please… you… you remember what I said to you in the barn? When… when I was
acting funny as we… we…”

“…you… you said you would always hear me.” Donnie’s voice broke.

“And that I would always find a way to get to you.” Leo pressed in close to the radio as if he could
touch his brother through it. “And I will. I will find a way to get to you Donnie. I’m going to get you
home.”

“Leo… I-”

There was the sound of metal bending under pressure. Leonardo braced himself as he heard his
brother fall into that horrid time loop once more. The side of the submarine pulling in, water gushing
forward as Donnie coughed and sputtered on its salty taste. The garbled sound of impact, choking…
Leo could see it all in his mind, the flashing red emergency lights as Donatello died only to repeat the
process and die again.

“I’m right here, Donnie…” Leo spoke only loud enough to be heard. He couldn’t be there to live
through it with him again, but he could at least lend some comfort through his voice. “I’m right
here.”

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Raphael stood still, Leonardo was laid down on the floor, that stupid helmet on his head as his body
shook. April’s mouth hung open as Leonardo and Donatello’s voices came out of the device she had
helped create while her and Karai tried to hold Leonardo to the floor.

“What’s wrong with all of you! Help us!” Karai was trying to get the helmet off, unnerved by the
events. Donatello and Leonardo could be heard over the radio. Leo was having some sort of seizure,
and everyone but April were standing around in shock!

Kirby and Master Splinter moved, kneeling down to try to help in a powerless situation.
“Donnie.” Mikey whispered, in his hands was Professor Honeycutt’s head. He was still covered in filth, stinking of rotten sea bottom silt. It was Donatello. He was really hearing his big brother’s voice once again.

Then came the sound of twisting metal. Rushing water. Then a terrible cracking, a shell splitting open. Tears ran down Michelangelo’s face as he stared in horror. The sounds his brother was making, drowning while trying to scream from the pain.

“I’m right here, Donnie…” Leo’s voice filtered through the radio. “I’m right here.”
Chapter 18

Raphael stayed with Leonardo. They had waited out his seizure, the helmet to Donnie’s stupid machine had been removed to reduce head trauma. Now Leo slept, at least he hoped that he was sleeping. He couldn’t even fathom the depths of terror that Donatello was going through, nor the pain that Leo was experiencing. To have to hear Donnie... die... like that, his choking, his sputtering... He had thought seeing Donatello being evaporated was a living nightmare, that things couldn’t get any worse. Then he heard him, he heard his precious egg headed brother desperately clinging onto life. He heard such a heavy impact that it would have broken even his own thick bones. He froze, unable to process what had happened but Leo... Leo tried to speak comforting words as if he had seen it all before, as if he knew what Donnie had been going through. What was shameful was that Leo had mentioned it to Master Splinter back at the base and Raph couldn't, wouldn't, believe him not until he heard it for himself. Leo said he had dreams of seeing Donnie die over and over again like a broken record. Raph had been in such denial that he couldn't stomach to hear it at the time. What was happening was forcing him to see it for it was; a truth that he was scared of. If he had been terrified at the prospect of abandoning his brother then what could be the word to use to describe his current state? Wretched, the only thing he could think of in this silent, dim room. He felt wretched.

A green gaze looked to his sibling laying still on his shell, his chest slowly raising and falling. Raph hoped that Leo was actually sleeping, resting- he needed it. He hoped that Donnie's machine didn't scramble Fearless' brains. He also wished Leo would wake up. He hated being reminded of Leonardo's coma only a few years ago. Parked up in that old bathtub.

He still could feel the worry of each and every time Donnie came in to “feed” their brother. When it came down to it, Raph was powerless and it riddled him with worry. What if Donnie didn't do it right? What if Leo started to choke or vomit with the tube in? What if he woke up and jerked away causing damage? With all of these questions he silently knew that his genius brother had thought the exact same ones as well as countless others. It left a cold comfort while Raph watched Donnie. He was careful with the tube that he fed down Leonardo's throat, even more so when he poured pureed food down the funnel at the top. He would clean their leader afterward, Raph would help roll Leo in the dirtied water, some times it would be disgusting with excrement and urine. They would flush the water away, down the drain. Fresh water, hypoallergenic soap, and a cloth would be set to work. Donatello never missed even an inch on Leo. He washed everything, Raph opted to look away when Donnie cleaned Leo's anus and the little pouch that housed Leo's sex, even his limp cock. After being rinsed thoroughly they would use an old hair dryer on him and move him out of the tub to lay on a blanket on the floor, shell up where the warm sun could touch his carapace, help him relax more. At these times Donnie would be so quiet. Too quiet. He could hear the birds outside, hear Leo's slow breathes. He never gave it much thought before when Donnie would lightly touch the skin of their brother. Brush his knuckles over an elbow or the back of Leo's arm. Then it was back in the tub, back in the clean water, back to being alone in the quiet as Donatello left once more. And while Raph had been the one to never leave Leo's side, it was Donnie that did everything for him. Reflecting back... he now saw how much Donatello had blamed himself for Leo's condition. He tried everything he could to not be around Leo in fear of hurting him, but he would always come back, always. That begged for questions in his mind to speak up. How much did it pain Donnie to see that? To endure the cleaning of an invalid, a limp vegetable that was once the turtle he adored?

Raph leaned back in his seat when the door to Leonardo's bedroom opened. Mikey gave a tired smile, in his hands was a cup, from the familiar smell, it was some of Donnie's coffee. He looked away, eyes misting over the dumbest reason; the smell of coffee. He had no idea that he had missed it so much. How much that the simple scent of it was connected with his brother. It was ridiculous.
His baby brother came up to him, taking a sip from the mug. “How’s he doing?”

“No real change.”

Mikey silently offered the cup to his brother who took it. He pulled a long drink from the warm liquid, the cream and sugar made it taste less bitter.

“You put cinnamon in this.” Raph took another drink.

“And vanilla... I thought some comforting flavors would help.”

“It kinda does...” He handed the cup back to his little brother. “Noticed you took a shower, when did you find the time?”

“After I gave Kurtzman a call.”

Green eyes turned to the young ninja, Raph was never one that liked being left out of the loop, more so when he became the new unspoken leader. His eyes narrowed in displeasure, “What's going on, Mikey?”

“Dude, don't get angry with me.” Mikey sighed. “I don't got the energy to deal with that.”

“I'm not angry with you, I want to know what is going on.”

“Well, we filled the Fugidude with as much information as we could from the crazy crystal and April going all Exorcist on us up until now. Having Leo's part of the story would help a lot but, yeah, he's kinda out right now... so the Prof said he needed someone to be his hands because he may have an idea to help us out, but when he started to instruct no one but Mr. O'Neil knew what he was saying but even then only half of the stuff he actually knows about...” Mikey stared at his eldest brother. He looked worried and pained even in his sleep. Mikey wanted to soothe those dumb lines off of his face, they had no business being there they were barely legal adults. 19. It was hard to believe only 4 years ago they were all together whispering a plan to figure out how to get their father to allow them to go up onto the surface. They were still young, they should be having fun, laughing and learning. If that was true... why did Mikey feel endlessly old?

“Who's idea was it to call Kurtzman?” Raph's question cut through Mikey's thoughts.

“Hm? … oh, uh, mine. I remembered the monkey dude that was almost as smart as Donnie, maybe he can help.”

“That was pretty smart of you.”

“Thanks... what do you think we should do now?”

“All we can do is wait and waiting really, really sucks.”

“It sucks a lot.” Mikey took another sip of coffee before handing the mug back to Raph. “I'm going to find another chair.”

Raph had finished the cup of coffee before Mikey returned with something he could sit in. They fell into an uncomfortable silence. There was nothing left to say, they had to wait. Both feeling uneasy, unable to sleep until they knew Leo was okay, unable to close their eyes until there was a light at the other end of the tunnel for getting Donnie home. The minutes pulled long and slow making them painfully aware of their own fatigue.
As time went by Mikey leaned against his brother's shoulder, his eyes dry, body heavy. There was a small snore that got him to look, Raph sat straight up, shoulders slumped, his chin tucked down towards his chest. He was fast asleep.

Mikey carefully leaned the sai specialist against himself as the chair his brother was in did not have a high back. The youngest figured he could stay awake long enough for Raph to get a few minutes without risking a kink in his neck. The room seemed dark even with a lamp turned on. The dim glow kept to its corner by the shelf that Leo stored a few books and trinkets. It was so quiet, only the sounds of slumber heard. It didn't take long for Mikey's tired eyes to take longer with each blink until he couldn't lift his eyelids anymore. He rested his head against his sibling's, telling himself it would only take a second, just a brief moment and soon, he was asleep.

~

When Leonardo woke he slowly took in his surroundings. He recognized his own room, though it felt foreign. He was no longer used to being in it opting for the past year to sleep wherever Donnie had frequented. Mikey and Raph were sleeping, leaned up against each other for support. If one moved they would both be tumbling over. He tried sitting up only to feel the whole of his head pulse, the world spun so quickly he couldn't make out much more than blurred colors. His hands shot up to his head, clutching in an attempt to make things stop moving only to feel an electric shock of agony bounce around his skull. He felt as if the world had completely tipped over and he was going to fall off. He tried to take in deep breaths, concentrate on calming his body.

One breath and a tightness was in the back of his mouth.

