

# Butterflies and Blizzards

18+

TEENAGE MUTANT  
NINJA TURTLES  
"TURTLECEST"  
FANBOOK

JANUARY 2010



# BUTTERFLIES AND BLIZZARDS

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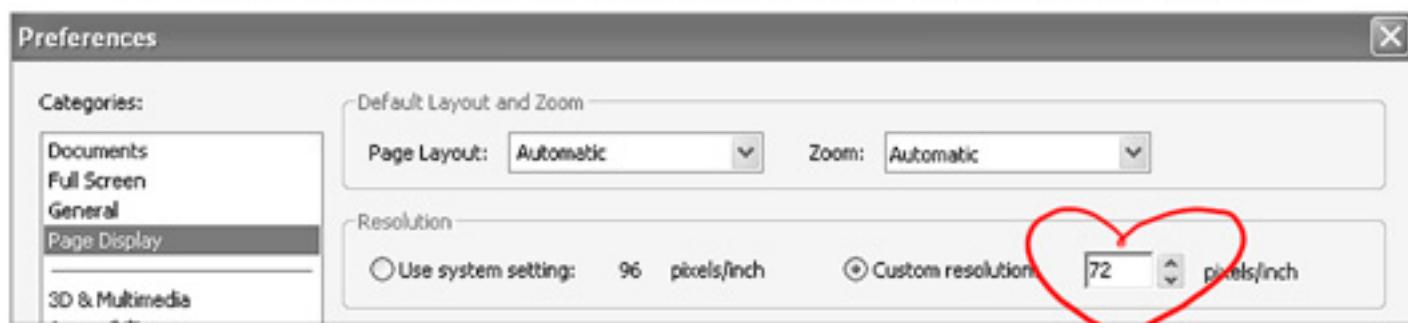
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# LEONARDO

BOOK 1  
WINTER



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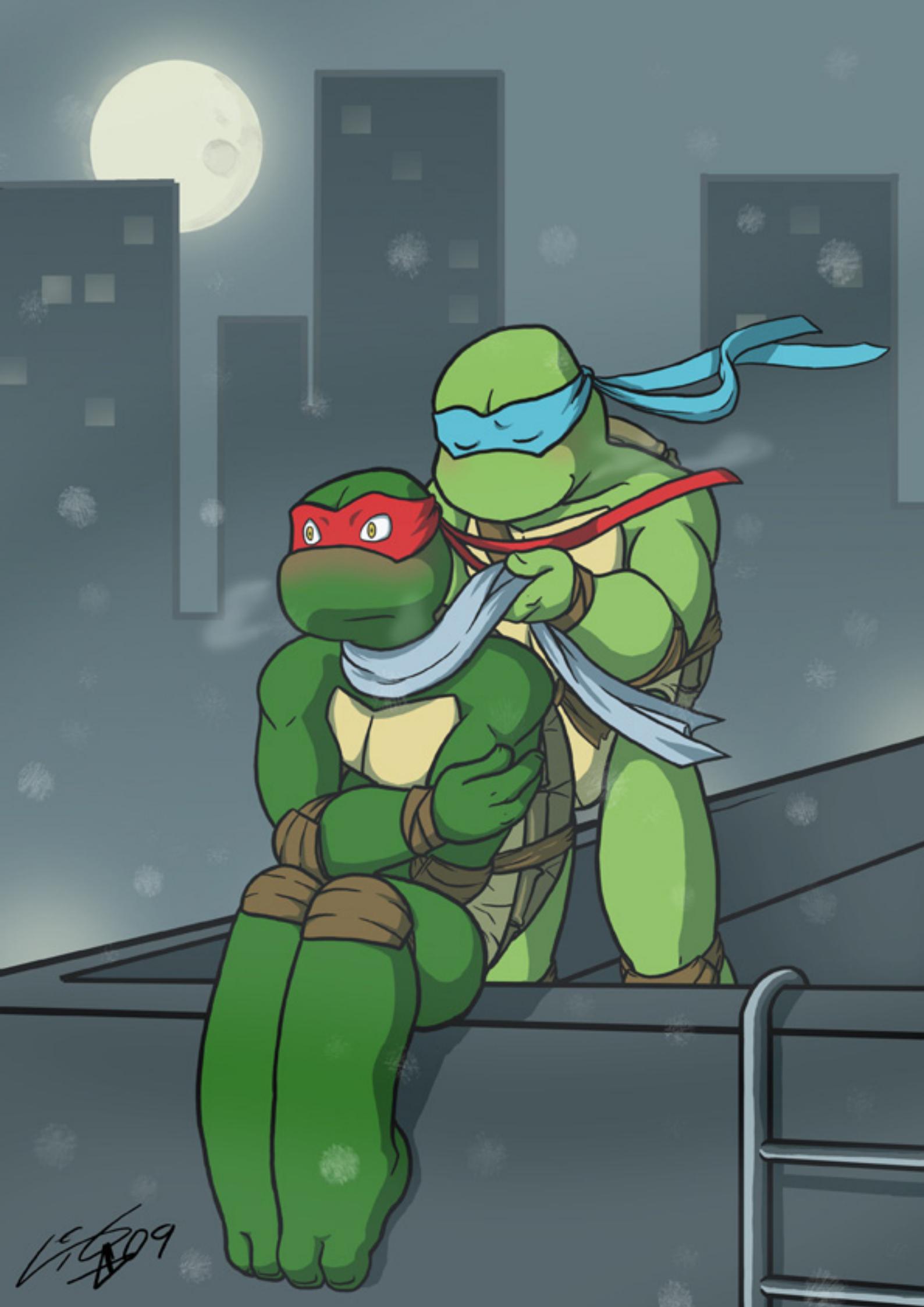


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VG 2009



# Coming Full Circle

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## Chapter 1

~Leonardo~  
Winter's Gale

~~~~~\*~~~~~

It was weird. He had never felt so frigid entering the Lair. For the first time ever, he felt like he wasn't welcome. Leonardo looked about his home after two years of being off on his grand training adventure, and he felt like he didn't recognize it. It felt like home, smelt like home, but it was so empty somehow.

Even after the greeting Donatello and Michelangelo had given him upon returning, it almost seemed forced to him; just as his being comfortable indoors after living out under the wide blue sky and leafy bows of a rain forest was hard to reacquaint himself with, Donnie was giving him that same strained frustration.

A month after the monsters, after Winter's final breathe, and seeing Karai again – the Lair still didn't feel like home. He still had no routine with his brothers or with himself. The only consistency he had was his afternoon tea with Splinter. It was a pleasant thing, but he still was so lost concerning his brothers.

And there was something different too. Mikey had explained that Don and Raph had been fighting more since he left, but he wasn't so sure he saw that – it was like they were egging each other on, dancing around the real issues that they never said aloud. He wanted to sit them both down and demand to know what was wrong, but feeling the glares from Raphael and the cold distance Donatello had adopted in his presence he wasn't sure his demand would be met – in fact, he had a vision of Raphael and Donnie momentarily pushing their differences to the side simply so they could kill him for trying to pry into their personal fight.

"Hey, Leo?" Michelangelo called as he knocked on the door.

Sighing and building up strength to deal with whatever Mikey was about to throw at him, Leonardo finally crawled out of his bed and stood, "Yes, Mikey?" He called and began dressing himself.

"I was just checking to see if you were up. I have a birthday party in about two hours, just thought ... you know... maybe you'd have breakfast with me?"

Leonardo faced the door, a bit surprised. He knew Mike had a job as a birthday mascot, but to hear Mike say it and comprehend that he was dedicated to it was weird. He lashed his katana to his back and headed to the door, his mask hanging from his belt

as he exited his room, coming face to face with Michelangelo. He hesitated and shifted backwards slightly as he nodded. "Uh, yeah... I'd like that."

Grinning up at him, Mikey grabbed his wrist immediately and tugged Leonardo towards the kitchen, reminding Leo of that time when they were kids when Mike had desperately wanted to show his older 'bwoffer' the pet snail he had acquired and made a home for in an old tin can with leaves and some grass - he had even put a little daffodil inside to make it pretty for Charlie, the racing snail. That snail never did win a single race. It made him smile – at least some things wouldn't change.

"Awesome! I even woke up early enough so I can even make something good like waffles or pancakes! What do you want? I got all the good stuff too, like peanut butter, strawberries, whipped cream, chocolate syrup, pepperoni!"

"Mike, seriously." Leo scowled.

He grinned, so sweet and innocent, a dazzling display that made Leo smile right back.  
"You know I'm jokin'. Pepperoni is only good on eggs."

"Amen to that." Leonardo nodded, opening the fridge to hand Mike the necessary ingredients.

"Now I want eggs too." Michelangelo whined and gazed up at Leo, batting his eyes.

He gave in without any fight at all. How could he not? With eyes like those he was surprised the Shredder hadn't given in to Mikey in the past. "I thought this was a welcome home breakfast. Why do I have to cook my own breakfast?"

"Because you cook better eggs, that's why. No one can make a mean pepperoni omelet like you!" Michelangelo explained, grinning from ear to ear and blue eyes twinkling.

Leonardo frowned, attempting to look annoyed, but it was all for show. "All right," He sighed and reached back in to grab the carton of eggs, a bag of cheese, pepperoni and whatever else he found in the fridge.

Mike started off the cooking session with a hum and a swing to his hips as he danced and sang while cooking. It was humorous really; watching Michelangelo shake his tail like he was a Go-Go Girl. And having him by his side had lifted all those fears from Leonardo's shoulders.

He gazed at Mikey and smiled, knowing his brother was just being his wonderful himself without even trying. "Hey, thanks." He said suddenly and darted his eyes back to his work at hand, cutting and slicing food to prepare it for the omelet.

"Huh?" Michelangelo grunted, questioning what he meant by that.

Leonardo smiled, a bit of the guilt for having been gone so long was fading. "Thanks – I just... I feel happy. Thanks for inviting me."

It was funny watching Mikey's expression change. It was like he didn't realize what he had done till Leo had pointed it out. His smile softened but was more genuine, and his blue eyes sparkled with a timid joy at being told he did a good thing without trying to do so. He shrugged and bobbed his head. "Yeah, anytime, Leo. I'm glad you're home

after all."

Leo smiled faintly and looked away, feeling a bit flustered nonetheless by that. "Uh... it's good to be home." He whispered, focusing on his slicing as he cut up some mushrooms.

Michelangelo giggled and elbowed Leo in the side. "That's so sweet – enjoying my company. And here I thought you were only helping me for the food." He teased.

Leonardo shook his head and smirked. After so much tension between him and his other two brothers and even with Splinter to some degree, this was a relief. He felt like he had suddenly escaped to some unknown land that he had wished he had discovered long ago. He nudged him back with his elbow, smiling down into the bowl as he began to mix the eggs and ingredients together before pouring the contents into a frying pan. "I am. Your pancakes are the best after all."

"Flattery will get you nowhere." Mikey scoffed and waved his ladle, flinging batter across the kitchen and across Leo's face.

Breakfast was casual and Leonardo smiled more than he had in a long time. They piled peanut butter onto their pancakes and poured the syrup, mixing jams and jellies, fruits and creams. And they enjoyed breakfast together. Leo smiled and they talked.

Mikey invited him to breakfast the next day and everyday that followed. Leo eagerly accepted and came to love his mornings with his brother – they warmed his heart.

~~~~~\*~~~~~

He smiled as he watched his family linger. Even with the threats Karai's new order of ninjas and the lingering possibly for far more powerful enemies on the rise, Leonardo took a moment to enjoy the sight of his brothers together. They were happy and free. They were where they could forget about the persistent issues that clung to the air around them like a fog that Leonardo acknowledged and tried to fix so they could remain like this – laughing, smiling, punching each other in the arms, and being given a chance to enjoy life.

But it never lasted for Leo himself. Raphael noticed him watching them from the archway and Raph immediately lost all mirth. Donatello followed his gaze and Leonardo watched Donnie's face fall from laughter to annoyance in slow motion.

"I'll be back later guys." Don announced and turned and left, disappearing into his lab without a second look.

Raphael snorted and shook his head, scowling down at something.

Michelangelo watched his brother leave in confusion and looked to Raphael for answers. "I don't get you." Raphael said suddenly. "He ditched us and he expects—" Raphael stopped himself and he threw his hands into the air, not even wanting to get started. His self restraint manifesting itself unexpectedly and he took it out on the can of beer he had smuggled into the lair, crushing it with his fist.

"Raph, don't say that." Mike frowned, "He didn't—"

"Whatever." Raphael glared, staring directly at Leonardo. "Not like it matters." He

marched out of the kitchen, tossing the can into the garbage. "I'm headin' out ta Casey's." He grumbled, brushing past him swiftly and jogging up the stairs taking them two at a time.

Leonardo frowned and watched Raphael grab a coat and hat to protect him against the snow and wind before he left. He glanced towards Donatello's lab and the closed door before he gazed back to Michelangelo in the kitchen.

Mikey looked away and sighed heavily, his shoulders falling. "You have to understand, Leo, you told them you'd be back at a certain time and you... you broke that promise. You've never done that before; not like this anyway."

His heart hurt. He physically could feel his heart shattering and drop into his belly like broken glass. It had never occurred to him that they would be so dependent on him returning when he said he would. It was more of an approximate time frame to him.

Even so, only a few months should have been the longest he was gone – not a whole twelve months longer tacked onto the end of his yearlong training.

"Maybe I should go talk to Don." He whispered.

Michelangelo bobbed his head, fidgeting with his fingers in his lap, "Yeah. I know Raph is all in a huff, but I think it hurt Donnie the most."

"Right." Leo whispered and turned away, walking up to Donatello's door. He knew where Raphael stood – after all, they had duked it out like wild cavemen on the roofs of New York. He understood that on some level, Raph didn't care anymore; but he was holding it against him for another reason – and he was beginning to wonder if it had anything to do with the looks he occasionally saw Raphael lingering on their resident genius. He knocked lightly before pushing the door open.