Two breaths and he was throwing up, retching loud enough to wake his sleep deprived brothers. He couldn't make out their words but he could hear their voices. They were scrambling and soon there was only one left, holding him up by his shoulders. Leo's vision continued to swim as he tried to breath, to see who was next to him, everything was so blurry, spinning out of control as his migraine threatened to split his skull. Leo threw up on himself unable to hold it back. He heard the strong voice of his sibling trying to talk him through it, offer comfort? He wasn't sure. What he did know as that the one with him was Raph. His little brother held him still giving a contrary feeling of being spun off of the planet. Something was put up against his lips as he panted, nothing left in his stomach to push out besides the acrid taste of bile. It took several breaths before he took a sip, it was bitter. Leo kept his eyes closed to save him the pain of the dizzying spell that would make him vomit again. He was maneuvered by someone large, odd fingers, it wasn't someone he was too familiar with. He was lifted so easily. A wet cloth was pulled over him, the new touch he could identify as his father. The bitter liquid returned for him to sip, it slowly started to help his lurching stomach. He was soon laid back down onto his bed, the hands that held him moved away, it was only then that he realized how big they were. Huge. The grumbling voice that followed hung to the edge of his consciousness, his head was tilted up by one of those massive hands and he took another sip of the foul tasting medicine. Webbed fingers held the back of his head. Leatherhead. That meant the Mutanimals were here. Why were they here?

A cold cloth was placed over his head as he was rested back down. It felt so good.

"I'll throw the sheets in the wash." He could make out Mikey's voice now.

"I'll stay here." Raph.

"Raphael, you have regurgitation on you, it would be best to clean yourself up." The gentle persuasion of his father.
“I will stay, watch over him. It will give you a rest.” That was Leatherhead.

“Um... guys?” April, timid, far away, she must have been by the door. “Is he alright? I-I tried to warn him but...”

Mikey was the only one to speak up, “Don't worry, April. Leo’s strong, he’s probably just a little bit scrambled from what happened. Give him a power nap and he’ll be good as new!”

“Y-you sure?”

“Would I lie to you?”

“I guess you're right... um... Professor Honeycutt said he would like to talk to Leo soon as he's able to. He said something about wanting the full equation, I'm guessing he meant story, before him and Rockwell set to work.”

“What are they doing now?” Raph asked with a hard edge to his voice. “Just sitting on their thumbs?”

“Heh, jokes on you! The Prof doesn't have any thumbs!”

“Mikey, I am this close to rubbing Leo's barf on your face.”

“That's gross man!”

“They're taking inventory, seeing exactly what they have to work with.” April filled in.

Raphael’s voice started to fade, he was probably headed to the shower, “At least they're not being completely useless.”

Things were starting to move forward, closer to saving Donnie. They couldn't wait for him to sleep any more, they needed to get to work, help his precious brother. He was running out of time.

Leo tried to speak only managing to let out a small sound that hurt his bile eaten throat.

“My friend, do not push yourself.” Leatherhead put his massive hand on Leo making him feel so tiny.

The ninja tried to move, the whole of his body feeling a solid ache. He licked his lips. He was given a wonderful drink of water, small and fresh. It helped the hot feeling in his core cool. All too soon afterward he was given another drink of the medicine. It really didn't help much beside make his stomach less cramped.

Leo took in a few breaths before he was able to push out a scratchy voice, “I wanna talk... to... to Honeycutt.”

“Leonardo, you must rest.” Splinter was firm but gentle.

“D-donnie.” Leo let out a moan as a particularly bad ache felt as if a vice had screwed on tight to his neck and head. “Donnie needs help.”

“Leonardo.”

“I'll go to him myself!” Leo managed to spit out. He started to claw at his mattress to crawl off of the clean sheets and onto the floor.
It took only one of Leatherhead's hands to pin his shell down. He tried squirming only able to make weak attempts to loosen himself. A new born kitten would put up more of a fight than what he was capable of.

“I will get him only if you stay in that bed.” Splinter's firm voice nearly barked.

Leo grunted by nodded his consent. He was moved back into place by his friend. The cool cloth was removed from his head allowing him to see. Everything was still blurry, he couldn't make much out, only colors that fit together in blotted shapes. At least everything wasn't spinning now. What was Leatherhead's form took up most of his vision before his sight was taken away by the cold, wet, cloth placed over his eyes and forehead.

It wasn't long before he heard the greetings of Honeycutt. “Leonardo, it is good to see you awake.”

Leo tried a small smile. “Sorry that I can't welcome you properly, Professor.” God, talking hurt. It was so much effort.

“Don't be ridiculous.”

“...Leatherhead, Sensei... I'd like to talk to him alone.”

The shuffling sound to his side was the only tell he had that Honeycutt's head was rested on a chair. “We shall be right outside.” Splinter patted his son on his chest. Leo reached up and gripped his father's arm, giving a reassuring squeeze.

“I'll be here.”

He waited until he could hear the closing of the bedroom door before taking a deep breath. His throat still hurt, he was so thirsty but not willing to move.

“Leonardo... your family has told me most of what had happened but I need to know your side of the story in order to know what I can do to help.”

“Where do you want me to start?”

“From the beginning.”

“I... don't think there really was a beginning, Professor. I remember... Donnie trying to help April because she started to rely too much on that alien crystal. Mikey was even worried, he was the one that pointed it out. She was acting like a drug addict.” Leo swallowed, his tongue dry and heavy. “Something was in that crystal, a piece of the alien's mind or something... it possessed her, she struggled with it but not until after Donnie was... he was...”

“Could you describe what it looked like?”

The turtle nodded slowly. He would never be able to forget it. “He was in the air. Flashes... flashes of light, I almost expected to see his bones when his form turned black. He then turned purple and... then... he was gone... that purple light scattering in all directions as if they were beads.”

“Your brothers had told me of a time you were meditating, you saw through Donatello's eyes. What did you see?”

Leo went into detail, making certain to describe everything down to even the physical sensations he had experienced through Donnie. He told the Fugitoid about the different creatures, his theories of what the red eyed creatures really were. This lead him to tell about his previous experiences, in his
dreams of seeing the table, hearing the Morse Code. He left nothing out, going into gruesome detail of witnessing Donatello's repeating death. He told about his supposed dreams being back in time with the knowledge that he currently had. He confided in the alien robot about how he had kissed Donnie, how he could still feel him on his lips in the present time. Which lead him to now; “I read his journal, what I dreamed, interacting with him in the past, doing something different... he knew about them as if they really had happened, but my memories... they... they're the same as if it had never happened but running along side of them I have these new ones. Small things that had changed such as... as Donnie kissing me again after he got my crutch. Him being more physical with me in a shy way as if he was waiting for me to chase him away. It even seemed that his crush on April was slowly dwindling only to rekindle whenever she was in trouble. I don't understand it.”

A silence fell over them. Honeycutt stared at the turtle on the bed. He had no doubts that what he had been told was true to form. It did, however, make him feel saddened.

“...I am so sorry, Leonardo.”

“As long as we can get Donnie back, everything will be fine.”

“My friend, what I am apologizing for is allowing April to take such a dangerous object. I had thought it a simple amplifier. I had been so fascinated with her abilities that I had completely neglected you.”

“Neglected me... You didn't neglect any of us.” Leo sighed as he started to feel the pulls of sleep. “We treated you badly in the end, and I can't say I'm sorry enough for that. You were trying to he-”

“That's not what I'm talking about. You have abilities, spectacular ones. Latent as they are you have a pretty remarkable situation.”

“What do you mean?”

“Complete congintive temporal elaspe.” When there was silence that met his statement, Honeycutt elabrated. “ Your mind traveled back in time.”

“W-what? H-how is that possible?”

“You recall when we traveled back in time?”

“Yes.”

“It took a great amount of effort in collecting tachyon particles, harnessing perpetual fusion energy and many more things to make it possible to send that ship as well as ourselves physically back in time. What you had achieved was to travel in time all by yourself.”

“How?”

“The consciousness is not only chemicals or electrical synopsis in the brain, it's a wave length. Contrary to some theorists, wavelengths are not affected by time, at least, time as most know it. It can resonate with another that is the same as itself and synchronize. If your wavelength is the same as a previous one in time you can link up to it, usually it would cause a sensation of deja vue, in your case you took it a step further. Your current consciousness linked up to a past point in time and held on transferring yourself for a brief moment back. Without such a vital function in your mind to continue to drive your body, it would switch everything to a state of panic, other parts of your system simply over compensate which would explain the seizures that your family and friends had described as well as the one I had witnessed you experiencing as you spoke with Donatello.”
“When did I...” No. No, Mikey had told him before, at the kitchen table. It had scared his little brother so much that he ended up holding Mikey on his lap for almost a full hour. “Then why do I have two memories? And why am I the only one that can talk to Donnie?”

“To answer your questions in reverse order; Michelangelo had told me about seeing Donatello next to you at some point. He had described it as a ghostly light... You had told me yourself when you were telling me what had happened from then up until now how you had seen what you theorize are the occupants of a submarine. Then there was the human partly in the wall, only for an instant. I believe you have many abilities, same as our friend April. Only... yours are not physical as hers are. She tends to manipulate things around, yes she can gain impressions from others but she is simply reading their physical state. You, on the other hand, are rather spiritual. If time permits, I would like to see to what extent your abilities truly are and what they can do. As it is, you are more in-tuned to the workings of the soul.”

“So... I'm interacting with Donnie's soul?”

“Yes and no, I do believe it is quite complicated and can possibly be explained with my answer to your first question. Have you ever heard of the Multiverse Theory?”

Leo tried to think. Something tucked way in the back of his mind, reserved for strange trivia that Donnie usually gave him. “It has to do with decisions.”

“Correct. The theory presents that when we make a decision then another universe is created no matter what we choose. Imagine a fork in the road and you went left, in another universe you went right, these moments are anchors in time. What you had done is go back to these anchors to correct your decision.”

“Wouldn't that do something to the other universe though?”

“Indeed. It would combine the two until another decision is made that would allow them to split into their own respective worlds once more.”

“...Professor?”

“Yes, Leonardo?”

“...Is Donnie in another universe?” A tone of shame crept up into Leo's voice.

Honeycutt could tell that the turtle was afraid that he had may have been the cause of this predicament. This unholy situation that had been spinning wildly out of control. It would do no good to pull the impact of the turth. “No, my friend. He is in a far worse place.”

Leo moaned in the agony of hearing that. “Where is he?”

“This is why I told you that you were and were not talking to Donatello's soul. I believe he is in a sort of limbo.”

A pained whimper pulled from the turtle's lips as the robot spoke. “A place in between. It's not another universe, not another world, nor is he alive or dead. At this moment, Donatello's consciousness is simply a wavelength where time cannot reach him while his body has been, as I theorize, molecularly scattered. You have, indeed, been interacting with him, but not in a way any of us can fathom.”

“How do we get him back?” Leo's voice was thick.
“...We have to bring him back together. Understand though, it is easier said than done. With the primitive technology of this world, I do not know if we can achieve what we desire, and if we cannot succeed... I fear I do not know what will happen to your brother.”

A silence fell before Honeycutt whispered comfortingly, “I will do all that I can to get him back.”

It was that cold, hollow comfort that Leonardo feel asleep to unable to hold on any longer to the waking world.

Honeycutt called out for assistance. He had what he needed to complete his equations. Leonardo had supplied much of the gapped information, he now knew what needed to be done. It would not be easy, in fact it would be most dangerous to even attempt such a feat, but perhaps, with luck, they would be able to achieve their goal. He had seen some alien technology, of Kraang origins if he was not mistaken. It would help greatly.

He was carried back into Donatello's laboratory and placed on the desk. A small group gathered together only half he was acquainted with.

“Did your talk with Leo help, Professor?” April worriedly rubbed her hands together.

“Indeed I did, April. It was most enlightening.”

Casey was close to the redhead, “And?”

“And I believe I know where Donatello is.”

“Where's that?” Raph's eyes were blood shot, dark lines under them yet so eager to hear the news.

“It is hard to explain other than telling you that he is nowhere.”

“What?!”

“He has been split, his mind or soul, pulled from his physical body that has been molecularly scattered. This key piece of him, what -is- him, is in a place that time does not exist in the way that we understand it. It is in a place of limbo. It is not a world but a reflection of both past and present, a shadow of sorts.”

“So, Don's living in this messed up world?” Casey tried to understand.

“No, no, no. As I said, it is not a world. Nor is he alive or dead. It is a limbo, not a world, not a parallel universe.”

Mikey made a worried sound, rubbing at his arm.

Raphael had enough of this pussy footing. “Well, how do we get him back?!”

“We must pull him back together, all of him. It is dangerous because we do not have the technology to due it safely.”

“I don't care! What do we do?!”

The Fugitoid went silent, his glowing eyes staring out at the group. Raphael looked as if he was about to attack, Michelangelo uncertain, the rest in anticipation. Telling them exactly what he had planned would not be beneficial. He could only tell them what he needed to start this.

“What I need you to do is gather as many Kraang parts as possible.”
“Done.” Raph turned on his heel, “Mikey, Slash, LH, Casey, Karai, April with me. Mr. O'Neil you stay here with Sensei and keep an eye on Leo. Mando... just stay here. Rockwell get done what you can, we'll be back in a few hours and you better be ready.”
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

This was an important chapter to finish. I had to take my time in order to get every detail right.
I hope you guys enjoy it.
WARNING this chapter is violent and intense.

The sky was angry as it growled with thunder. Clouds painted in dark grays and blacks rolled overhead as the new device was being set up on the roof of the very building that April had suspended Donnie over. They needed to be as close to where it had happened as possible. He didn’t understand the details only that in order for April to attempt to bring Donatello’s molecules back together the place of the event was crucial. It has been a year, a year of his mind breaking, of his family’s hearts breaking. A year of cold, dark, hell.

He looked to his family. Raph stood next to Mikey, powerful arms crossed over his chest. The youngest seemed to be unable to decide where to keep his hands as he shifted them from being on his waist to folding his arms to nervously rubbing at arms and thighs. He was scared. It was understandable. Splinter… He stood close to his sons trying to look as if he had all the confidence in the world that what they were doing was going to work. There was a slight give though, in his stiffness. He was just as scared as the rest of them.

A part of Leo was scared too. It whispered frightening thoughts into his head about never seeing them again. That this would be the last time he would be able to interact with them. The rest of him just wanted this over with. He needed the machine to be fully built, have it connected, and have Donatello back. Even if it killed him, he needed to be with Donnie.

“Scared?” April hushed next to him. She was holding onto herself. For the first time Leo noticed that she didn’t look like the teenager he once knew. Her hair was down around her shoulders, no band or hair tie. She wore a knitted cardigan instead of a coat, her shirt a rusty brown, black leggings and simple shoes. It wasn’t just her style of dress that had changed but the brightness in her eyes. What was once fiery and brilliant was dulled and almost shy.

“You?” Leo turned his attention to watch as Rockwell used his mental abilities to thread together some wiring as Slash and Leatherhead placed down a heavy section of Kraang tech.

“I… I’m not sure. I am but I’m also real excited to see this work. I… I know you don’t trust me Leo but to see Donnie again, to right this wrong that I’ve done; my fear will have to wait because this is all that matters to me right now.”

The turtle smiled a little. “I’m glad we’re on the same page then.”

April’s face contorted into a grimace as two new parts were placed down. Casey had a riveting gun that he used to bolt down two old electric chairs onto the roof.

“Couldn’t they have found something… that wasn’t so… I don’t know, connected with death for us to use?”
Leo nudged her with his elbow. “You had the option of the modified old dental chair.”

“I had to update my tetanus shots from just looking at that thing!”

They shared a comfortable smile, falling into a quiet. The two watched the machine continue to be constructed. It wouldn’t be long now. It took only one night for Raph’s party to search for the Kraang parts that were needed. They brought back everything the Professor had wanted, and more “for Donnie” was Raph’s excuse for the excessiveness. There had been half of a day spent finding the right “restraints” for them until Mondo had said in passing that the things that Honeycutt was looking for sounded like an electric chair. Both chairs were salvaged from the basements of museums. Of course they tried other things but they were not as easy to “hook up” as Rockwell has put it. All of this tacked on two more days that Leo believed Donnie didn’t have.

During the time of gathering parts and making out schematics, Leo was watched. He was forced to rest, to eat, to sleep. He knew he had yet to fully recover, his eyesight was still blurred when he looked at anything that was farther than arm’s length. Nothing dramatic, more like fog on a lens that got foggier the farther away that things became. His father was certain it was because of how hard he had hit his head on the floor with Donnie’s weird transmitter helmet that did something to him. It should heal in time after all the headache it had caused was still throbbing in the back of his skull. With the straps from the chairs he would have less head trauma if he went into convulsions.

“There, finished.” Rockwell declared. He put a hand on his chin as he stepped back looking at the round machine. It had a stand like a bowl, the top bubbled out into a perfect sphere of patchwork white and gray metals. Two coils rose out it, wires fed down the tips of the coils down into the chairs and two rounded helmets. Leo recognized them… Mouser heads, modified, almost exactly like… Leo swallowed at the memory.

Captured, trapped in separate rooms, all different torture devices. Donnie was the last one to be saved. His body jerking from electrical impulses surging through his body. He couldn’t even help, in the end, it was Mikey that had saved him, not Leo. And all of that pain and near death for what? For Karai. For his obsession of helping her, of her feverish, crazed desire to kill Master Splinter because of a brain worm. Then what did he do? He rode on his high horse and continued to doggedly follow Karai, even after… even after the kiss at the barn. Even after shyly avoiding Donnie until they had their Spirit Quest. So many times had presented themselves for him to man up and say something, do something only for him to turn away. “He turned away so many times that his feet pointed the wrong way” as an old saying went.

He walked up to the seat made for him. He rested his hand on the arm of the recently sanded down wood, making sure they wouldn’t get slivers.

No more turning away. No more running. He was going to get Donnie and never, ever, let go.

“Before we go any further,” Honeycutt’s voice beckoned to the group to gather. “I want to make certain this is what you want to do. As I have said before, the technology here is primitive, there may be unforeseen consequences.”

“If you mean there are chances of frying our brains and dying, we already know Professor.” April hugged herself. “It’s a chance we gotta take.”

“Even with the odds?” The solemn question came from Rockwell.

Kirby looked to the mutant, “What odds? I was under the impression that they were slim.”

“I’m afraid not. Perhaps not speaking about the odds had lead you to believe such a thing. There’s an
eighty three percent chance of permanent brain damage, a seventy nine percent chance of… fatal injury.”

“That’s—that’s too risky! April you can’t-”

“I have to, Dad!” April barked back, the fire she once lost start to rekindle in her eyes. “You don’t understand! I have to make this right, I have to-”

Casey started to talk over April continued protests to her father. “Whoa, whoa, whoa! You’re saying they’ll most likely die, Monkey Man?”

“The name is Dr. Rockwell, not Monkey Man-”

Soon everyone was fighting for vocal attention. Each needing to be heard over the other. Shouts of “should have been told earlier” were said and “what else are you not telling us” grew as others countered with logic. There seemed to be so many voices climbing on top of each other that they started to blend together like an angered crowd. Leo already knew the risks, from what the Professor said before of it being dangerous due to the lack of proper technology, it was easy to guess. What he wanted to know was something far more important to him than his own life. He put two of his fingers into his mouth and blew hard piercing the racket with a sharp whistle.

Once he got their attention he put out his enquiry. “Professor, what is the chance of getting Donnie back?”