Standing in his room, holding the door knob and staring at the back of his brother's head was frightening. Somehow knowing that Donnie was pointedly ignoring him scared him. Raphael was famous for his quick temper, but getting Don mad enough to be quiet made him the most terrifying of all the brothers. He was like a volcano, bottling up his rage and emotions. The blast could knock everyone off their feet, cringing in pain as his words burned their skin like fire and his cold whispers left them deaf, unable to comprehend the tumultuous words tumbling with precise conviction from his lips in rapid succession to the point they couldn't keep up with the abrupt topic changes.

The last time Donnie had been this mad, they were seventeen, and before that, when they were eleven. The glimpses at the ice storm that had previously been unleashed were nothing to what he felt brewing now.

"Donnie?" Leonardo croaked out, shifting where he stood at the door.

"What?"

He was so cold. Rubbing his palm against his thigh, Leo took a deep breath and stepped further into the room. "I was just thinking we haven't talked since I got back."

"What about it?" Donatello snapped.

He wasn't even sure if Donnie realized just how harsh he had sounded right then. Had he meant to bite his head off with just three simple words?

Shuffling further into the room and breathing deeply, Leonardo tried to clear his throat, "Well, about what went on while I was gone-

"Don't." Don hissed, causing Leonardo to cringe and look away. "I have no desire to do this right now, Leo."

"I just want to-

Swiveling in his chair and pushing himself up on his feet, Donatello stalked up to him, his hands shaking at his sides. "That's all it is, you know. What you want. Splinter gave you that mission, but really, you wanted to go. You wanted to get the hell out of this place after everything with the Shredder, with the Utroms, with Karai." He whispered.

Leonardo took a step back, his cheeks flushing and his hands shaking at his sides. "What? You-

"Of course I knew." He scoffed, glaring at him and folding his arms over his chest to keep his hands from shaking any harder. "But I couldn't say a damn word. Karai isn't the reason I'm angry – it's you leaving us so you could go off into God knows where to nurse your injured pride." Donnie scowled, shaking his head, "So what? I don't care anymore." Venom practically dripped from his lips after that remark. Leo swore he saw it – mixed in with the freezing breath and icicle daggers shooting from his eyes. "What I hate is that the reason you stayed gone was simply because you couldn't even buck up the courage to come home when you said you would!"

Shaking his head in denial, Leonardo stepped forward, forcing Don back a step. "You think you know me? Just because Karai and me..." He paused and inhaled, trying to remain clear headed about all of this. "I left to become a better leader. I was emotionally compromised. Splinter saw that and I agreed." He folded his arms, eyes narrowing. He wasn't used to fighting with Donatello, but after years of dealing with Raphael he wasn't about to back down from a fight that wasn't entirely based on logical terms.

"No, you left to get away from it all. You found a place that all you had to worry about was yourself. You left me here—" Donatello's eyes quivered and Leonardo winced, "you left me here alone, not knowing what the hell I was supposed to do, how to deal with everything, and you left expecting me to be you. You left leaving Sensei under the impression I would be you."

"I never expected you to be me!" Leo shouted suddenly, his hands flinging away from his body. "You weren't supposed to be!"

"Yes I was!" Donatello shouted, tears welling in his eyes and his face flushed as his emotions and anger, all his stress and loneliness came rushing to the surface. But he bowed his head and trembled, breathing shakily and not moving for a very long time. It wasn't until Leo was about to reach out to him, to place a comforting hand on his brother's shoulder to whisper he understood the pressures that Donnie finally spoke again, his voice calm and quiet like frigid waters lapping against ice. "You left me with them and I didn't know how to be a leader like you. I like being their brother, but when I try to be their leader I can't do it. I don't know how to order them to listen to me and I can't deal with facing their lives with the possibility of death around every corner and

my word being the final decision.

"I'm a scientist and I'm an inventor! I create for a living. But.... instead I'm stuck working a job I hate to make up for you being gone and our income disappearing." He was shaking again. It took several deep breathes before Donatello's eyes rose and met his. They were no longer those warm depths that made him weak in the knees and want to do anything for his younger brother, they were hard and glassy.

"What made the whole situation worse was that a brother whom I thought loved me suddenly hating me because I couldn't be his best friend who he took out his frustrations with."

Leonardo didn't know where to start; it was all coming out so fast and so honestly. The tears that threatened to well up in Donatello's eyes also kept him at bay – Raphael didn't cry like this, even Mike didn't cry like this. Only Donnie left him this helpless for having failed him so miserably.

"I should have been able to handle it; yet I can't even tell Raphael to stay in for a change. I can't convince Mike that everything was okay anymore, and I can't even look Splinter in the face because I knew he was disappointed." Don shook his head, those tears again appearing at the corner of his eyes. "I'm useless! I can man the troops for a short while but not all the time. I couldn't focus anymore and I still can't sleep! All I see are nightmares of being alone in a sea of red from the blood of my brothers–"

Something painful welled up in Donatello and Leonardo felt his own lungs lock up and deprive him of air as tears fell fast hot and heavy the moment Donnie broke.

"I hate that I couldn't handle it and gave up. I gave up! I just didn't care after a while. I worked hard so I could hide yet, I hate my job. I hate Raph for fighting all the time with me over stupid things, and I hate you the most for leaving." Donatello hissed. Though he never shouted or screamed at him, everything had come out so fast. Donnie's whole body trembled from releasing the pent up feelings and Leonardo could only stare at him, his mind trying so hard to comprehend what just happened past the sickening realization that Don hated him.

Wiping his eyes in a subtle way as though trying to hide the fact tears had indeed fallen, Donatello breathed in slowly and shaking his head to clear his thoughts. "You said you would be back and you never came back. I thought you might have died. I trolled the internet for months looking for news on you, but when I didn't find anything, I knew you had left. You didn't even write us. You didn't care enough to even consider how much this has aged Master Splinter. Not knowing where you were took a toll not only on us, but on him too. He waited every day, hoping you would call, hoping to get a visit from April saying she had a post card from you, waiting for anything. But nothing; nada; zilch."

Don waved a hand between them, cutting Leo off before he could say one word. Donnie shook his head and when he spoke, he was so much calmer; scarily calmed and focused. "No. You gave up, Leo. You gave up on your own family. Well guess what, I did to. I gave up on you."

He turned away then, walking quickly towards the door and trying not to absorb that last part. Leo felt his shaking fingers grasp the doorknob. Leo had almost expected Don to stop him, to apologize, to just say something to his retreating shell – but nothing. He opened the door and found Michelangelo standing three yards from the door, waiting.

Mikey didn't move till the door had closed behind him. He ran forward and Leonardo found himself enveloped in a hug.

Leo found himself buried in shaking, tropical green flesh. He stood there a moment, his hands on Michelangelo's hips – and before he knew it, he was hugging him, hiding his face against Mike's neck to escape the guilt.

"It wasn't your fault." Mike whispered, cupping the back of his neck.

"I said I would be back–"

"And you did come back. Donnie just missed you. He was ready to hand everything back to you, but you didn't show. Raph got mad and Don didn't know how to deal. It was like watching a slowly spiraling plane crash." Mike explained and Leo shivered, his brother's fingers tickling his neck slightly where they rubbed. "Don felt – he felt like he was abandoned."

It didn't help, hearing it coming from Michelangelo as well. Leonardo shook his head and tried to pull away, his hands gripping tightly at Mike's upper arms. "I did screw up–"

Mikey held on though. He practically climbed Leo's body to keep his hold on him.

Falling back against the wall, Leonardo grit his teeth and hissed. He was trembling. He knew he was in the wrong, but he didn't want to fall apart like some inexperienced child.

It was the kiss that distracted him enough to momentarily forget his worries. Leonardo drifted in the kiss, feeling still and calm for just a fraction of time, like the sun was shining above, the sounds of the jungle rustling around them and the heat of the moment clinging to them like the jungle humidity. He tasted something he had entertained thoughts of only briefly before banishing them for fear of – of rejection.

Chaos raged inside of him and those tempered thoughts forced him to jerk his head back suddenly. Leonardo stared up at Mikey. He felt his lips tingle and the kiss felt as though it was continuing. His face flushed and colored darkly and in the end he didn't know why he broke it off except for his own selfish reasons for punishing himself.

Michelangelo looked away, blue eyes scared and staring at anything other than him. "I knew you would come back no matter what. Just like I told you before; I knew you might be gone for a while, but you always keep your promises – just sometimes they get pushed back is all."

"Mike..." Leo whispered, touching his own lips in disbelief.

"Just... don't go away again." Michelangelo whispered, gripping at Leo's arms and bowing his head against his chest.

He felt cold. The abruptness from the warmth of the moment to the chilling effect his words brought on. Leonardo turned his face away and he moved, pulling away from him. "I had to stay longer. I was still confused." Leo turned slightly to look at Mike, staring at him with sadness. "I was gone too long, wasn't I? Donatello wasn't overreacting, was he?"

Mikey hesitated and seemed to fumble with how he would response. His eyes darted here and there, he could practically see the hamster working overtime to crank out lies or excuses. It just made him feel that much more numb and disconnected from the moment. Leo felt his heart hurt when Mike still hadn't answer. He didn't need this right now. He already desired for another kiss from him; but he had just gotten over one heartache, and now wasn't the time to hide behind one issue from the revelation Mike's words would reveal about another issue.

"You never told us where you were or... or why. We; even I was beginning to fear you had gotten sick or, or captured – or perhaps even died. It was hard not knowing what was going on." Mikey admitted, looking away from him.

"So you really didn't think I'd be back?"

Michelangelo shot him an alarmed looked, "No! I did! I really believed you'd be back!" he exclaimed, desperate for him to understand that as well as the flip side of the situation, "but... ya gotta understand, Leo, doubt creeps in. Hearing Don and Raph fight, not getting any letters from you – not even when April saw you down there did you tell her anything for us." He looked down, and Leo was struck by how small Mikey looked. "I... I was starting to believe maybe you didn't want us around."

Leonardo shook his head, his fingers tightening on his brother's arm and he even pushed into him, trying to command his attention. "I do want you around, Mikey. I was just lost for a while. I was trying to... to come to terms with something."

"Over what?" Mikey suddenly snapped, his brows knitting and his eyes flaring with fight. "What could possibly have happened to make you ditch us?"

Wincing and pulling away, Leo again felt that pain in his chest. "It's my business." He hissed. Mikey had lied. He hadn't forgiven him and he hadn't believed he would return.

"It is our business, Leo!" Mike croaked and Leonardo looked back to him quickly, watching Mike's fight continued to grow even as the misty coloring in his eyes took over. "You were gone and I was scared. Not even Splinter would tell us why you left other than for leadership training – which is bullshit; no one would leave that long just for that. What are you hiding?"

Leonardo folded his arms and lowered his eyes, shaking as he mulled over the question. There was no reason for him to hide anything. If his brothers no longer believed in him, what kind of leader would he be? It would be better to confess everything and let them adjust than continue to be the traitorous older brother they were making him out to be.

Sighing, Leonardo bobbed his head. "Before everything happened with defeating the Shredder, Karai and I... we had grown in friendship and... feelings began to develop."

Michelangelo shook his head, a scowl forming. "No... Not... Did you fuck her after she beat the hell out of us? Is that why you went crazy when she sided with tentacle-butt shred-head?"

Fumbling with his words, Leonardo shook his head, slightly shocked at Mike's language. Sure none of them were angels, but even Raph didn't use that term unless really pissed. "N-no... we never–" but he couldn't even finish his protest. Donnie's door opened and he suddenly had two brothers staring directly at him. What he had said was true, but

but the look on Mikey's face somehow drove home what Splinter had told him years ago before sending him on his training. The cold look within Donnie's eyes forced him to admit that just perhaps for the first time in his life he had finally done something so stupid as to warrant a true punishment. He had always been the good son, the son that didn't get in trouble, the son that set a good example for the others. He was the son that studied hard and trained harder because that's what their father wanted as well as his own desire to actually be good at something for once in his life.

He had to wonder if this was what Raph felt like most of the time.

Michelangelo looked down once Donnie looked his way. He sighed and rubbed his arm, his shoulders hunching just slightly as he seemed to calm down. "Sorry... shouldn't have snapped." He apologized, yet he was unable to look at him.

Standing in the middle of them and seeing how his brothers now saw him, Leonardo couldn't help but hate himself as well. He looked away, his mind reeling as he tried to digest it all. Mikey was right, he had done something he would have yelled at his brothers for doing; and the same with Donnie. He had left with no warning and then no updates as too when he would return officially, only a vague date and he ended the subject. He should have known better, Don needed specifics in his life to keep everything organized and neat. He had ruined that for Donnie. Raphael – for all his gruff resistance – he needed those rules and consequences to keep him in line to feel wanted and appreciated. And Mikey – Mike needed the support having his family all together achieved.

He had destroyed everything by not keeping a one year training promise.

Donatello snorted to his right and he walked away, heading up the stairs and was soon out the door with his own winter hat and coat. He could feel Michelangelo looking at him, but he couldn't bring himself to look at him. He felt like a selfish coward.

Mikey shuffled away from him at that moment and Leonardo flinched.

He had his reasons for staying longer; though he was beginning to think his brothers would find his excuses weak. Though his guilt was hard pressing – he couldn't stop his mind from wandering and leading him back to why that kiss had made his heart flutter, his belly flip and his hands sweat from staring into blue eyes after such a sweet kiss. He hadn't felt that intensity before – though the symptoms were not dissimilar to what he had felt when Karai and he had gotten chances to be alone. It was far more powerful. Mikey made him shake when he touched him and Leonardo found himself smiling – something that had been rare and far between in the last seven years of his life.