“.....................Three percent chance of him returning unharmed.” Honeycutt spoke up.

“Unharmed or not, what are the chances of getting him back?” Leo pressed.

“...Six, in total. Though there is a...a much higher chance of him being brought back in a state of decay.”

“Y-you mean we might just bring back a dead body?” April shook. “Then-then what’s the point of-”

Leonardo let out an infuriated shout. “How many times have we had lower odds?! How many times have we faced things that had less than a one percent chance of succeeding according to Donnie and we still managed?! If any of you have doubts that we’re not bringing him back home, whole and alive, then you should leave! Now!”

“Leo-” Mikey tried to speak up.

“Enough talk! April if you want to bow out then do it! I’ll bring him back by myself if I have to.” Leonardo stormed over to the large machine. He grabbed a helmet before taking a seat.

April hesitated before picking up her feet and moving forward. She sluggd him in the shoulder as she passed by. “You know I’m in this with you.” She said as she started to take her seat. “You don’t have to be a jerk about it.”

“Someone has to get everything moving.” Leo grumbled.

Rockwell heaved a sigh before setting himself to work on their restraints. Wrists, ankles and chests had to be strapped down snugly. The last would be to strap down their heads before the helmet could be properly placed on. Mr. O’Neil was already beside his daughter begging her to stop.

“Leo!” Mikey hurried to his brother’s side.
“You’re not going to talk me out of this.” The elder cast a stern eye.

“I don’t want to. What I want to say is: get him back fast, okay?”

Leo’s expression softened. He smiled, leaning his head back for it to be strapped down. “You got it little brother.”

“And…” Mikey hesitated feeling his skin prickle. “I think you should keep in mind what Sensei told us once. ‘With the spirit, anything is possible’, I think that’s what he said anyway.”

What a strange thing for him to say. That had been a rather obscure lesson when they had first started to learn how to meditate. Not many of them wanted to know how to meditate, Leo was even on the edge himself about it. At the tender age of seven there was so many other things he could think of that he wanted to do besides sit still. Telling four little boys that anything was possible with the spirit was a way to reign in their imaginations and coax them to sit down. Why would Mikey be saying that now?

Leo shrugged it off as one of Mikey’s weird ways of encouraging someone, kind of like his strange and disjointed motivational speeches.

“Thanks, Mikey. This will be over before you know it. Get ready to give Donnie one hell of a welcome home, okay?”

“You said hell…” Mikey’s expression changed from surprise to a big smile. “You got it.”

It was only a few more moments before Rockwell announced, “Everyone stand back… now, Leonardo, April… I don’t know what kind of physical experiences you will endure when I activate this. It is best that you brace yourself.” He took in a deep breath. “Are you ready?”

“Ready as I ever will be.” April swallowed, already feeling her palms getting sweaty from how nervous she felt.

“Let’s get this over with.” Leo shifted his hips.

“I’ll activate it in… 3…”

Leo closed his eyes. Taking a calming breathe through his nose. All he had to do was concentrate on Donnie.

“…2…”

He needed to grab him. Pull him through whatever portal this machine will open.

“…1.”

The initial feeling was something like a static charge racing over his body before it blossomed into a burn that dug deep into his skin. The fiery pain sent a chain reaction, exploding from his head ripping violently down his body all the way to his fingers and toes. Agony twisted his senses, tipping him onto his side, flipping him forward to tumble into an endless abyss. The scream that tore from him was barely heard in his own ears as everything focused on the devastation to his body.

Hitting a solid surface was the only thing that stopped the cry coming from him. The impact so hard that it forced the air out of his lungs. He coughed, short and shallow, trying breathe. He forced a hand underneath his shoulder. With a trembling limb he pushed gaining only a few inches of space between his chin and the ground. He heaved, gagging on suffocation. A horrid burn ripped down his
throat as his lungs expanded. Leo pushed his other arm under him, resting on his forearm as he choked for more air.

His limbs screamed at him as he tried to get up, his chest on fire as he got his breathing under control.

“D-” His body convulsed as a thick coughing fit took over. He managed to get himself up to his hands and knees only to tuck his head down as he hacked out a wad of foam. His head pulsed as the world swam around him. He had to close his eyes, concentrating on taking deep breaths in and releasing them out.

He didn’t have time for this. He needed to go. He needed to move.

Biting down on the disorientation he pushed himself forward. He felt as if he was wrapped in cellophane. Something held onto his body making it difficult to move. Looking down to his hands and arms he could see a strange iridescent light made of wires and mist coating him. The wires trailed off of him lifting into the darkness. His sight followed them until he was looking over his shoulder. Everything twisted around on him as he sat up onto his heels. The only way he could describe it was that it was a tear in the darkness that surrounded him. A jagged rip with the same substance around its edges that strung along like ropes of mucus attacking themselves to him. Beyond the tear was his family. Their eyes wide as they stared at him. They stood perfectly still except they were sideways. How did-

He looked over his other shoulder. He could see April, strapped down, hair floating around her as her eyes glowed white.

Had they punched a hole through reality? How come he was the only one thorough?

His attention was brought over to rip once more, it looked like it was dripping… bleeding. Some of the mucusy ropes at the time moved, slowly reaching over to the other side, clinging, pulling.

Whatever this was, this portal, it was the way out and it was closing.

He was running out of time.

Leonardo tried to push himself up to his feet only to have them collapse out from under him. He could feel the substance on him subtly pull, trying to get him back to the other side of the portal so it could mend itself. He didn’t belong there, in the darkness. Neither did Donnie. With determination he shoved himself onto his feet, this time he didn’t allow his legs to do what they pleaded for. He pushed himself further into the inky black in front of him. Each step he propelled himself forward with more vigour until he was running. With the restraints slowing him down he felt as if he was underwater trying to run.

He beared down on his lungs, bellowing out a firm, “DONNIE!!”

It didn’t sound like his voice had traveled. It didn’t even echo.

He tried again.

Nothing. Only the darkness. Only the iridescent glow of the filth covering him.

“Donatello! Answer me!!”

He whirled around, the portal was so far away now a pin prick in the distance. The glowing trail the only thing that linked him to it slithered along the black ground.
Panic prickled at his senses with the thought that if he was too far then getting back before it closed...

He screwed his eyes shut. He needed to focus on Donnie. He was able to talk to him. He was able to see through his eyes. In his dreams he was able to touch him. He needed to focus, bridge the gap between them. Remove all obstacles. How could he do that? There were nothing here. He could run and run forever and find nothing. There wasn’t even that damn radio!

An idea suddenly came to him. The radio. The radio itself! It was a message. It wasn’t just there for communication it was a sign from Donatello himself. A representation, a-

It felt as if something shifted in his surroundings. It was as if the environment itself had adjusted to accommodate something. It was the same feeling he got when he was alone in a room and one of his brothers silently came in. He looked towards the area that he felt the disturbance. Amongst the darkness was the military desk with the radio standing in the eerie silence.

Leo smiled. His genius brother… he was so many steps ahead of Leo. Something as simple as a radio and what it did took their leader this long to figure it out. The radio. It was the way to get to Donnie all along. The entry point, the exit. All he had to do was open it.

Mikey last words clicked into place. “With the spirit, anything is possible.”

This part was easy. It came with meditation, feeling his swords in his hands. The tight cords that bound the hilts, the leather under them. The sharpness of his blade. He held them so often that they left behind a lingering sensation like when someone takes a necklace off when they had worn it for months. Concentrating on that feeling, bringing it together, honing. He focused until he was certain he was holding his swords. Then he rose his hands above his head, bringing them down quickly. Even though there was no katana in his hands he felt the impact of blade on metal, hacking into it like an axe to wood. He sliced all the way down dropping his hips with his form to give leverage for a vicious chop. He watched as the radio split.

A terrible groan of metal twisting under pressure reverberated around him. It was so loud he could feel his bones rattle. A tear ripped open, the edges were dark and jagged like metal.

On the other side was Donatello, emaciated, sickly. He was covered in hap hazard bandages, one was now over an eye, brown with dried blood. He stared in shock with parts in one hand a screwdriver in the other. The tear he had created was the very one that would break open the hull to the submarine. The one that would push in salt water that would kill his brother over and over again. This time, water didn’t come through, only salvation.

“L...Leo?” He breathed.

He was breathing. Leonardo heard his voice! He was alive!

Leo moved to get inside and pick up Donnie only to be stopped. The mucus surrounding him constricted pulling him back. He dug his heels into the ground with little result.

He was being taken away from Donatello once more. Pulled by the very fabric of reality.

“DONNIE!!”

His brother jerked with a start snapping out of his shocked state. He scrambled up to his feet from the desk. He raced as quickly as he could to the rip.

“Donnie, PLEASE!” Leo feet were pulled out from under him. He reached for his brother with one hand as the other tried to claw at the ground. “Hurry!!”
Donatello grabbed at the edges of the tear. The sharpness bit into his palms and foot as he leveraged himself up. He was trying to run to Leo, his legs too skinny, barely anything besides skin and bone to carry him. His leg was splinted with old fabric and what looked like a section of pipe. He was so weak, in so much pain. He wouldn’t be able to make it.

“Push yourself!” Leo finally got his toes underneath him. With all his strength he leaped forward, arms flailing as he only got a few inches of distance to close between them. They were so close. So close! They could almost touch, just another foot and he could grab Donnie. Pick him up and run for the portal.

From the rip contorted shadows came. Their long limbs only illuminated by the piercing red lights that were once eyes. They were layered, one after another. Their eyes casting the shadow in front of them with a grotesque halo or red.

They wanted out too. They were the ones that kept Donatello. Kept him working so they could escape their hellscape. They would head straight for the portal, rush through and close it before it could put them back into their shadowy realm.

Leo could feel his heart hammering.

No.

Donnie used what little strength he had to speed up as Leo was dragged further away from him.

No!

The creatures that were once soldiers, sailors, pushed at each other. Their long limbs stretching out impossible lengths, reaching for anything to give them leverage enough to move forward. They tore at each other. A struggling mass of black and red surging forward as they drove over one another. The desperation to escape so thickly desired they were crushing anything in their path including themselves. The sounds they made were akin to what he had heard on the radio. Old time shows, different stations, switching between each other as they tried to talk all at once.

They were quickly approaching Donatello. The turtle shouted as his ankle gave out on him. He fell to the ground. Despite his pain he scrambled up onto his hands and good foot.

Blue eyes watched the horrible limp as Donnie scrambled forward, remembering the moment he had seen through redwood eyes when Donnie had broken his ankle and was desperately trying to get to safety.

The mass behind him was closing in. The radio voices grew in volume scratching like speakers that have reached past their capacity. The noise only got louder and louder, beating into their skulls.

NO!!!

Leo bore himself onto his hands and feet. The staticy screams of the soldiers was so loud he could feel it in his teeth. His body wanted to curl up, to cover his ears to try to stop the cacophony! He wouldn’t give himself that reprieve. He had a mission. He had to get to Donnie. He had to save him!

Using all his strength he clawed his way towards his brother, his restraints tightened, pulling harder. Doggedly he pursued. He wouldn’t leave Donnie. Not again, not after all that his brother had been through, not after all that Leo had experienced. He couldn’t live through that pain again. He wouldn’t live through it again.

Twisted hands grabbed at Donatello, fingers clawing. He let out a shout of pain as bandages were
ripped down, skin tearing. He was pulled down, hands grasping on to him. Clawing. Tearing. Ripping into him as the ninja tried desperately to struggle free.

“Leo!! Le-AAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!”

Donatello’s scream froze Leo’s core. His eyes widened as he watched the red eyed demons start to shift. They bleed into each other as if they were blobs of tar. Red light flickered being replaced with white teeth. Teeth he remembered biting into his very flesh. The staticy noise silenced into a choking rasp of air. The same kind that came from the shadow creature he had seen through Donatello’s eyes.

The sailors. They were the creatures.

The painful sounds that fractured his mind and made his skull ache in his dreams were the dying screams of the sailors before they turned into one of these monsters.

He had witnessed them run out of time.

Primal fear took hold of him. He saw the ever consuming creature grab Donatello, push him down onto his chest. Donnie’s frail limbs shook as they tried to fight it. Its massive form pressed Donnie onto the ground as it seeped around him holding him by many angles with many hands.

That was when the gasping mouth sunk into the scoot of his shell. Teeth digging deep, gaining purchase. The maw twisted breaking the fleshy stone that was shell. It tore away a chunk of its captive before it reeled back its head to start chewing on the chunk it had bitten off.

*He was being eaten.*

The hellish scream didn’t stop as the beast stretched, another blobby mass emerging with another set of teeth. The new mouth bit at another section of scoot, breaking, ripping, consuming.

The turtle’s screams intensified as he was being mutilated.

*Donnie was being eaten alive.*


Rage flooded forth overwhelming his fear. He didn’t think only acted. What strength he had left he rushed forward, pulling against the luminescent tendrils around him. Leonardo closed the distance between them. He could feel his swords in hand more solid than ever. Blades sharp and deadly lashed forward with precision. They cut into the tar, slicing deep. The cut split open releasing a multitude of staticy screams. Inside the gaping wound were eyes, red with light staring up at him.

It was only a moment’s breath before he brought both blades down once more cutting deeper. Limbs flailed as the scream continued, the movements broken and stuttered. It was completely inhuman. Long gone were the people that once were only to be replaced with this demon.

There was a sudden pull so powerful that it bent him in half, his hips going back towards the portal, his feet soon followed. He hit the bloodied body of his brother underneath him, sliding off as the fabric of the universe tried to push him back through the tear. His hands scrambled for purchase, anything he could get a good grip on of his brother. A belt, a bandage, scoots; his fingers dug into the bloodied edge of Donatello’s wounds, flesh and blood pushing under his fingernails as his brother shrieked and thrashed. Leo panicked, let go only to be pulled harder. His chin slid over Donnie’s head, slamming down on the ground.

It was a brief moment, half a heartbeat, yet it felt like he stared at the tired face of his brother’s for hours. A sunken in eye that was half lidded, the other covered with gauze with caked on blood.
Mouth open and panting, damage to his body so extensive that he was now trembling in shock. There was no light in his eye. He then closed his mouth and looked to his brother, to the leader he had so much trust in. Leo felt his heart stammer. He knew what Donnie was silently saying in that brief, tiny, half of a second.

Donnie had given up. Too weak. Too frail. He had fought as much as he could for as long as he was able. He was resigned... he was going to die there, pinned down and eaten alive.

Leo’s bindings constricted. The substance shifted, sliding over his skin and over his mouth. It felt as if he was being suffocated by thick plastic. He grasped at Donatello’s upper arms with a vicious grip.

He wouldn’t let go. Not now, not ever!

As he was pulled so was Donatello. Whatever was pulling Leonardo gave such a sudden jerk that he was certain he had dislocated both of Donatello’s shoulders. The jerk had dislodged the younger ninja. Leo took this time to do his own pulling bringing Donatello closer to him. He wrapped an arm fully around his brother, grasping onto his belt for a good hold. It was difficult to get his feet underneath him as he slid along the ground. He couldn’t do it. Instead he rolled Donatello onto him, he wrapped himself around his brother holding on tight as the pull gained in speed. He felt as if he was being pulled along from behind a car with as fast as they were going.

A rasping, hollow made Leonardo look. The monster rushed after them, its black body blending into the darkness. All he could see were two hungry mouths coming at them as red light bled through the cuts the ninja had inflicted.

Leo looked down, he could see shapes now outside of the portal. It was so small now, barely the size to fit them through.

The demon’s unholy call was closer than ever.

The portal was close now. He could see the light from it.

He could feel the impact of the demon’s limbs. So close as it used the many hands it had to run.

A pained whimper escaped Donatello.

Leo tightened his grip, slick blood soaking his arms. He buried his face against Donatello’s. They were going faster, picking up more speed. He could feel his skin rubbing off from the friction on his shoulder and side. He felt a clawed hand graze the top of his head as light engulfed them. Throwing them out on the other side of the portal. The momentum they had suddenly stopped, dropping them unceremoniously onto the rooftop like dead weight. They hit the chair that Leonardo had been strapped to. Leo refused to let go of his brother as they tumbled painfully down its back and seat.

An eruption of dark limbs pushed through after them, long clawed hands grabbed at Leonardo digging into his skin and shell. He let out a pained scream as he was attacked trying his best to move away and keep hold of Donatello.

“Close it! CLOSE IT!!” Mikey shouted as he and Raphael blindly launched themselves at the creature.

Leonardo’s head swam. He felt sick and weak. His vision darkened as his hearing gave way. The last thing he could remember was the blurred image of his father coming to him and the hard pounding of his own heart.
Chapter 20

Raphael kept his arms folded as he watched April and Leo get strapped into those awful chairs. The helmets made him uneasy. The way Leo held little regard for his own life made his stomach queasy. The low odds, the weird machine, April and Leo looking as if they were going through a public execution… it all made him sick. He knew he couldn’t change their minds. If he was in Leo’s place, if someone he loved so deeply was in Donnie’s situation, he wouldn’t stop at anything to get them back. It was the whole reason why he stood by. It was why he dug his fingers into his palm so tight that he could feel the sting of his nails digging into flesh. Silently he screamed. He cried inside of his head sounding like a scared little turtle that just wanted his big brother to make the monster under the bed go away. He had to stay strong though, so, for the first time in his life he prayed. Prayed to a god he didn’t know was there, begging for his brothers to be returned to him alive. That prayer repeated in his mind as he watched Mikey give Leo a final word. He quietly waited for his baby brother to finish and come to his side where he belonged. He flinched when Mikey reached up a hand and rested it on his shell.

Mikey didn’t say anything, only stood beside Raph, hand on his back in silent solidarity. They didn’t know what was going to happen. They had no inkling as to how this was supposed to work. It was all up to some crazy machine, the head of a android, a monkey mutant with the ego the size of Manhattan, and two people they dearly loved.

Rockwell then began to count.

“3…”

Raph felt Mikey tense.

“...2…”

He unfolded his arms. Mikey’s hand left his back. They fumbled their fingers together to hold hands.

“...1.”

They squeezed in anticipation as the machine was started. There were no sparks like with half the stuff Donnie made. It was silent as the air. Raphael breathed twice. A funny thing to remember, his lungs expanding once, then again, before April shrieked. Her fingers spasmed as her body tried to jump against the restraints. Leonardo screamed along with her, his toes curled as his body locked as if he was being electrocuted.

Raph watched with large eyes as Mikey shouted for their brother. All he could do was hold onto Mikey’s hand in a crushing grip. He could hear Casey shouting for April. The human went to rush forward. That was when Raph let go of his little brother in favor of grabbing Casey. His best friend struggled against him, shouting over the screams. No matter how much Casey yelled at him to release him, to go and help them, he couldn’t. Something inside of him twisted harder than ever making him want to vomit as he realized that he was actually remembering a lesson from Donnie; “If someone is being electrocuted, don’t grab them! You’ll fry too!”

Then something happened. Something he didn’t know how to describe. April stopped screaming, her eyes white as her hair floated freely around her as if she was in water. While Leo… he… It was as if Leo fell back, as he did a darkness was cut into sight. The slashed opening widened at least six feet. It seeped a glowing substance that coated the edge.
Was it… was it bleeding?