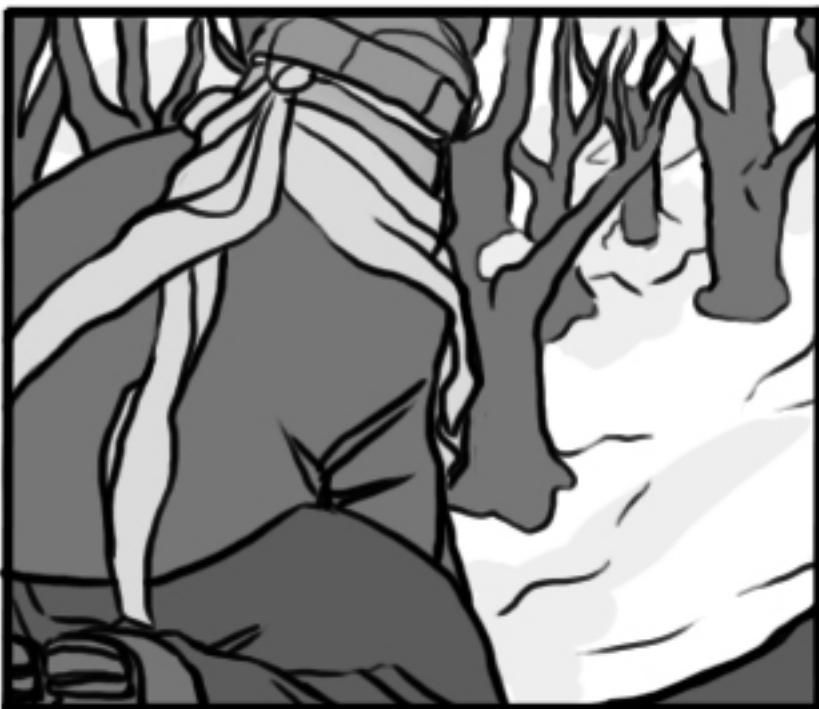
Leonardo hissed and turned, cursing and pacing, trying to find something to do yet unable to focus. He was feeling so much, his body felt ready to explode from the overloading information. He wanted to sift through them all and find his answers now, but he couldn't, between trying to find a way to fix the relationship rift he had created by being gone for so long and the budding blooms of love, Leonardo was lost in a cloud and was unable to see any path lying before him. He just wanted to solve these problems.

And he wished his lips would stop feeling phantom kisses ghost across their breadth.

**Fin**















END



## A Warmer Winter

I want them to be happy; I honestly do. Not just because they are my brothers, and we're a family; but because they deserve it. There isn't much for us to look forward, living under the city and sentenced to staying within its shadows. I smile indulgently at them, at their teasing and flirting with one another. I tolerate the blushes, the overlooked innuendos. There's very little chance of us finding someone else to share our lives with so intimately; who better to turn to than each other?

And, again, they *deserve* to be happy. I want them to be happy.

This isn't meditating. I came into the dojo tonight to try to clear my head, to try to get a grip on my own torrent of emotions. Yet, their distance laughter from the living room keeps seeping in like a thin fog that continues to chip away at my resolve.

I've always loved Donnie's laugh.

I've always loved *Donnie*.

Before I had left for my training, we had begun to spend more and more time together. Most of the time, we merely stayed up late into the night talking about so many different things—from a new project or invention of Donnie's to a new training or battle technique I'd been contemplating. I'd grown fond of our time together, finding myself looking forward to it earnestly. I didn't know at the time if Donnie shared the same feelings—the same longing to learn every curve of muscle, trace every sinew. I'd been afraid of upsetting him in my presumptions so I said nothing. I resigned myself to be content with the small caresses of our hands or the way Donnie would lean up against me as we'd sit on the bed conversing.

I almost didn't leave for my training because the thought of being away from Donnie, of missing our talks, was unbearable. But, I had to do what was best for the team—for the family; there was no place for my own selfish needs. It was only when I was away that I realized I loved him beyond the traditional definitions of brotherhood.

I became confused and worried. I couldn't be allowed these feelings. I have a responsibility to *three* brothers, not just one. Would I even be able to obtain Master Splinter's blessing? Could I keep an emotional balance between the platonic love between two of my brothers and the passionate love for the other? And, what about Raph and Mikey? What would *they* think?

I stayed away an additional year analyzing, thinking, and attempting to train my heart to let go of that which couldn't be mine. But, all I really succeeded in doing was proving how much I missed Donnie...and how much I did love him.

I'm jarred from my thoughts by a boisterous laugh, as strong as if I'd been slapped in the face.

*Mikey...*

I frown as the unfamiliar, yet more present as of late, flames of discontent simmer within me. I shouldn't feel like this towards Mikey, my baby brother of all people. I should not feel so...*jealous*...

*Why not?* a voice sneers in my head. *He has what you want, what should be yours. You went away to better yourself for the family and that little sneak takes advantage of you absence and steals—*

"No," I hiss to myself, willing the voice to be silent.

Donnie was never mine to begin with; I'd never even told him how I felt. I'd been too afraid of disgusting him or, worse, being rejected by him.

*But he wouldn't have been disgusted,* the voice hissed back. *He has no problems being intimate with one of his brothers...so long as it isn't you...*

My heart clenches miserably as this thought repeats itself. Another echo of laughter slaps me, and I can't take it.

I can't breathe.

I have to get out...now.

I rise quickly to my feet and stride out of the dojo, past the living room where the torturous laughter still filters up from the couch. I purposefully avoid looking at Mikey snuggled up close to Donnie on the couch, a blanket draped over them.

"Going out for a quick run," I say over my shoulder, slipping out of the lair before either one could question me.

\*\*\*\*

I run through the sewer tunnels that have become my streets over the years. I feel the bite of winter nipping at my skin. The city above has been cooling for weeks as the seasons changed. This is the first taste of the harsh months to follow.

Winter is always hardest on us. We can't go out as much, and even with the great accommodations that Donnie has provided, the snapping winter cold still manages to seep into our home.

Yet, this cold is painless compared to the ache in my heart...

I'm running as if the entire Foot is on my shell. My lungs scream for oxygen, and my legs beg for mercy. But, I keep going because I can concentrate better on the physical pain than the emotional one.

Before I realize it, I've come to an open drainage system where multiple pipes empty out and fill a small pool of sludge several hundred feet below. I'm reminded of the sounds of the waterfalls I'd discovered in Central America. The sound of the cascading water had comforted me so many nights.

I sink to the floor of the tunnel, sitting up along the side away from the light flow of the water flowing. My breathing is slowly regulating but the heaviness in my heart is growing as I bring my knees up to my plastron, wrapping my arms around them.

And...I cry.

I couldn't have stopped the tears even if I wanted to at this point. I've held it all in for so long, putting on the act that everything is fine. I guess...I guess I *finally* realize that things between Donnie and me...

It'll just never happen.

Donnie and Mikey are so happy with one another. I couldn't stand the thought of interfering with that. They—they're in love. As much as it breaks my heart, I know that. I want to be happy for them. Had things worked out between Donnie and me, I would have wanted Raph and Mikey to be happy for us. I can do no less.

I *will* be happy for them...as soon as I figure out how to end this pain...

\*\*\*\*

I feel a hand rest on my shoulder, pulling me out of the sleep I'd fallen into at some point. Blinking the sleep and dried tears away, I focus on the large shadow before me.

"It's a good thing Donnie put those trackin' things on the Shell-cells," a gruff voice speaks. "'Cause I sure as shell wouldn't have thought ta look fer ya here."

"Raph?" I ask, my voice hoarse. "How—how long have I been gone?"

"Four hours," he answers with a grunt, stepping out of the shadows with eyes narrowed in concern. "Last time ya took off an' didn't check in, we got ya thrown back at us through a window."

I frown slightly at the memory. It may have been a few years ago, but I still recall that battle with the Shredder, the condition in which I was returned to my family.

And, I know how hard that was for them...

Apparently that memory is still fresh in Raph's mind, too.

"I'm sorry, Raph—I didn't mean to worry you; I just lost track of time," I say softly.

"Yeah, that's another thing that ain't like ya," he replies, sitting down next to me.

"What's goin' on with ya? Ya've been actin' different ever since we got back from fightin' those Generals."

*That's been weeks ago, I think to myself. Have I really been behaving so differently? Have the others noticed, too?*

"I'm fine, Raph," I say without much conviction as I turn to watch the water flow out of the tunnel. "I'm just readjusting to being back home; that's all."

Silence stretches between us, and I can feel his eyes on me.

"Ya know somethin', Leo?" he finally asks. "Yer a horrible fuckin' liar."

That's unexpected. I turn my head to face him, an eye ridge raised.

"After everythin' we've been through, the least ya can do is be honest with me," Raph continues. "Or do I have ta pin ya ta a roof again?"

He mumbles a curse immediately, a look of regret painting his face.

"Shit—I'm sorry, Leo; that was outta line," he growls. "But I know yer lyin' ta me; which is somethin' else that ain't like ya."

My face softens lightly. Since our confrontation on the roof weeks ago, an understanding has developed between us. We've both been making more of an effort to smooth the tumultuous tension the years have born between us. The fact that Raph is here now and attempting to talk to me shows how far we've come. To lie to him like this, I know I'm undoing all the progress we've made.

Yet, I just can't tell him.

"You're right, Raph," I finally say. "I haven't been myself lately, and I'm sorry for that."

"It's Donnie and Mikey, ain't it?" he broaches, and I can't hide the slight flinch in my face.

He simply nods, plucking one of his sais free and twirling it in his hand absentmindedly.

"Ya know," he begins quietly. "Donnie an' Mikey have been together fer years; long before ya even left fer the jungles."

I blink, stunned, and hear my voice speak softly.

"They have?"

"After ya went ta Japan ta stay with the Ancient One," he explains, keeping his eyes on his moving sai.

I think back to all the time I spent with Donnie, all those long nights of talking. The whole time he'd been with—

I feel like such an idiot. I have been completely clueless, vainly trying to believe there was something more developing between Donnie and me. The whole time he'd already been with Mikey.

I tighten my arms around my knees, staring intently on the trickle of water moving before me.

"Love's a fickle bitch," Raph finally speaks again.

"Yeah..." I reply, deep in thought.

"You ain't the only one," he says in a voice I can just barely hear.

I raise my head to hear him better, catching a glimpse of him as he quickly averts his gaze from mine.

"Ya ain't the only one ta have his heart broken by someone who doesn't even realize what they've done," he elaborates. "I ain't sayin' this ta belittle yer feelins'. I'm just sayin'-I just wanted ya ta know you ain't as alone as ya think ya are."

I regard him for a moment, a sad, knowing smile forming.

"Mikey," I say, realizing that Raph must have been crushing on him as much as I had been on Donnie.

"No," he says, standing and sheathing his sai. "Not Mikey."

"Donnie?" I ask, thinking that those two did have quite a bit in common as they are often working in the garage together.

"No," he says again, slowly walking away. "Don't stay out here too much longer; ya gonna catch a cold with this chill in the air."

I watch him leave, too stunned to answer him or stop him.

*Me? He's been crushing on...me??*

\*\*\*\*

I continue to sit here in the cold sewer tunnel, lost in my thoughts.

Why would Raph be attracted to me? We've spent most of our lives fighting with one another, butting heads with one another. He challenges me on *everything*. And, he's constantly complaining how I 'mother hen' him too much.

Why the shell would Raph want *me*? How long has he felt this way?

My mind starts replaying the past years, all my past dealings with Raph. I realize that he's always been present, whether in my face or molded into the shadows of the background. His challenges help me to examine different views of a situation. His forcefulness in the dojo propels me to train harder.

And, he's always the first to help.

He never left my side on the farm after that near fatal battle with the Shredder. He even helped me to re-forge my katana. He was the first to talk to me after Splinter decided I needed to spend some time with the Ancient One, telling me not to worry about things at home—he'd take of things. And, when it was decided that I'd go to Central America, I told him first in hopes that he could help me break the news to Donnie and Mikey.

My god...how could I have been so blind?

He's been the constant in everything around me. I've turned to him so many times in

in battle and in life, and I just didn't realize it until now.

But, do I feel the same for him?

I don't know. I don't want to hurt him anymore than what I apparently have in my negligence. I don't want him to think I'm turning to him by default. Maybe I've always had some kind of feeling for him but didn't recognize?

I need to talk to him.

I slowly rise to my feet, my muscles loudly protesting as they are forced to move after having been still for so long. I make my way back home, quietly entering. The dull glow of the television lights up the room, and I'm greeted with the chorus of twin snores coming from the couch. I smile as I pass the couch, leaving the television on lest I awaken either of my brothers. I head upstairs, ignoring the ball of anxiety forming inside me.

I stand outside Raph's door, hesitant to knock.

*No. I was hesitant before; not again.*

I knock, willing my racing heart to calm itself and enter at Raph's reply. I close the door behind me, cautiously approaching Raph's bed where he's languidly stretched out.

"Nice ta see ya made it home," he drawls with a smirk.

I manage a weak smile, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Raph, what did you mean back there?" I ask, figuring the direct approach would be best.

"Ya know what I meant, Leo," he answers, slowly sitting up and settling alongside me.

"Why—why didn't you ever tell me?" I ask, staring at my lap.

"Same reason ya never told Donnie," he says, and I feel him look at me before hearing him sigh.

"We fought all the time," he begins. "I couldn't help pickin' fights with ya; it became as much of a habit as breathin'. It meant that, even if ya were pissed at me, ya were at least payin' attention ta me. I know it sounds stupid but...anyways; when I saw how moony ya were gettin' over Donnie, I didn't see the point in tellin' ya how I felt. Didn't matter if I knew that Donnie an' Mikey were hookin' up; I still couldn't tell ya. I didn't tell ya about them 'cause I didn't want ya ta think I was tryin' ta come between ya an' Donnie. I didn't—I didn't want ya ta get hurt."

He sighs again, and I finally raise my head to look at him.

"Not that it really matters in the end," he mumbles.

I'm speechless by his confession. He sits next to me, body tensed and fists balled. I place a hand over one of them, squeezing slightly.

"It matters," I say. "It matters that you were concerned enough to want to do something. I don't know if it would have made a difference or not."

He unclenches his fist, taking my hand in his and hesitantly looking at me. My throat tightens at the immense emotions pooling in his eyes. I've never seen anything like it. I feel a slight spark of something deep inside me as I slide a little closer to him.

"Raph...could I..." I struggle to speak, feeling my cheeks warm. "Can I...I mean, would it be too forward of me to...kiss you?"

I watch his eyes widen as a similar heat colors his own face. He merely nods his head. I lean forward, so unsure about how to do this. I gently place my lips on his, watching him. His eyes close, and I feel his mouth opening to mine. Growing bolder, I open my mouth in response, slipping my tongue out to trace his mouth. I raise my free hand to cup his cheek, pushing my tongue into him as I explore him. His tongue welcomes mine, and together they dance as our kiss deepens.

I feel my heart swell with something I've never felt before. It's so strong; I feel as if it'll burst. I'm so aware of him—his smell; his taste; his hand squeezing mine; the soft rumbling churr escaping him. This feels so real; so right; so—

"—perfect," I rasp against his mouth, breaking the kiss.

His eyes flutter open, glazed, as he looks at me.

"Huh?" he grunts at me.

I laugh, rubbing my beak against his.

"I thought I was in love with Donnie," I explain. "It felt good spending time with him, connecting with him on so many things."

I release Raph's hand, wrapping both arms around him as I nuzzle into his neck.

"But it never felt like this," I whisper. "It never felt...*perfect*."

I feel his arms encircle me, his mouth teasing the sensitive skin of my neck.

"Leo," he murmurs. "Ya have no idea how long I've waited fer...damn it—now ya got me all fuckin' mushy soundin'."

I laugh again, catching his mouth in another kiss. This time there's little uncertainty as we both volley for control of the kiss. I barely register him untying my obi, releasing my katanas, until I hear them clatter onto the floor. That churr of his is growing louder, overshadowing my own as he pushes me back onto my shell, feasting on my mouth as though starving. I grip his biceps, feeling my body heat up and chase away the last bit of chill still left from my time out in the sewers.

"I wanna do this right, Leo," he rasps when he pulls away from the kiss. "I don't wanna rush things; yer still hurtin'."

"You say that after getting me this worked up?" I counter with a smirk. "What a tease."

He chuckles, looming over me and running his hand down my plastron. I gasp as I feel it groping between my legs. A finger ghosts across my slit, my hips jerking upwards immediately at the touch as I feel myself harden more.

"I'll take care of that," he churrs, rubbing soothing circles over the growing bulge. "But we're gonna do things right when it comes ta the real thing. I don't want our first time to be some rushed, frenzied fuck. I want it ta be memorable. Now, be a good turtle an' drop down so I can give ya hand."

I moan, releasing my throbbing cock into his hand. It molds around me like a glove, easily stroking up and down. Oh, shell—it's so different from when I use my own hand. The smooth strokes, the tantalizing squeezes...

"Oh, Rrrraph~~~" I churr as he thumbs the head, spreading the precum already forming.

His other hand cups my cheek, forcing me to look at him. He's studying me so intently as if trying to memorize my face. He slides my mask off quickly, kissing the top of forehead.

"I wanna watch ya cum," he whispers, his hand moving faster.

My hands clench tighter on his arms, hips feeding into his hand. So many sounds are coming from me; churrs, moans, whimpers. He seems to be drinking it all up. I feel the first twinge of the inevitable orgasm.

"That's it," he drawls, tracing my mouth with his finger. "Let it build; let it take ya higher. Feel it overcome ya."

I groan, wrapping my mouth around his finger and suckling on it as he moves it in and out in sync with the strokes. He pulls out his finger, moving the hand below me. The wet digit tickles my entrance, and I cry out, cumming hard in his hand.

He milks me expertly, still teasing my entrance. I swear, I probably cum again and don't even know it at this point. It's all a blur of pleasure and heat. Before I can think anything else, his mouth is over mine in another searing kiss.

I feel my body slump underneath him, completely spent as his hands leave me and the kiss ends. My eyes slip closed as I try to catch my breath. I sense him moving around on the bed and then feel something soft gingerly cleaning me before tucking my cock back inside me.

I feel his body rest against mine, his arms pulling me close, and I gather enough strength to return the embrace.

"Oh, Raph," I breathe, barely able to open my eyes. "That...wow."

He chuckles, kissing the top of my head.

"Yer welcome," he says, pulling a blanket over us.

My sexed-fried mind finally recalls a thought.

"Wait—you didn't—" I begin.

"I will...later," he interrupts. "This time was just about you. I...I love ya, Leo."

My chest tightens but this time it's not in pain.

"I love you, too, Raph."

I don't think this winter is going to be so cold after all.

**Fin**





## Worth Killing to Keep

Moonlight colors New York black and white. Glowing in a clear spot between the clouds, it throws shadows across streets and roofs, stark angles that jut out and break and vanish like gravestones. Tonight the city is a cemetery painted in dirty snow that slushes into the gutter, and four ghosts move through the darkness, careful not to be seen even so far from their target.

"Storm's getting rougher," Donatello whispers, leaning so close that his warm breath touches his face. He lays his hand over the screen of his shellcell to block its light, but the numbers of the latest weather report flicker between his fingers, reflecting in Donatello's wide eyes.

Leonardo cannot bring himself to risk whispering, not even to reassure his brother. He turns slightly to face him, touches his cheek and holds him for a moment, waiting until he feels him relax. Donatello shivers under his touch. In the winter air, their cold blood feels warm.

The heat of his brother's skin tells Leonardo they have little time left. If he wants to reach their target before they freeze, they need to go soon.

This would be a lot easier with April's help. Saki's little office building isn't as guarded as his headquarters, but it requires several angles of attack. Another pair of eyes behind a laptop could have eased the work quite a bit.

They never tell April about these nights. She's only seen them kill in self-defense. In her eyes, the blood on their hands is free of guilt, free of sin. They're careful to keep it that way. Having a friend is a luxury they don't want to live without again.

They've managed to scrabble together a life out of the mess they were born to. Threats to that life are to be dealt with harshly, with steel and fire.

Waiting only for the clouds to cover the moon, Leonardo motions for his brothers to wait in the alley and then leaps up to the utility ladder, climbing silently on the rickety old steel. He needs a better view of the sky as it rolls harder than the ocean. They're only a few blocks from the shore, and he hears the rollers crashing on the docks. He imagines the violent spray as the waves break and retreat.

Finally the wind pushes the thick clouds over the moon. The darkness brings with it heavier rain, but at least the black ice on the rooftops will wash away.

He waves for them to follow him up, and they leap fearlessly across gaps in the buildings four or five stories up. They have sprinted over the city for practice, playing games of tag and hide and seek to hone their skills. Now they run confidently, silhouetted by slick concrete, always watching the lighted windows of Saki Security Enterprises.

Two buildings away they stop, using a cramped air conditioning unit for cover. Raphael stands over them, peering over the top of the unit to watch for sentries. Security has obviously been tightened for Saki's special guest. He spots four lookouts on the opposite roof with firearms, guards in several of the windows, and around the front gate, ninja dressed as regular security guards with dogs.

"Damn," Raphael whispers through grit teeth. "I hate dogs."

"No problem," Donatello says back. "Planned for it, remember?"

Raphael rolls his eyes. Donatello isn't the one that usually deals with the business end of mutts that weren't scared of mutants.

Reminding himself that no one could hear them over the wind and rain, Leonardo watches over Donatello's shoulder as his brother calls up the building's floorplan on his handheld. On his other side, Michelangelo turns so that the rain slides off his shell, sheltering Donatello's equipment, but it's Raphael's body that protects them the most. He teases them often about how none of them will grow as tall as he had, but he pays a price for his height in blocking the rain.

"It's almost time," Donatello says, staring at the screen. "They'll change guards in a few minutes."

Settling against the sheet metal behind him, Leonardo sighs and closes his eyes. This is the worst part of every mission--sending his brothers into the path of bullets and knives. He listens to the drone of the rain hitting metal, concrete, Raphael's back for a long moment.

Then he glances at Michelangelo who's already waiting for the signal. Leonardo nods, and his little brother grins and darts back into the shadows. Donatello counts thirty seconds for Michelangelo to get into position, then stands and moves to the edge of the roof, vanishing.

Raphael stands still. Leonardo looks up in confusion, wondering why he hasn't followed Donatello. The look in Raphael's eyes tells him enough. Kneeling and resting his hand on his shoulder, Raphael silently stares at him as if engraving Leonardo's face in his memory. His hand slides up to Leonardo's cheek and he runs his thumb just under his eye.

"No stupid risks, right?" Raphael whispers.

Leonardo tries not to laugh. "You're one to talk."

No witty reply. Raphael waits for his answer. Smiling ruefully, Leonardo nods once.

"Promise."

Raphael disappears.

Left alone with the rain, Leonardo waits. There was no point to counting seconds off in his head. The plan is to wait five minutes, then strike, but the plan will change if Michelangelo feels he has a better opportunity. He counts anyway.

At three minutes and fifty seconds, the floodlights of the front gate come on. A few of the guards rush over with their barking dogs, playing their flashlights over the street as far as they can see, but Michelangelo is long gone.

The distraction only pulls three or four guards from their posts, but that's all Donatello and Raphael need. Leonardo turns and watches the light over the building's power shed. Donatello doesn't need much time to sneak into the electrical system. As soon as the light flickers to signal that the security system belongs to them now...

The light fades and comes back. It only lasts an instant, quick enough to be a real power glitch.

Leonardo backs up several feet, then races all the way to the edge of the roof and leaps. The jump is farther than any human could hope to make, pushing his own abilities to their limit, but he clears the barbed wire fence and the fifteen feet of open space between the buildings.

If he shatters a window, he'll alert the enemy to his presence. If he lands on the ground, he'll be noticed immediately. As he falls, he reaches out as far as he can and catches himself on a dark window ledge, slamming into the bricks and fighting to keep his grip on the slick ledge.

The impact feels like it jarred loose his teeth, but this is the only flaw in the Foot's security. No one should have been able to make that leap. Grimacing, he pulls himself up and finds a chink in the brick wall to brace his foot. It takes enough of his weight that he can hold himself in place.

With one hand, he tries the window, hoping for a dumb mistake on their part. No such luck--locked. He leans against the glass and waits with his free hand raised in a fist. Lightning rumbles overhead. His arm began to tremble with the effort of holding himself. Another bolt of lightning runs through the sky, closer, but it was too small. He waits painfully, hoping the next one would come--

Lightning strikes the building they'd leapt from, with a flash bright enough that he can see inside the room. The door was shut, the room empty. A second later he punches through the glass as the thunder exploded. Now he can reach inside, force the stiff lock open, and raise the window.

He slides inside, turns and closes the window again, yanking the curtains shut. The shards of glass sparkle on the carpet, and he sweeps them into his hand, hiding them in the fake potted plant beside him. There's no way to stop the curtains from waving with the wind, but warm air circulates from the vents in the ceiling. If anyone comes inside, they might not realize the window is broken.

Sparing a moment to orient himself, he looks around the darkened room. The office furniture is more alien to him than the spaceships and planets. Straight lines, unstained material, clean walls and a dry carpet make him feel the difference between him and the rest of the world.

His first thought is cameras. His gaze flicks around the edges of the ceiling and--when he finds nothing there--to the less obvious places like clocks, the computer monitor, the shelf full of goldleaf-paged books, and the desk lamp. Donatello's tampering has likely killed any transmissions out, so they probably don't have to worry about the in-

side cameras sending their images out, but they can't be sure if something had slipped out through an alternate electronic route. Fire would destroy any evidence left behind, but he'll have to cling to the shadows and avoid patches of light, even in empty rooms.

A minor annoyance, but minor annoyances can turn into big problems later on.

He pulls one sword free of its sheathe and holds it angled to the floor, the blade blackened so it won't reflect any light. His left hand he keeps open and goes to the door, gently turning the knob.

A soft thump behind him make him glance over his shoulder. As expected, Michelangelo slides through the window and comes up on the other side of the door. He nods once as Michelangelo slips his nunchucks into each hand.

No sound on the other side of the door, so he pushes the door open a hair, allowing a sliver of light over his eye. A lone figure walks slowly down the hall, keeping alert, but his shoulders are relaxed and he occasionally stops to view the pictures on the walls. A radio receiver scratches on and off at his hip, but no alarms had been raised yet. The enemy has not yet noticed that their security had failed.

The guard has several steps before he reaches the end of the hallway. Waving his brother after him, Leonardo darts into the light and leads Michelangelo away from the guard, following the floorplan they had memorized. They'd been lucky that the building had registered blueprints to download. They didn't always have that luxury.

Bad luck. The door they need is locked. Leonardo doesn't waste time glancing at the guard. Either he hasn't turned yet or they'll hear the yell when he does. Precious seconds can't be wasted on the lock. He draws his tanto, rams it into the keyhole, turns it, and feels the lock give way. He steps in with Michelangelo on his heels, closing the door like a whisper.

"Clear," Michelangelo whispers.

Leonardo nods once, hiding a twist of guilt. Even if he hadn't heard anything inside, he should have checked for people as they went in. Behind him, Michelangelo breathes a laugh and leans close, pressing a kiss to his shoulder and nuzzling at his throat.

"Don't be so hard on yourself," he whispers, teasing. "That's what we're here for."

Despite himself, Leonardo half-smiles and nods. Should have known he can't hide anything from his perceptive little brother.

The moment passes. They have an hour before the room will be used and they can complete the mission. For now, they hide and hope no one notices the broken lock. Leonardo leaves the door cracked slightly so anyone coming in will touch it and feel it open before turning the handle.