His grip on Casey loosened. The punk, having been using Raph’s grip for support fell forward onto his knees. Everyone stared at what was there. It was like a Kraang Portal only black. Inside was Leo trying to gather himself.

“Leo?” Raph called out. Could his brother even hear him?

He went to take a step towards it only to be halted by a hand on his shoulder. He looked over and up to see his father. He turned his attention back. Leo was now sitting up, looking over his shoulder at them but he was sideways, almost as if he was stuck on a wall. Just as he was confused himself Leo displayed his own curiosity trying to figure out what had happened. It was a brief moment as the next he was struggling to get up and move. Once he was on his feet he ran away from them deeper into the darkness leaving on a faint trail of light behind.

“A physical breach. That was unexpected.” Honeycutt broke the silence.

“What do you mean?!” Raph yelled.

“The machine was designed to help pull Donatello’s molecules together from the surrounding environment while Leonardo simply ushered your brother’s essence back to his physical body.”

“MEANING?!” Raph stormed over to the head of the professor.

“Meaning you should have seen at most Donatello’s body being reassembled and he would breathe or not.” Rockwell grunted as he got close to the portal. “This wasn’t even a possible outcome. Somehow, combining their two abilities made a portal.”

“Then we should go in after him! Help get Donnie back.” Raph reached for his sai.

“I don’t believe that would be a good idea.” Rockwell turned a sour expression to the young turtle.

“I’m afraid he is a right, Raphael.” Honeycutt’s soothing tone called for attention. “If you would observe the edges, the portal is slowly closing. Going into an unknown space, not knowing where you are to go, you could be lost forever.”

“I wouldn’t be alone! Leo’ll be there, we could find Donnie together.”

“What if that is not the outcome that you anticipate?”

“So what?! It beats waiting here and-”

“Raphael!” Splinter barked. “That is enough!”

“But-”

“I said, enough!”

Raph went quiet. All he could do was wait.

It felt longer than it actually took. The worry and anticipation warped his sense of time taking a few minutes and stretching them until it felt like he had been waiting for an hour. He couldn’t look away as the portal slowly stitched itself back together. It looked as if it was pulling itself by little ropes of that strange glowing substance making it smaller each time it did. He wanted to go in there, find Leo, help him get back their brother. But, as he shifted his weight from foot to foot, his father watched him. Made him wait. Wait out the long distance of time with slim hopes. The less he did the more he
felt time stretch. It wasn’t boredom that ate at him, it was the feeling of uselessness. He was sidelined all because he couldn’t do something to help. It made his skin itch and his heart feel heavy.

What broke him out of his lull and rocked him forward onto his toes was Mikey. His baby brother had been pacing but suddenly stopped. His wide eyes narrowed as he looked at the darkness inside the portal. Without a word he pulled out his chucks.

“What is it?” Raph looked into the darkness in the shrinking portal.

“Something big, bro. Something big and mean.” He started to whirl his chucks.

Taking his lead Raphael unsheathed his sai. He felt his fingers slip into familiar chambering. His muscles bunched, coiling in anticipation to move at any moment. He felt his heart beat in his throat. It took a few seconds but then he could see it. Something coming quickly towards them. The speed was as fast as a racing truck, barrelling forward. He braced himself for whatever it was to be shot out at him only to witness Leonardo and Donatello coming out of the portal at an awkward side angle. The force they should have been shot out with instantly dissipated. They fell down onto the chair Leonardo had been strapped to, tumbling down to the ground.

Next there was an eruption of limbs, long and distorted like pulled shadows. A deep cut in the black body leaked light that screamed like a radio station of static turned up to impossible volume.

“Close it! CLOSE IT!!” Mikey shouted as he and Raphael blindly launched themselves at the creature.

Claws flailed in every direction trying to gain purchase. It was only their rigorous training that kept the ninja from getting caught. Mikey’s natural agility allowed him to dodge while striking out with his chucks. The hard impact of wood and metal on pitch black arms yielded little damage. He took the risk to glance over to his brother to see how he was faring. It was a risk that he shouldn’t have taken. It left him open for the thumb of one of the grotesque hands to pierce completely through his left shoulder. He screamed as the hand closed, lifting him up. His shout of pain created a domino effect. Raphael looked over to see the trouble his brother was in only to have claws rake over the right side of his face. They dug in deep, ripping down, easily opening the thin flesh of eyelid and lips. He reared back, a hand going to his injury. His shouting only got louder when the claw came down upon him again tearing into arm and shoulder. He barely noticed Slash and Leatherhead both feeling the claws lash against them like the spiked tongues of a cat o’ nine tails.

Rockwell worked quickly turning the machine off. The eery glow of April’s eyes died away to slowly allow her natural eyes to become visible before they rolled back and she fell unconscious. The portal quickly sealed itself closed severing the limbs. The arms continued to writhe as they dissipated into smoke.

Raph stared at the spot with his one good eye, blood running down his face and side. It seemed eerily quiet now despite the hastened voice of his father. “They’re bleeding out!! Help me! Hurry!” Everything seemed still even with Mr. O’Neil, Rockwell, Casey and Splinter rushing to aid the wounded. It was strange. The stillness he was experiencing was difficult to explain, but he could identify it. It was the feeling of a false ending. Something more was to come.

“I can use my ability to stanch Donatello and Leonardo.” Rockwell quickly used his telekinesis to seal and put pressure on the large lacerations and gaping bloodied holes that revealed bone in places where shell used to be. He was careful to levitate them up, putting full concentration on his fellow mutants. “They need immediate medical attention.”
Leo watched the water below. It pushed and pulled in quiet waves that washed in and out of shore. The sound of it lapping against the dock’s legs was soft with the occasional loud plunk. Lights from the harbor reflected off the inky black sea. His mind was as listless as the water below. He felt as if there was nothing else he could do except participate in this endless push and pull of a life. Train, fight, few days of peace. Train, fight, few days of peace... all repeating like a broken record. He had thought going to the surface would be grand. That their lives would get better after discovering the wonders of the world. Instead they were constantly on the run, continuously fighting, fighting crime, fighting for their friends, fighting for their lives. The days when nothing happened he has found himself tense waiting for something to ruin the quiet. Recently, things had been slow. No alien invasion, no turf wars between gangs. His source of stress now was from home. He had found himself stealing glances at Donnie, watching him closely when April came over, calculating his reactions and... getting jealous of them. Seeing him laugh with her, put his arms around her; it cut deep. It ripped into him leaving a screaming void of despair. He had grown more depressed, seeking solitude in hopes to deal with his situation only... he would wallow in it. Feel it festering into a rot. He felt like an infected wound that was only getting worse, worse because he couldn’t reach out to Donnie.

He was helpless!

Powerless!

He- How was he supposed to talk to Donnie about that moment in the barn? When Donnie gave him that little kiss. How was he supposed to tell his brother, his BROTHER, that he could still remember the feeling of surprisingly silken lips, of a tender touch while he was handed his crutches, of his stomach winding up with the beat of his heart.

How-

A strange sensation raked over his skin. He put a hand over his mouth as he started to feel sick.

“You know, sometimes... I like to come here and just look at the water. The lights from the ships out there... the harbor itself, it’s like the water catches the lights making a star filled sky right below my feet.”

The leader closed his eyes as he took in a deep breath as Donnie spoke, the sickness washing away leaving behind knowledge of things to come.

He never wanted to forget that voice, the precious sound, the feel it gave him that everything will be alright.

He could feel his brother taking a seat beside him on the old, flaking wood. “I wouldn’t go swimming too far out though. I think this is the spot I threw that cursed dagger into the ocean from.”

Leo stayed silent, looking over to his brother. Was this really happening again? Another moment in time he was reliving?

Donnie’s gaze roamed over his face, brows pushed up in concern. “Are you feeling okay, Leo? You’ve been... well you’ve been acting funny recently.”

“Funny?” He pushed it out in a breath. Why was this happening again? How many times would he have this happen? How many times would he be so close to his brother only to have him ripped away once more? How many times would he have to fix things until they were right? Until Donnie was safe... He felt his eyes prickle with tears, the wind brushed up behind him pulling the tails of his
mask over his shoulder. All he wanted was for Donnie to be safe and sound.

“Leo…” Donatello hushed, leaning over. He raised a hand, his knuckle brushing over a forest green cheek. “…you’re crying.”

Leo’s hand came up, fingers feeling the coarse fabric used to wrap wrist. Memories of Donatello’s eyes begging for him to let go, to let it all end came flooding forward. Donnie had wanted to die. His brother wanted…. His Donnie….

His shoulders began to shake as the tears pearled down.

“Leo?” Donnie’s touch left him, tender eyes filling with concern.

The leader wrapped his arms around the genius. He squeezed him tight as he gritted his teeth. His brother inquired after him once more even when he returned the embrace, his voice more worried than ever.

“Leo… you’re starting to really worry me.” He rubbed gently at Leonardo’s shell. It felt good, reassuring.

Donatello was alive and warm in his arms. He had goals, desires, a passion for life. He slid a hand to the back of Donnie’s head. His brother allowed him to guide his head to shoulder, he -himself- buried his beak into the crook of Donatello’s neck.

His breath was as hot as his tears when he said, “Let me hold you, just let me hold you.”

Donnie only tightened the embrace as he felt helpless. Then he whispered, “I’m here for you, Leo. I always will be… Don’t forget it, okay?… I’m here… right here.”