The guard comes back their way. His footsteps, though muffled, thump audibly on the carpet. Leonardo points up, and Michelangelo leads the way into the ceiling, pushing aside a styrofoam panel and easily slipping up. There's little room to perch, and Leonardo waits the handful of seconds it takes for his little brother to find a spot further back before following him up. Michelangelo always found the most reliable route the fastest, although as Leonardo replaces the ceiling panel, he finds himself in an uncomfortable

position, one hand on an overhead water pipe to hold his weight, one on the air conditioning duct, balancing precariously on a thin fiberoptics line built into the wall.

Reliable and fast, but hardly a place he wants to sit for an hour. He glances at Michelangelo, settled easily on an electrical conduit a few inches wide, and his little brother grins and shrugs unapologetically.

The waiting begins. Leonardo watches a spider creep lazily across a mat of dust, twisting a wrapped cocoon over in its legs. How many bugs or rats live inside the building? He forces the thought from his mind as his skin crawls. Ridiculous, quailing from the thought of vermin when he lives in the sewer, but he can't help it. He knows Michelangelo suffers from the same. Perhaps waking up with a large sewer roach crawling across the blanket, or worse, several roaches, has made them sick of living with pests.

He hopes Raphael and Donatello are all right. They have to be. He heard no shots fired, no shouts or even loud static on the guard's radio as he walks by again. The clock beneath them ticks loudly, though—loud enough to be heard through the ceiling.

Beside him, Michelangelo sighs and shifts his weight. His brother could be patient when it came to life or death. Leonardo welcomes the change. Michelangelo plays at being hyperactive and flighty while at home, but he's death, cheerful and focused death, when need be.

Over his head, the muffled echo of raindrops come down the airconditioning duct. He hopes the building doesn't have any leaks. If the room sprouts a leak, the humans might decide to hold their meeting elsewhere.

A dim glow to his right draws his attention. Michelangelo stares at the display of his shellcell and sighs, then shows it to him. Still another half hour to go.

Leonardo thinks it's an improvement. Usually Michelangelo checks the time every ten minutes.

Thunder rumbles overhead. Dulled by the walls and multiple floors, it's still loud enough to set Leonardo on edge. He has a healthy respect for storms, considering he often runs across rooftops with two lightning rods strapped to his back. Being able to wait for his target to come to him, and to wait in a dry, cool building, is a luxury he can't often indulge in.

They can't hear the guard's footsteps, but they do hear the crackling of his radio as he comes and stops by the door. Then several more steps follow, as if several men were following him, and then the door falls open. Leonardo holds his breath, but he needn't have worried. They don't even hesitate, too busy conversing in low tones as they enter and sit around the table.

Leonardo tightens his grip on his katana's hilt. Through the pockmarked ceiling panels, he sees tiny glimpses of business suits and briefcases settling beneath him. He recognizes the voices of a handful of them. One in particular stands out. Leonardo knows the voice of Saki's newest lead scientist, ingrained in his memory from one painful night in his hold. Phantom aches run through his arm, remnants of needles, intravenous tubes and scalpels.

There is no reason to wait. He takes a breath and moves.

He has to cross two ceiling panels over, an easy distance, before making his first cut. A spray of blood follows, the thump of a head landing on the table and rolling over glossy paper. Leonardo strikes again. Men are already moving back from the table, but his sword finds the nearest throat and slashes it wide. Hot blood splatters across the carpet.

A loud crack follows, and a body lands half on the desk. The head has been smashed open and gore dribbles from the sharp edges of bone. Michelangelo destroys a second head like a gourd, then catches a third on the backhand.

Two more remain, too far to reach easily. With a throw of his sword, Leonardo pins one to the wall through the throat, but the last one has time to scream for a second before his face caves in under a nunchuck.

"Dammit," Michelangelo curses and tucks his weapons back into his belt. "Too slow."

Leonardo shrugs as he retrieves his sword, letting the body slide to the floor. Can't be helped sometimes. He moves to the door and looks out, and sure enough, the guard has heard. The human holds an automatic rifle in one hand and fires, but his shots are panicked and unaimed. The heat of the bullets pass close by Leonardo's skin as he draws his throwing stars and hurls three. Two land in the guard's chest. The third sinks into his forehead.

Footsteps pound up a nearby staircase. Leonardo and Michelangelo run back the way they'd come, diving into the first office and barricading it quickly with the desk. Then Michelangelo is out the window, climbing down the wall and heading for the fence.

Leonardo spares the moment to toss the incendiary Donatello had made for him. The canister hits the floor and rolls along the carpet leaking fuel, then sparks. Fire races along the polyester carpet, up the plaster walls and beneath the desk to eat at the floor where the sprinklers can't reach. As he jumps through the window and lands on the dirt, the canister explodes, sending flames in all directions. Shards of glass and bricks bounce around him and off his shell, but he's already up and over the fence by the time security gathers its wits and releases the dogs. Their barking fades with every step.

The road home is easy enough. Once he finds the culvert, he settles in far enough so that no one will see him. He waits. Michelangelo comes first, his eyes still wide and excited from the attack. He won't be falling asleep any time soon, and Leonardo wonders who'll stay up with him that night. Not that Michelangelo doesn't make it fun, but Leonardo cares more about sleep now.

Donatello catches up in half a minute, shouldering Raphael as he favors his right leg. No one speaks as they set Raphael down and make a quick wrap of his calf, binding the dog bite. Raphael spares a moment to put his hand behind Leonardo's head and draw him down for a kiss. Michelangelo follows suit. It's almost a tradition now, Raphael's way of welcoming them back after going into danger.

As Donatello and Leonardo help Raphael back to his feet, Michelangelo grins and walks backwards in front of them.

"So," he stage-whispers, "does Raphy have to get a rabies shot?"

"Security dogs don't have rabies," Donatello mutters.

"But we don't know for sure," Michelangelo sing-songs. "He could go all foamy at the mouth mad any minute now and--hey!"

Michelangelo stops midsentence, and the sudden silence surprises the other three so much that they stop, too.

"If Raph goes all foamy," Michelangelo says, "how do we know he isn't just pissed like usual?"

Raphael growls and takes a step forward, but that puts weight on his injury and he stumbles before his brothers catch him. He grumbles and turns his head away, ignoring Michelangelo like an ox might ignore a horse fly.

"So, Leo," Raphael asks, speaking a little louder as they work their way deeper underground. "Your arm giving you any more trouble?"

That stops Michelangelo in his tracks, his jaw hanging in shock that Raphael would even ask. Trapped, vivisected while fully aware--a living nightmare that none of them would want to remember if it happened to them. Leonardo never speaks of it at all, only favoring his right arm from time to time, using his left hand more often in a fight. Leonardo gives Raphael a look, but he doesn't balk at answering.

"Just a little sore," Leonardo says softly, flexing his hand into a fist. "I think...I think it's going away now."

Mission accomplished. Michelangelo smiles, and he fills the rest of the way home with lighthearted chatter and teasing flirtation. It takes their minds off the blood, itching as it dries on their skin, and the sting of small cuts and burns.

Once home, the routine of cleaning and patching themselves up carries them through the night. Leonardo properly dresses Raphael's leg while Donatello slathers antibiotic onto Michelangelo's shrapnel wounds, and Michelangelo applies ointment and clean bandages to Leonardo's burns. The closeness soothes away the anxiety, and as they come off the adrenalin rush that carried them through the night, they relax in the warmth of home.

Their furniture is crooked, clean but frayed and worn. The walls are damp in spots, and the bricks are tilted askew under the chipped cement. The heater keeps the lair warm, and they slowly edge closer and closer until they're all but on top of each other, relieved to sit skin to skin. Michelangelo turns off the lights until there's only the glow of the kitchen far enough away to be a night light, then comes back and flops on Donatello's lap. Beside them, Leonardo sits between Raphael's legs, laying against his plastron while his brother holds him. It's a rare truce between them, no arguing, no fidgeting that turns into stomping off for their own personal space.

"Didn't get all the blood," Raphael whispers.

Leonardo blinks, follows his look to his own hand where a splash of red still colors his knuckles. It glistens with the frost that's melted and running down his skin in thin drops.

"S'okay," Leonardo says, closing his eyes again. "I'm good with it."

He drifts to sleep with the sounds of Michelangelo and Donatello quietly coupling beside him, with the feel of Raphael's hand resting heavy on his leg, holding him snug. It's a world away from the city above, with its cold edges and snow and human interference. This is where he belongs. The underground is tilted and off, but it's a shelter in the storm, a world removed from human morals and needles, away harsh light and bullets.

It's home. A home worth killing to keep.

**Fin**

# WINTER MEMORIES

CREATED BY HEIROS AND RAASET



I TRY TO FORGET...

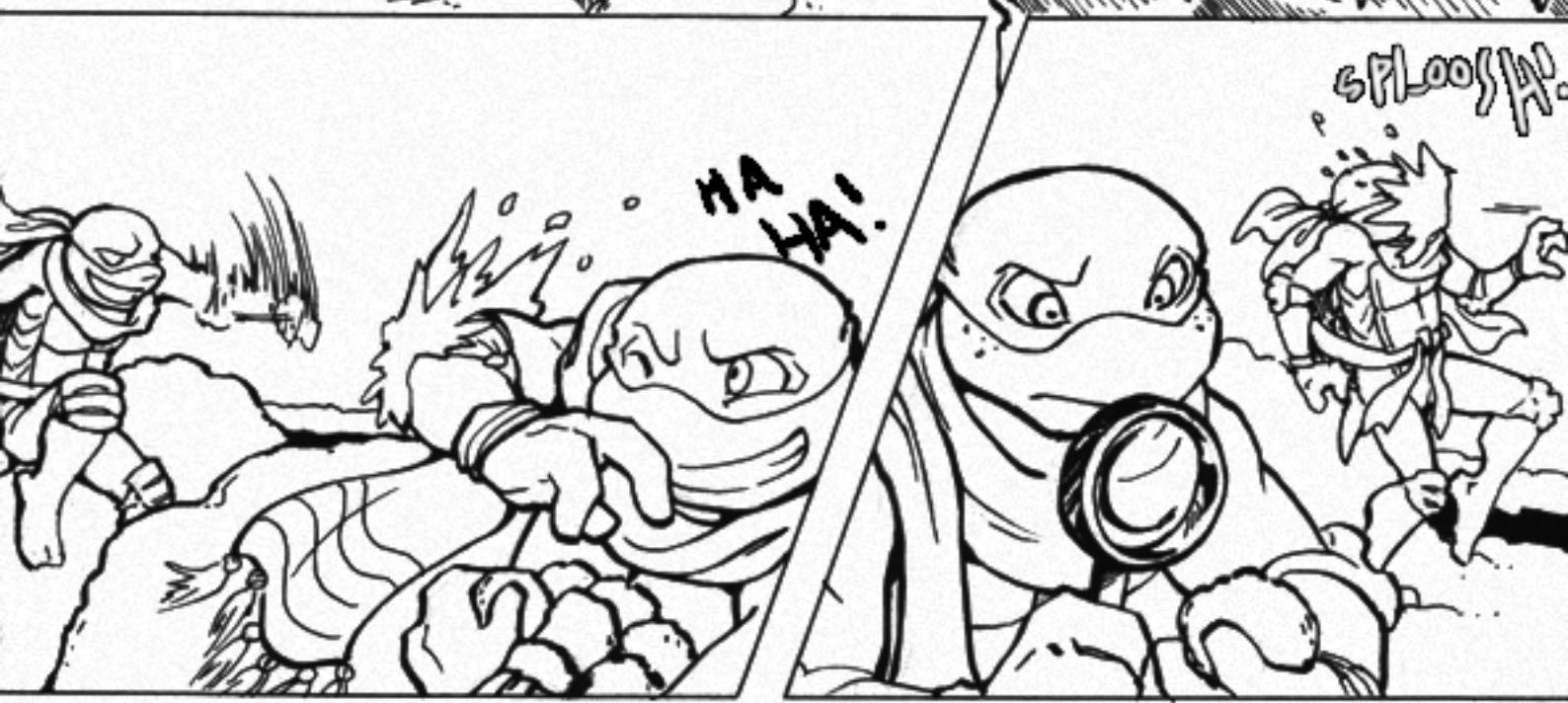
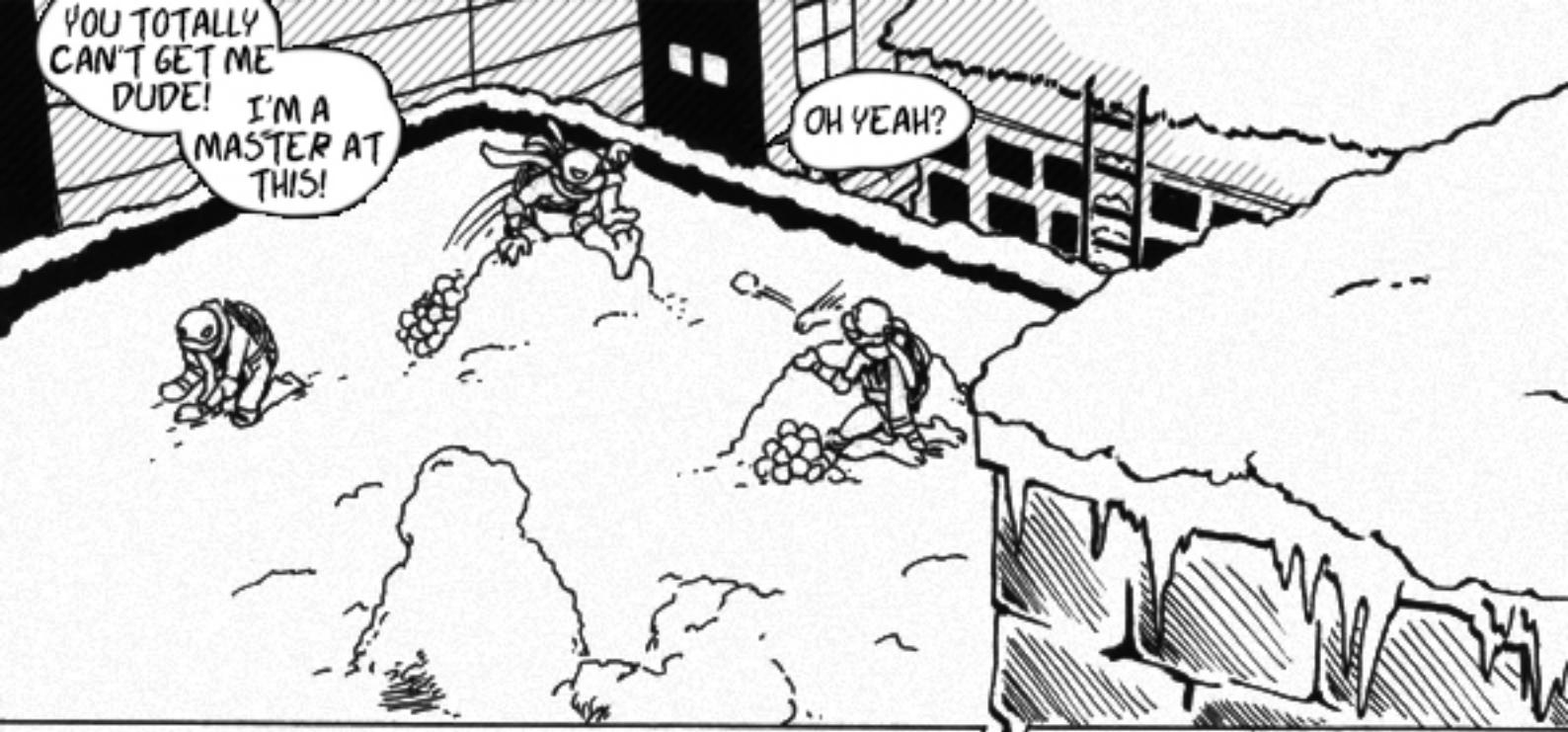
ALL THE TERRIBLE MEMORIES I HAVE OF THIS SEASON...

BUT THEY ALWAYS COME BACK.

IT'S LIKE A STAIN I CAN'T WIPE AWAY...

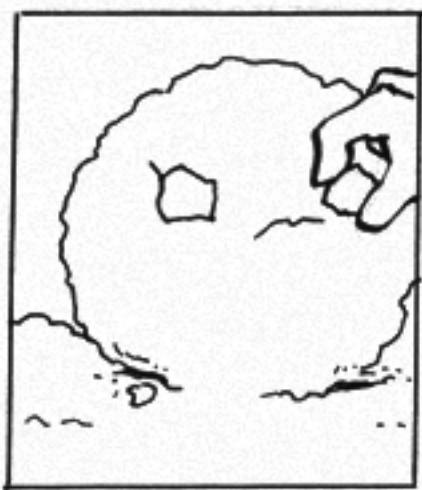
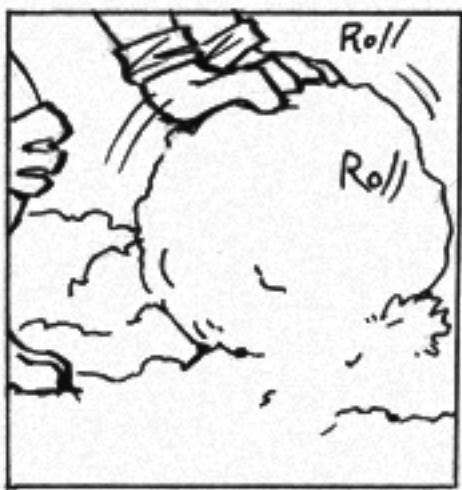
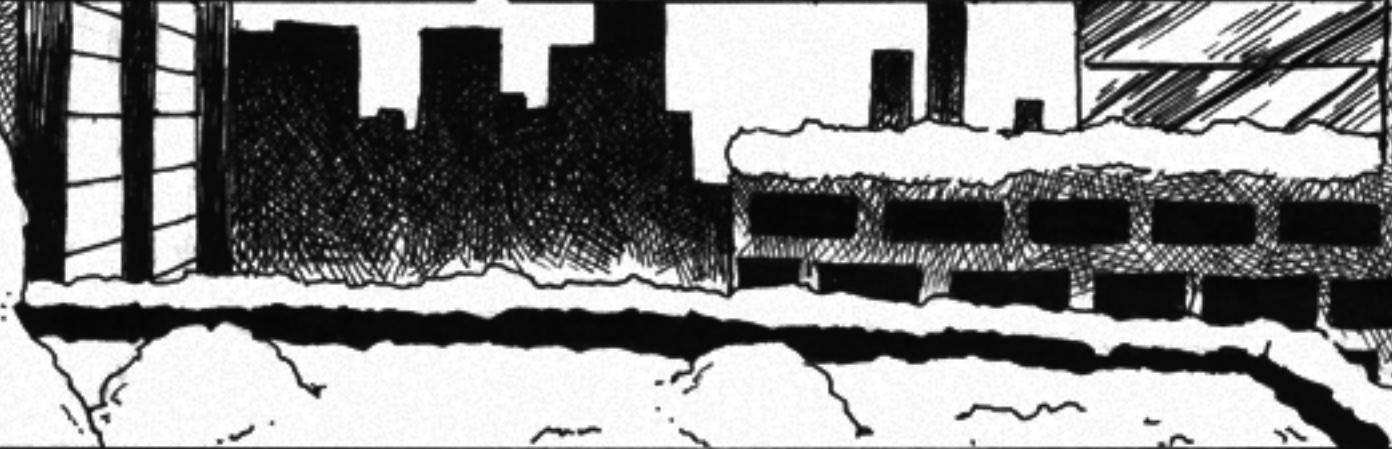
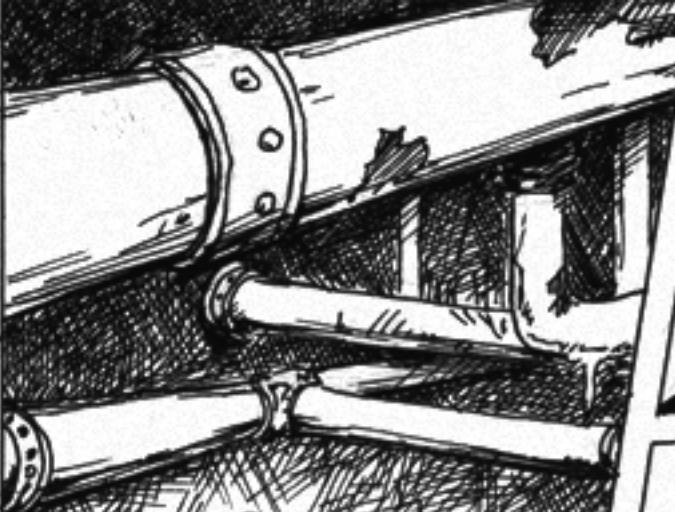


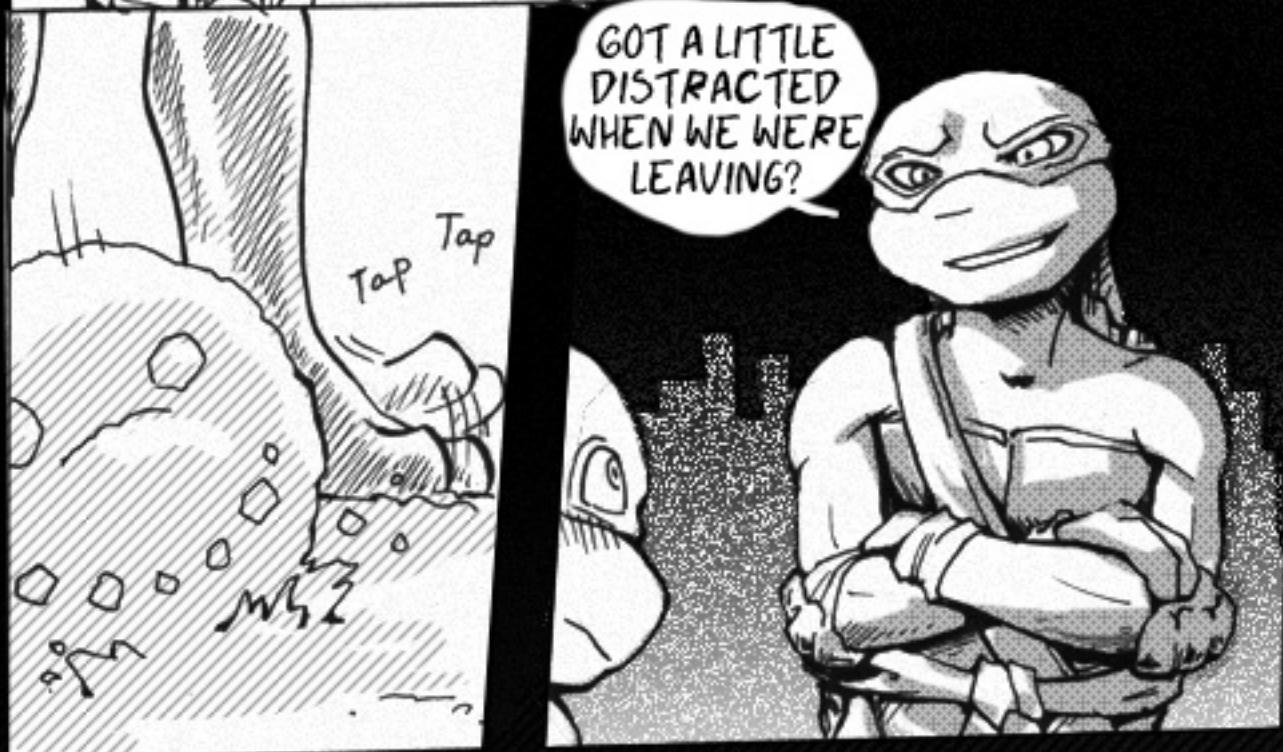
WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME  
I WENT OUT AND JUST ENJOYED  
THE SNOW AND SEASON?







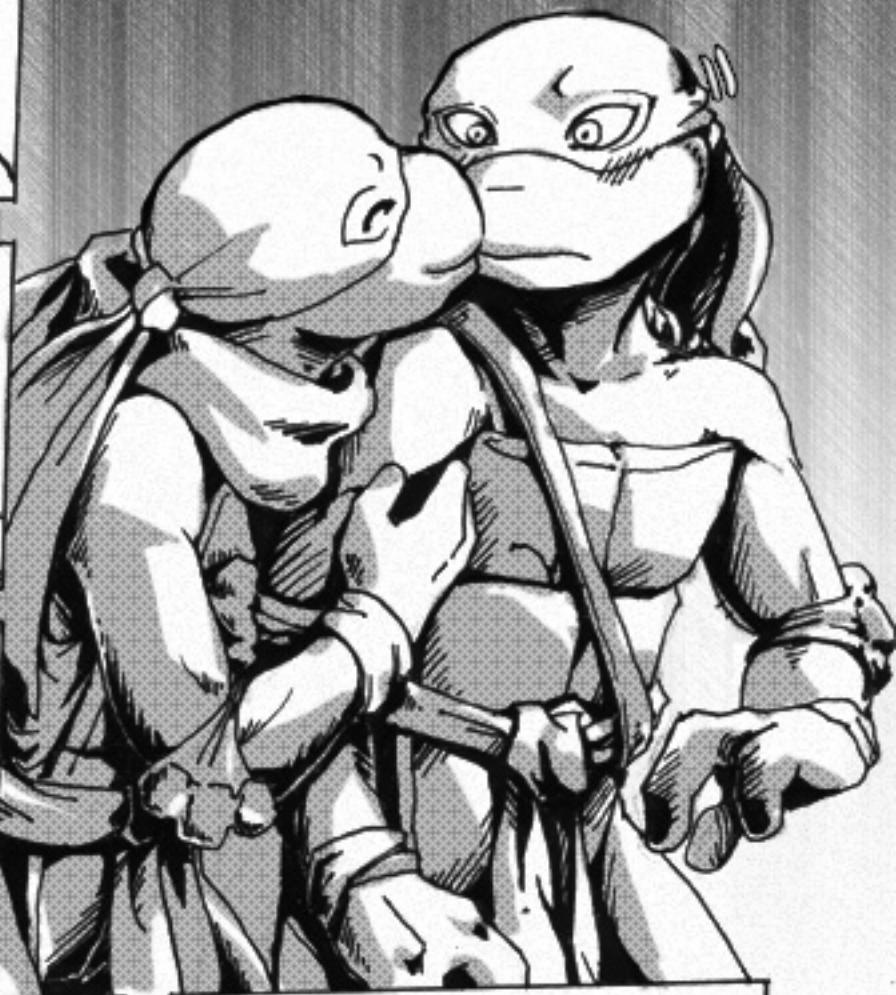




THERE, THAT'S BETTER. LIKE ONE HAPPY COUPLE.

AWESOME! I WONDER IF WE CAN BE LIKE THAT SOMEDAY

YOU WANT US TO BE A BUNCH OF SNOW BALLLED UP TOGETHER LIKE SNOWMEN?