The warmth of his brother’s arms, his breath, it dulled down into a numbness. He kept his eyes closed, his consciousness barely pulling forward out of a realm he still couldn’t understand. Thoughts slowly picked themselves up to wander aimlessly. The sensation of feeling ebbed in waves giving him small bits of information as it came before washing away. It made him aware of something around his beak making breathing different, not difficult but different. Something put a spot of pressure in his arm making it feel stiff. He tried to move his arm only to find difficulty. It was as if his body did not want to respond to his commands. He decided to try something easier, twitch his fingers. It took a great deal of effort to move them even a little bit almost as if he was breaking off dried, caked on mud. Once they moved, he flexed his fingers with more ease creating a tingling sensation that ran up his arm. It was a feeling he was familiar with, he got it a lot when he didn’t move during meditation for a long time. All he had to do was slowly work himself, limb by limb and he’d be able to get up off the dojo floor and see what his brothers were up to. Mikey would be in front of the TV no doubt, Raph probably would be punching the practice dumby or reading a comic, Donnie would-… Donnie would…

Memories came rushing forward swarming over him like thousands of crawling bugs. Panic stormed through him making his heart suddenly race and his breath pant.

He had gotten Donnie! But Donnie was hurt!! He needed help! He-

“Calm down, calm down.” A familiar voice soothed.

“D-” Leo tried to speak only to have his throat alight with pain. He tried to clasp at his throat but was stopped by a human hand. His eyes pried open a sliver, blurred light filtering in

“Shh, shh. You’re fine Leonardo and so is your brother. Let’s get you sitting up so you can drink
Leo started to raise but not by the aid of a hand. He was unfamiliar with it. Leo’s blurry vision made his eyes hurt. Everything was too bright. Now sitting up he could barely make out the humanoid shape in front of him.

“Kurtzmen?” His voice scratched so hard he was certain his throat was now bleeding. It was muffled too, why was he muffled?

“Yep.” The journalist pulled an oxygen mask off of Leo’s beak and brought a plastic cup up to Leonardo’s lips. “Drink slowly. Slow… there we go.”

The room temperature water felt like a cool fresh spring to him. It soothed the burning in his throat and satisfied a dry thirst he wasn’t aware he had. Once the last drop was drank his oxygen mask was resituated.

“I’ll give you some more in an hour. Don’t need you getting sick off of it after just waking up.”

Leo tried to look around the room. His neck felt stiff and all he could make out were large blobs of color that were mostly washed out due to the bright light.

“Donnie?” Leo raised a hand to shield his eyes.

“Right beside you… are the lights bothering you?”

“Y-yeah.”

“Let me get them.” Kurtzmen left Leo’s side.

The turtle squinted and tried to see where Donatello was only to have his vision too compromised. When the light was turned off a pressure released in his eyes. He blinked several times in relief. In a hospital bed next to him, too far for him to reach was Donatello. He was laying on his plastron, a tube fed through his nose and taped down. He was hooked up to an IV and little wires that made a machine next to him beep. Leo didn’t like the rail that was obscuring Donatello’s face from his view.

“How is it now?” Kurtzmen asked from across the room.

“Better.” Leo wasn’t lying. He could see better even though things were still a little blurry but at least Donnie was clear. He was right there, breathing. He tried to move only to be lanced with pain. He winced, gritting his teeth. “W-Where are we?”

“Careful, careful.” The human came up to his side. “Don’t move just yet. You have a lot of stitches.”

“I-I just want to be closer to him.”

“I’ll move the bed.” He pressed a peddle at the base of the bed that unlocked its breaks. He pushed it closer, their beds now flush together. “As for where you are, it’s an old part of Central Hospital. No one comes in here. I was able to pull a few strings and call in a lot of favors and I.O.Us to get the equipment and have this place to ourselves while you recover enough to move you back home.”

“Thank you.” The ninja really meant it. With this help he knew Donnie would be fine. Now all he had to do was get that pesky railing lowered.

Leo fumbled with the rail latch before he could lower it. He settled himself back down, his pain a dull throb as he took up his brother’s hand. He was warm. Leo could feel the bones in Donnie’s
fingers. Now that he was closer he could see just how skinny he was. He was almost a skeleton. He could see the joints of his elbow and shoulder. His cheeks sunken in, even his eyes.

“He’s um… he’s not going to wake up for a while.” Kurtzmen broke the quiet.

“Why?” Leo’s thumb gently rubbed at the back of Donnie’s hand.

“He’s in a medically induced coma. We thought it the best considering his state. He has a higher rate of survival if he’s kept asleep until the antibiotics do their job.”

“Antibiotics?”

Kurtzmen pulled the chair he had once been sitting in closer. He pulled out his phone and sat down. He started typing on it. “I’m not the best person to answer all these questions. Journalism, I know. Uncovering conspiracies, right down my alley. Medical, not so much. But from what I understand, he had some infected injuries.” He turned off his phone and set it to the side. “On top of that, the damage done to his shell, it’s too much for his system. Keeping him asleep while the medicine does its job and some time to heal, I believe he’ll pull through.”

“He will… He’s always been the strongest out of all of us…” Leo didn’t look away from his brother. He looked so small… “I’m guessing Rockwell is our physician?”

“He’s doing the best he can. Donatello’s surgery was hard on him, but as you can see, he did a good job in stopping the bleeding and closing him up.”

Most of the olive turtle’s features were bandaged or covered with a wire or tube. He would have to take the man’s word for it.

Leo felt the siren song of sleep pull at him. He kept a hold of Donnie’s hand as his eyes drifted close. He felt his bed lower and then a thin blanket pulled up to his chin.

“Get some sleep. You want me to wake you when your family comes? I had just texted them.”

Leo nodded his answer but before he could answer verbally he was asleep.
Chapter 21

When Leonardo saw Raphael’s head wrapped up and Mikey’s arm in a sling with his shoulder bandaged he felt his heart still. True to their personalities they told him that they were fine and just happy to have him and Donnie back. They found some chairs to sit down and talk in whispers with one another as if they were worried that they would wake their catatonic brother. All the while Leo held one of the bo master’s boney hands.

“Your eyes look really bad, bro.” Mikey smiled with his once lost vibrance while he kept quiet. “Like you have zombie eyes.”

“Zombie eyes?” Leonardo’s voice was thick and raw.

Raph looked around and found a small plastic set of cups and pitcher. He double check it for water before grabbing one of the small off pink cups and filling it. “You remember that time when Mikey had his skateboarding accident and hit his head real hard?”

Leo reached up with his free hand to an eye. He did recall it. They had always called it the “skateboarding accident” because it was the only time any one of them had nearly split open a skull. Mikey had been a rag doll for an hour after the wheel of his skateboard had caught on some garbage on the floor. It stopped the board but sent Mikey flying straight into the corner of a cement wall. He had collided head first. At first they had laugh at how much of a klutz he had been only to realise he wasn’t moving. They had been so young that none of them knew what to do at the time. It was the first time he had been looked to for direction. Upon instinct he sent Raph to find Master Splinter. He then looked to Donatello, asking what he could possibly do for Mikey. His little heart hammered in his chest. He was terrified that Mikey would not be okay. Donnie though… It was almost like a switch had been flipped in him. His hands were steady even though Leo’s trembled. His voice was firm and guided as they moved Mikey from his crumpled up state to lay flat on the floor. He supported their baby brother’s head with his knees as hot blood spilled out. Donnie pressed down on the gaping wound to try to stop it from coming out and he started talking. Leo had wanted to respond to Donatello’s question of “can you hear me?” when he realized he wasn’t the one being spoken too. Donnie, as firm and as gentle as he could spoke to Mikey to stay with them. To hang in because Master Splinter was just around the corner. As they waited Leo helplessly held onto Mikey’s hand while Donnie ran over all the plans that Mikey had been looking forward to. A new cartoon. A new batch of algae. His special one on one training time with Raph, which honestly was just a day where they could play video games together without Raph threatening to pound the poor kid. When Splinter came he took Mikey into the dojo and they were alone together. Leo remembered reaching over and taking a hold of Donnie’s sticking hand. He would always remember the squelching feeling of the blood as they gripped each other tightly. He reached over his other hand and grabbed Raph’s. They all squeezed their hands together until their knuckles were white. Scared. Thankfully Mikey woke up. One of his eyes was hurt, the whites of his eyes were all red making him look scary. Light hurt the eye and that was when they had their first lesson on how to bandage an eye properly by their father. For the next week they took turns changing Mikey’s bandage. Needless to say Mikey got a lot more algae and worms than the rest of them and a lot more attention too. Leo’s thumb ran over one of the knobby knuckles of Donnie’s hand as he recalled. “Is it that bad?”

“Yeah but both of your eyes are doin’ it.” Raph stuffed a hand behind Leo’s shoulders and helped him sit up enough to drink from the cup he held.

“Hopefully, it is not permanent damage.” Splinter’s hushed tone joined.

He had been silently sitting on the other side of Donatello before he decided to speak up. His
redwood eyes continued to look over the fragile form of his once lost child. He would gently adjust his blankets every once in a while. Other times he would skim his fingers over an arm or hand as if reassuring himself that the child that once used a spark plug as a pacifier was actually there. He was physically with them.

Risen from the dead, returned by divine providence.

His strong son.

His sweet boy.

“Rockwell’s coming to check up on you and D.” Mikey wiggled in his seat. “I’m hoping you guys get to come home soon.”

“We talked about this Mikey.” Raph put the cup of water and pitcher back where he had found them. “They gotta stay-”

“I know, I know.” Mikey groused. “Where they can stay clean and the sewers aren’t very clean. I get it… I just… I really…” He reached over with his good hand to rub at his upper arm trying hard not to touch his bandaged shoulder. “I just want you guys home.”

“We all want to be home.” Leo agreed. The sooner they could get home the sooner they would be safe. He felt too exposed in this building. It left an unease itching under his skin. They still had enemies out there. They still had people that would do anything to hunt them down and end their lives. No matter how happy he was to have Donnie back he could never forget the threat of losing him again or Raph or Mikey. The knowledge sat as a tight knot in his stomach. The only reason why he could rest now was that he was certain their allies were not foolish enough to leave them unguarded. Even having Kurtzman there when he woke up was at least some form of security, as little as it was. Though the reporter was no fighter he was at least aware enough to spot danger and call for help before anything too bad could happen.

In a feeble attempt to keep his thoughts from delving into worse case scenarios Leonardo turned his attention to the bandage around Raphael’s head. “You haven’t told me what happened to you, nor Mikey.”

“Oh it was crazy!” Mikey blurted out in his usual tone. The loudness made one of Leonardo’s eyes twitch as a pang drilled deep into his head. His little brother quickly hushed himself. “Sorry, bro. But it was super epic!” He bounced on his seat wiggling it closer to the bedside. “This thing came crashing out of that portal thing you and April made and it was all these crazy hands with even crazier claws! It was all swinging around like this!” He then threw up his hands and started to wiggle them around immediately regretting it as his shoulder protested causing him to swallow down a shout of pain. His free hand shot to his shoulder holding onto it as he cut himself short on his explanation.

Raphael immediately reached over telling him in a gentle tone, “I told you to take it easy.”

“I’m okay.” Mikey breathed through his nose a few times, his jaw tight. He made sure to paint a smile on his face and look his worried brothers in the eye repeating his reassurance. He then turned his attention to their father whose ears folded back told him that even their father was upset over the pain he was experiencing. “I think I just pulled a few stitches. I’ll be fine. Doctor Monkey Dude will fix it right up. No worries.”

“Just take it easy for a while. You need to be all healed up so that when Donnie comes home you can play videogames with him.” Leo’s brows kept knitted in his concern though he tried to put on a reassuring smile.
“Yeah,” Raph jumped in. “And the two of you can eat lots of pizza and chips and that weird cake only the two of you like.”

“Tiramisu.” Leo offered.

“Donnie makes the best of that stuff.” Mikey’s gaze settled on the silent turtle, barely recognizable under all those bandages. “I hope he’ll teach me how to make it…”

“He will.”

“……. so… um… what were we talking about?... Oh! Oh yeah, so this thing came busting out of the portal after you and Donnie. We started to give it a mega beat down, right? Slash and Leather Head are all jumping in to help. One of those freaky fingers went through my shoulder and one took off with Raph’s eye.”

Raphael saw the immediate concern taking shape in their oldest brother’s face. His color growing whiter as he made a sickly expression. He was injured, pumped full of who knows what kind of drugs to keep him from feeling the horrible pain in his legs and head. All he’s had was water and if he didn’t throw in some reassurances quick they were going to have some nasty stomach water coming out of Leo.

“Don’t make it sound like it was ripped from my head, Mikey. My eye’s still there. And before you worry yourself into a barfing fit, Leo, Dr. Monkey Brains says I’ll still be able to see out of it, not that great but whatever.” He leaned over. “We got Donnie back. I’d give my whole eye for that.”

He looked over to Donnie… so fragile looking and yet, he knew that Donnie was the strongest out of all of them. He went through a level of hell that wasn’t on any religious map. He endured it and came back. He was here and alive and breathing. And he would make him coffee every day, he would bug him to get sleep when he was staying up too late. He would cook him his favorite meals even though he was still new to the whole cooking situation. He would, he would…

Breathing was suddenly hard. His throat and mouth felt too tight and his chin kept pushing up. His vision blurred while his bandaged eye stung.

A hand reached up to him. He closed his eye as knuckles brushed against his cheek. Sniffling, he blindly grabbed at Leonardo’s hand and nuzzled until he could bury his face into an open palm.

Mikey’s voice was tiny as he got out of seat in favor of wrapping his good arm around his brother. “R-Raphie.”

He could feel the emotion tugging at him as well. So much had happened. It was hard to process any of it. They had tried so hard to stay strong and show nothing but smiling faces to Leo. They wanted to be the strong ones now, the ones that the family could lean on while Leo and Donnie healed. They wanted to be as supportive as possible to whatever they may need or want to do. All they wanted was Donnie to be home, to hear his tinkering, his crazy laughter when he had a mad scientist moment. They wanted to feel the peace of Leo taking his rightful place in the dojo, going through katas and running his life like clock work once more. To have Raph start to break down only made Mikey follow suit. Tears as big as pearls ran down his cheeks as he rubbed Raph’s shell.

“I-it’s okay, Raphie. It’s okay.” He didn’t know what else to say. It was an automatic response to something that couldn’t be placed into words.

“He’s with us,” Leo’s own voice cracked. “He’s with us.”

Splinter watched his sons as they shared their tears. He understood what they were going through.
As much as he wanted to wrap them all together in his arms he knew that this was a moment just for them. This was their way to heal and they had a lot of wounds that needed to be mended and he was glad that they were now on the proper path towards recovery.

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When Rockwell came the lights were turned on to a level of brightness that made Leonardo’s brain burst with agony and his vision flood with strange blurred pinpricks of light and distortions. He shouted, both of his hands raising up to try to cover his burning eyes. Raphael was instantly yelling but the pain in Leonardo’s head only made the sound of his brother’s voice a strange combination of muffled and sharp. Rockwell’s voice was much more subdued and seemed to be underwater. It took several deep breaths and a lot of concentration to even make out what they were saying.

“I can’t examine them in the dark.” Rockwell’s voice circled around to where he could access Donatello. “And as I have told you before - if you suddenly can produce a PHD and take adequate care of them I will continue to assess what conditions my patients are in and treat them as I see fit.”

“You’re such an-”

Raphael was cut off by Mikey, “After you’re done here could you look at my shoulder?”

“Believe you pulled some stitches again, Michelangelo?”

“Sorry for being a pain, Doc.”

The monkey sighed heavily as the sound of his movement wondered around the room. There were noises of drawers being opened, packages crinkling, metal clack down on a hard surface. They were all familiar sounds to Leonardo, when they got hurt Donnie tried his best to keep everything sterile and clean, which meant keeping things in packages and boiling an instrument that he would have to use that would touch living tissue. It was strangely calming to hear such sounds, though, he would have preferred to never have to hear them in the first place. He rather listen to the melodies of whirring fans of computers, grinding noises of whatever power tool Donnie was using at the time.

“Alright, back away, back away.” Rockwell was close to him now. “Leonardo, I need you to lower your hands and open your eyes, please.”

His voice was rather dead pan. In a way Leo was grateful for it, it wasn’t loud and aggravating his migraine.

He slowly lowered his hands and tried to open his eyes as much as he could though he could only managed a miserable squint. Long fingers came up and pried apart the eyelids of one eye.

“Lean your head back.”

Leo did as he was instructed, his eyes watered from the pain of the bright lights. Another light, a pen light, was shined directly into his vision. His hands flew up and grabbed a hold of the doctor’s forearm as he tried to keep his head steady. His teeth gritted as he was instructed to look side to side, up and down. When the eye was released he felt a great relief only to feel some dread knowing that it would only repeat one more time for his other eye. He easily endured it, thankful when the exam was over.

“Well?” Raph asked impatiently.

“Good news, Leonardo. You still have intact retinas. Though you have a great deal of damage.” Rockwell sounded tired. “I will make you some proper antibiotic eye drops and a numbing agent.
You will have to have bandages over your eyes for a week or two, depending on your healing rate.”

Leo felt someone up against him. He didn’t feel skin but the presence and judging by the aura he would have to guess it was Mikey. Breath brushed against his cheek as his baby brother whispered, “Will you be okay with that?” Mikey knew the value of seeing Donatello once more. To have it taken away made the youngest feel uneasy, he could only guess what Leo was feeling. Funny enough, Leo could take it. While he wouldn’t be able to see the blessed turtle next to him, watch his chest rise and fall with life, he could still feel the warmth of his hand, feel the pulse in his wrist beat.

“I’ll be okay but-”

As if reading his mind Raph cut him off, “Don’t worry about it. We’re not leaving you guys alone.”

The leader nodded, smiling behind his large hands that blocked out the light. A sense of pride welled up in him. A year… a whole year and Raph had stepped up while he stepped down. His hot headed brother had taken over as the level headed leader. He didn’t even know how to express it. Saying “thank you” seemed shallow. How was he to tell Raph how much he appreciated everything he had done for the family, for him? He would… he would have to put some thought into it.

“What about Don?” Raph’s voice held a sharp edge to it. Leo tensed.

The room went quiet as the mutant doctor went to check his other patient.

Please…

The snip, snip, snipping of scissors filled the room. Bandages rustled softly as they were peeled back.

...please…

Careful shifting. Rolling of a limp, frail body. The tending to the most injured was long. Each sound perforated straight into Leonardo’s memories settling deeply to haunt him. Each minute ticked by feeling longer than they ever could be measured. It was the smell of disinfectant and the clang of metal instruments that told Leo that the doctor was done.

“And Donnie?” Raph pressed again.

“...I…” Rockwell was hesitant. “...He doesn’t look good…”

No.

“It’s too soon to know if the antibiotics have taken hold… He’s… in a very fragile state and it would be very easy for him to heal… or… not.”

“There’s gotta be something you can do.” Mikey leaned against Leo seeking any sort of comfort. He was shaking. Arms wrapped around him and he realized he was the one shaking, not Mikey.

“I’ve done everything I can do and I will continue to do exactly that. ...but there is only so much a person can endure and Donatello… has endured a lot.”

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