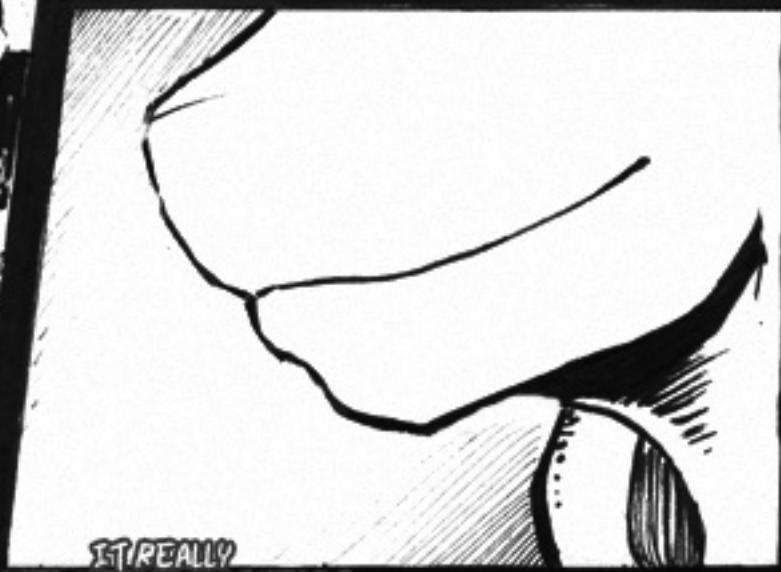




HOW COULD I FORGET... SOMETHING LIKE THAT...



IT'S ODD BUT...



IT REALLY  
MAKES ME WARM AT HEART.



BUT...

WE WERE JUST KIDS BACK THEN.

TOO MANY  
THINGS HAVE CHANGED  
OVER THE YEARS.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE  
TO GO BACK TO THE WAY  
THINGS USE TO BE.

LEO!



MAN YOU  
GAVE ME A SCARE  
BACK THERE BRO.



YOU OK,  
LEO?



I THOUGHT  
THE WORST HAD  
HAPPENED WHEN I  
COULDN'T FIND  
YOU.







IT SOMETIMES AMAZES ME TO  
SEE THE THINGS YOU SAY AND DO  
THAT TAKE ME BY SURPRISE...  
BUT SOMETIMES I WONDER HOW  
I'D GET BY WITHOUT THOSE  
SMALL TWISTS YOU BRING

LIKE THAT  
KISS YOU  
GAVE WHEN  
WE WERE  
KIDS.

YOU... STILL  
REMEMBER THAT?

AM I WEIRD  
TO STILL FEEL  
THE SAME WAY  
I DID BACK  
THEN?

IF YOU'RE  
WEIRD THEN I  
MUST BE CRAZY  
FOR FEELING  
THE SAME WAY  
BACK.



## Askew Tradition

It had started on Christmas day. Or maybe it was Christmas night. Actually, it was really the morning after Christmas when it all started.

Leo always regretted the morning after Christmas, not because it meant the ending of the holiday season, but because of how he spent the night. It had become a tradition of sorts to spend Christmas night getting drunk with Raph. The day was the only twenty-four hour time period that kept a smile on Raph's face, no matter what would happen.

To keep his spirits going until the early hours of the morning, Leo always joined him for a few beers which would turn into a lot more than just a few. It was the only days in a row that they got off from training and Leo took advantage of those precious days he allowed himself to sleep in by kicking back with his brothers while their pleasant holiday moods were in effect.

The headache that Leo woke up with was always worth it to have made his brother happier for one night. Even if he didn't always remember what happened during that night. Leo always just assumed that it was worth it.

"Hey, Donnie, look at that."

"Shush, let them be, Mikey."

"After they kept us up all last night with their loud singing? Seriously, I thought Raph's singing was bad but at least he can carry a tune; Leo is never allowed to go to a karaoke night ever."

"They were drunk. Besides, they probably won't remember anything from last night."

"Exactly,"

"You've been working on your evil laugh."

"Help me here."

"Why are you making our brothers cuddle on the couch?"

"For the hilarity that will follow it."

"I don't know why I go along with this. You grab Leo's feet, I'll get his arms."

Leo shifted slightly as his body slowly started to wake up. His ninja training made him aware of his surroundings instantly but the after-effects of the alcohol had his senses dimmed. He knew he was in the lair because he felt a sense of calm that only came with being in his home.

Also, he could hear Raph's snoring. It was hard to miss his brother's loud snores when they made it seem like an entire forest was being sawed down in their home. In fact, Raph's snoring sounded really, really loud. Almost as if it was right in his ear, if he had any ears, that is.

"Raph," Leo grumbled against his rather hard pillow. "Stop snoring," he knew it wasn't going to get his brother to stop snoring and wasn't surprised when the loud noise continued.

Leo turned his head to face the other way but the snoring was still just as loud. Groaning, Leo pushed off of the hard surface his head had been resting on to lift his

upper body. Freezing, Leo moved his hips from side to side. It felt like his thighs were brushing against someone else's thighs. But then that would mean that the tight grip on his hips were hands and not his belt falling down.

That couldn't be though or else he would have been essentially just rubbing himself against one of his brothers. He could only assume which brother it would be, especially since Raph's snore had suddenly gone silent.

Hesitantly, Leo started to open his eyes. As soon as he slid them open a crack, he saw that, indeed it was Raphael, and he was also starting to wake up.

"Wha," Raph grumbled sleepily as he smacked his lips together. He clenched his hands and Leo jerked as six fingers dug into his skin. Raph froze and his eyes widened, staring straight up at Leo as Leo's face heated and looked down at him.

They were both shell shocked.

"Please don't tell I'm awake," Raph pleaded quietly. "This is just a nightmare."

Leo remained silent as he tried to move off of Raph by touching him as little as possible. Raph's hands fell off of him to slap over Raph's eyes. "What happened last night?" Raph dared to ask the question that Leo didn't want to voice.

"I don't know," Leo admitted. He was proud that the panic he was feeling wasn't heard in his voice.

"We, we didn't do," Raph cleared his throat as he slowly sat up. "We didn't, right?"

"I don't know." Leo repeated as he kept his shell to Raph.

"Are," Raph paused for a moment. "Are ya, ya know, sore? Anywhere in particular?"

Leo closed his eyes and concentrated on his body. He had a killer headache and his heart was trying to fall into his stomach. "No," he sighed happily. He looked over his shoulder. "Are you?"

"No," Raph smiled, a hand pressing against his plastron to show his relief. Leo turned fully around to smile back at his brother. "So, nothin' happened." Raph established.

"Yeah," Leo agreed. "We just had too much to drink."

"And then passed out, makes sense," Raph nodded his head slowly.

"Good morning," Mikey sang as he walked down the stairs. "You too certainly had a good night." Mikey smiled at them knowingly. "Although, you could have been pals and kept it down a bit."

"Leave them alone, Mikey." Don scolded as he pushed past him to hurry to the coffee maker. "But I do agree, they could have been kept that porno down." Don glared at them.

Mikey shrugged. "I thought it was kinda funny when they started imitating it, or whatever they were doing." Mikey and Don kept talking to themselves quietly but it only sounded like white noise to Leo and Raph as their jaws dropped and their eyes widened.

They met the other's gaze and both tried to look calm, quickly closing their gaping mouths and straightening their postures. It wasn't working as they both realized that not all forms of porn between two guys meant a form of penetration.

Leo gulped and took a deep breath as he decided to act quickly and handle the situation before Raph tried to. When Raph handled a situation it meant one of two things. One was a fight.

"I'm gonna head up ta bed. Wake me fer dinner." Raph grunted and quickly left the main room, climbing the stairs and disappearing into his room before Leo had a chance to speak.

That was the other way Raph resolved his problems; he ran from them.

Leo sighed and took a seat on the couch, nursing his head in his hands. "I hate my life," he mumbled angrily at himself. Christmas was supposed to ensure that Raph and Leo didn't start the next year off hating each other. It didn't seem like that was going to happen this year.

Then again, that was understandable when drunken sex was involved.

"That was hilarious, Mikey."

"Shut up, Don. They obviously don't understand that they were supposed to think that they had sex with each other last night."

"How dare they mess with your prank."

"It's okay, I have another idea."

"Seriously, when do you practice that evil laugh and, more importantly, why?"

"For dramatic moments like this, duh."

Leo was getting really tired of Raph, and seeing how he hadn't been in the same room with his brother for more than five minutes, it was rather impressive. Still, he was sick of dealing with Raph's avoidance. It was the morning of New Years Eve and Leo was going to make amends for what might have happened a week ago. He would not allow them to start off the upcoming year with that night still on their mind.

He had attempted to talk to Raph about the night but all he got was a screaming fight that had ended with Raph going topside.

Raph was convinced that nothing had happened. Leo wanted to get Raph to just be okay with the night. If something had happened, that was fine and they need to accept it and move on. They would never really know what had happened that night so it didn't really matter, in a way. They just needed to talk it over and be okay with what could have happened but Raph was refusing to do so.

Casey and April were in the lair getting ready to ring in the New Year when Leo tried to talk to Raph again.

"Raph," Leo knocked on his door and waited for a moment. "Can we talk, Raph?" He opened the door slightly and poked his head in. The room was dark. Leo flicked the light on, "Raph?" he asked to the empty room. Flicking the light off again, Leo walked into the main room where his family and extended family were all gathered. "Did anyone see Raph?"

"Yeah," Casey nodded as he took a long sip from his cup. Leo didn't want to know what he was drinking but made an annoyed face as he waited for more.

"Casey," Leo sighed.

"What?" Casey asked.

"When did you see Raph?" Leo requested, earning a chuckle from April as he rolled his eyes at the big goon.

"Oh, right." Casey smiled sheepishly. "He said somethin' 'bout going out fer a bit. He told me he'd be back b'fore eleven though."

Leo glared. "It's eleven thirty."

Casey shrugged. "So he's a little late."

Leo sighed again. "Leonardo," Splinter spoke up from his comfortable chair as he turned his attention away from the special television program. "Please go find your brother. Raphael should not be alone at midnight." Leo nodded and started to suit up to go out looking for his brother.

"Or be kissing some random girl at the stroke of midnight." Mikey joked as he looked at April suggestively.

"Maybe a kiss on the cheek," April commented. "But only if you behave yourself for the rest of the year."

"Yes," Mikey cheered. "I couldn't possibly mess up my chances in only half an hour."

"I don't know, Mikey, you probably would be able to." Don teased.

"I shouldn't be long," Leo stated as he finished getting dressed in his warm clothes. He wrapped his long scarf around his neck and mouth and then ran out of the lair. As annoying as human clothes were, Leo loved his scarf. It made him feel like a feudal era

ninja with their long, flowing clothes.

Leo used his ninja skills to the best of his ability when he hit the surface. Of course Raph had to leave the sewers on the busiest night of the city. Thanks to the built in tracking system in the Shell Cell, Leo was able to find Raph in only ten minutes.

He stood behind his brother, silently watching him sit in the snow on some obscure rooftop and look over a ledge at the busy streets below. Leo's scarf blew in the wind and Raph turned his head as he heard the fluttering of the fabric.

Leo pushed his scarf down to around his neck to show how upset he was with his brother. "I don't know why I put up with you," Leo scowled. "Everyone in the city is out and about right now and you still ran up here."

Raph smirked over his shoulder as he stood; dusting off the snow pants he wore from the powdery snow. "It's because of our secretive, passionate desire fer each other that keeps ya coming after me." Raph made his way slowly over to his brother. "Ya can't resist it." He cupped Leo's cheek with his gloved hand, "Just like I can't."

Leo acted quickly and moved in to press a kiss to Raph's beak. Raph jumped back, his eyes wide. "Jesus, Leo, that was fuckin' sarcasm!"

"Yeah, I know." Leo swallowed thickly. "I was just messing with you. To teach you a lesson with trying to mess with me," he nodded his head quickly, as though he was unsure of his words. "Besides, we both know to show our pent up passion that we have over each other only when we're both drunk." Leo smiled, trying to make a joke out of the situation.

Raph glared. "Are ya drunk now? 'Cause I sure as hell ain't drunk enough ta be talkin' about that."

"Come on, Raph, you can't avoid this forever." Leo frowned. "And we don't even know what happened--"

"Nothing happened." Raph cut Leo off with a hand motion.

"Then why can't you talk about 'nothing?' I don't want this to hang over our heads all next year." Leo sighed and scrubbed at his face.

"I don't wanna talk about it so let's just ferget it. There. Done. It's no longer over my head." Raph declared as he turned away from Leo.

Leo sighed and walked the few steps to stand next to Raph. "Fine," Leo shrugged, giving up. "I don't want to start this year fighting with you so then we'll both just agree to forget it. That night never happened. End of the story."

Raph crossed his arms over his plastron, his puffy jacket making it a bit harder to accomplish such action. "Good," Raph grunted as he tried to bury his face into the neck of his jacket. The two stood silently for a few moments as they watched the people on the streets below them.

Raph shivered and brought his gloved hands up to rub at the lower part of his face. He was wearing his red hat but had nothing to cover the rest of his face.

Leo shook his head and offered some of his scarf. "Here," he wrapped the long ends around Raph's face. "It's long enough to share."

Raph stared at Leo for a moment as he allowed himself to be wrapped up in the warm cloth. "Thanks," he mumbled.

"Your welcome," Leo smiled and then tugged his scarf farther up his face.

"Ya know," Raph shifted and avoided Leo's eyes. "I'm not a homophobe."

Leo blinked. "Yeah, I know. You've never said something that would make me think that you are."

Raph nodded. "Good, 'cause I ain't. That's not why I don't wanna talk about, ya know. It's just that," Raph trailed off.

"That what, Raph?" Leo encouraged.

Raph turned to look at him but as soon as his mouth opened the city exploded into a countdown. The two stopped their conversation as they watched the ball slowly drop and then a wave of confetti and balloons fly into the air.

Leo pushed down his scarf and offered a smile to his brother. "Happy New Year, Raph."

Raph inhaled deeply and brought his hands up to frame Leo's face. "Happy New Year, Leo." Raph's eyes closed as he leaned forward and Leo eagerly let his beak part as their mouths connected. They parted and simply stared as their warm breaths rolled over each other's faces.

"Is this why you didn't want to talk about it?" Leo asked quietly.

Raph nodded. "I didn't want it ta be a one night thing, especially a night I wasn't even able ta remember." Raph shifted. "I know ya've been trying ta talk ta me because ya don't care and yer fine with it and all, but I'm not." Raph shook his head. "I won't just be a fuck buddy, Leo; that's not who I am."

"I never even thought of that." Leo promised. "But I have been thinking it over ever since that night and, well, I am okay with what could have happened because, honestly, it doesn't seem like a bad idea to me." Leo ducked his head a little as he smiled.

A small smile crossed Raph's face. "Ya say that, but I just found yer little gift this afternoon and, well," Raph smirked as he met Leo's eyes.

Leo blinked. "What?"

"That extra Christmas gift ya slipped inta my room. First of all, why the hell would ya ever put something in my drawers? Ya know I barely ever look in there. If I didn't need a new pair of gloves I probably wouldn't have found that until next year." Raph criticized. "That's why it took me ferever ta find it but I gotta say I'm kinda surprised that ya would buy such a thing."

"Raph," Leo frowned. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Don't make me say it," Raph smirked.

"Honestly, Raph, I have no idea what you're talking about. I didn't buy you any extra Christmas gifts this year." Leo claimed.

Raph studied Leo's eyes for a moment. "But it said it was from ya and who else would," Raph paused as he narrowed his eyes.

"Mikey," Leo scowled.

"That little shit would go and buy that ta try and make me even more uncomfortable around ya. But how did he," Raph clenched his hands into fists. "He totally set this up!"

"What?" Leo frowned. "How could Mikey have set all of this up?"

"Don't ya get it, Leo? Nothing happened that night except we got drunk and passed out. Mikey moved us onto the couch ta make it look suggestive and then he planted that gift with yer name on it." Raph explained.

"What was the gift again?" Leo asked, very curious at that point.

Raph smirked. "Maybe I'll show it ta ya one night." Leo blushed and Raph laughed. "Yeah, that was the look on my face when I opened it. But the jokes on that little knuckle head because he didn't wreck our tradition."

"Yeah," Leo smiled and reached down to hold Raph's hand in his own. "The joke really is on Mikey."

Raph grinned. "So, ya got any resolutions?"

"I have two on my mind," Leo replied with a smirk.

"Beat up Mikey," Raph stated.

"And work on my new relationship." Leo cupped Raph's face with his free hand.

"Sounds doable," Raph leaned in and the two smiled.

**Fin**

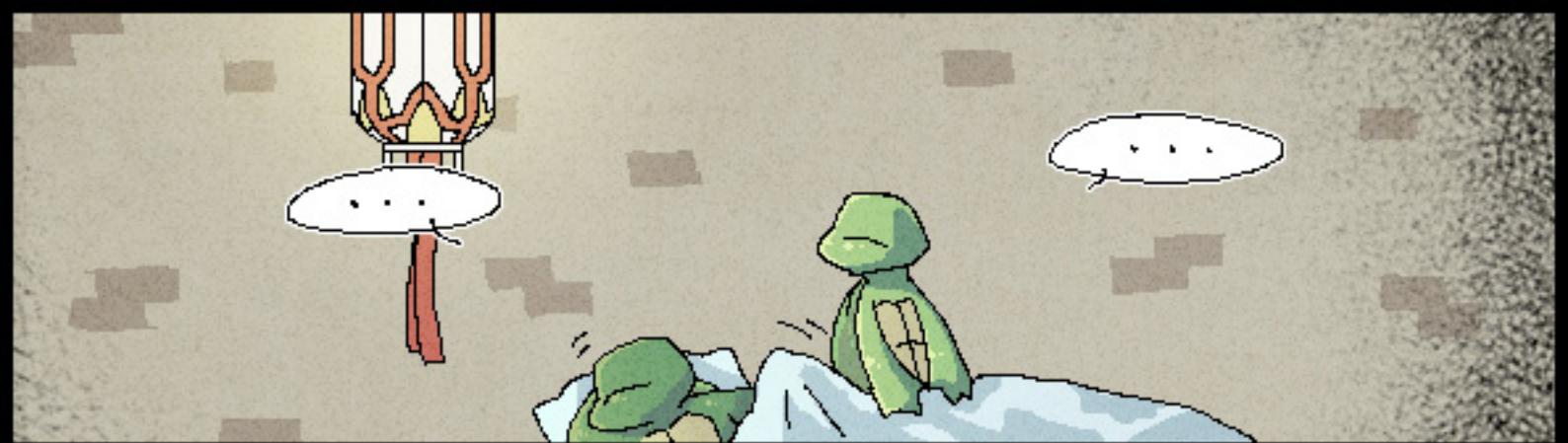
Hey Leo,  
YA' SLEEPING?



WELL..,WHAT ABOUT  
YOUR ROOM?

MY HEATER'S DEAD





YA' GONNA  
KICK ME OUT?

HAH? NO. ???



the pipe's out again?  
it's bit early  
in this winte---



gibble

slope

grape

WHAT-  
ARE YOU-  
DOING-?!

Eee!

grape

grape

grape

I THOUGHT..

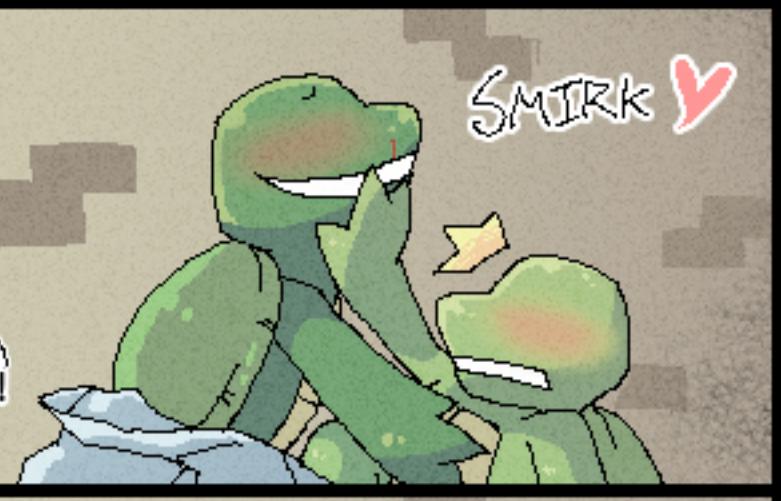
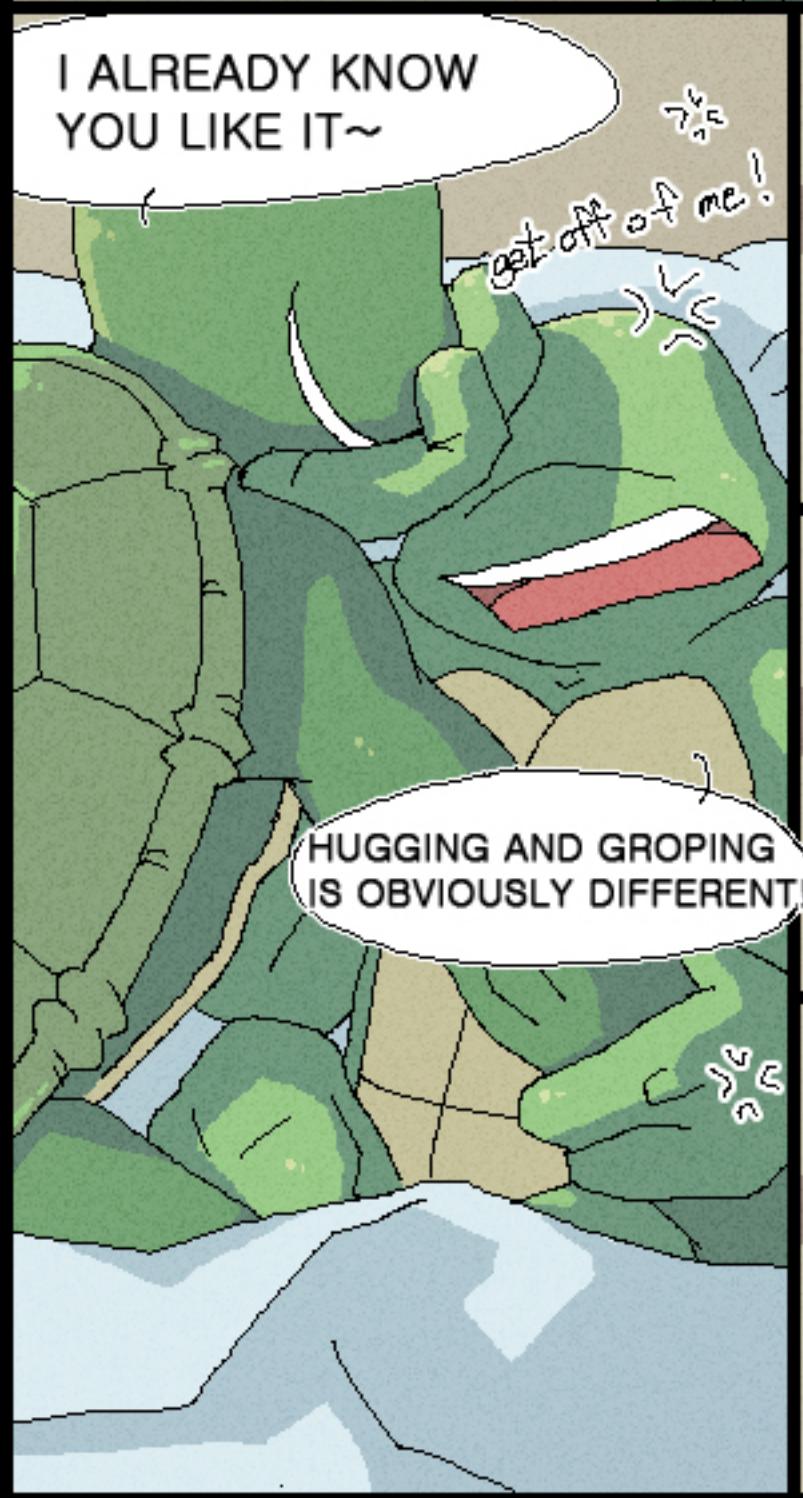
NUZZLE

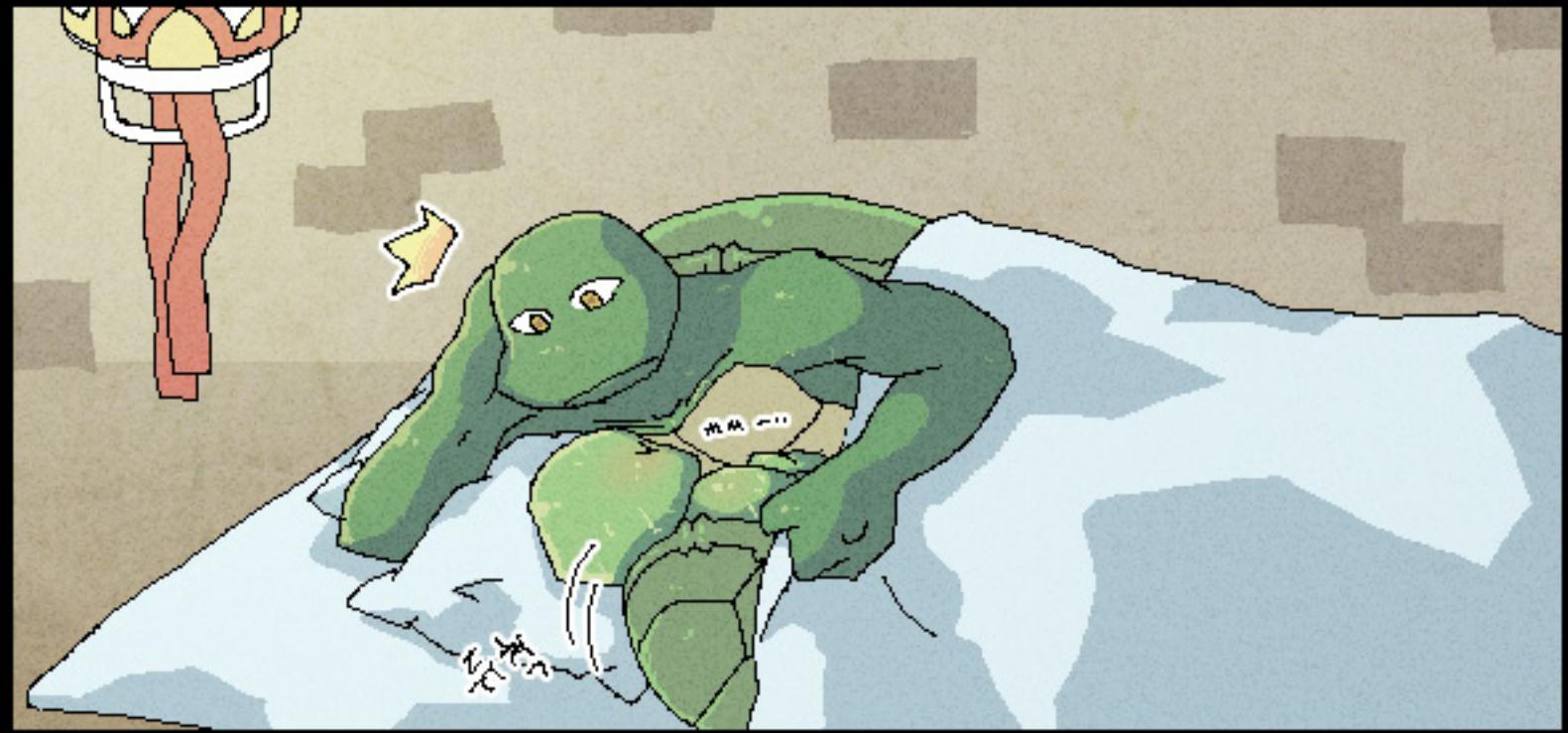
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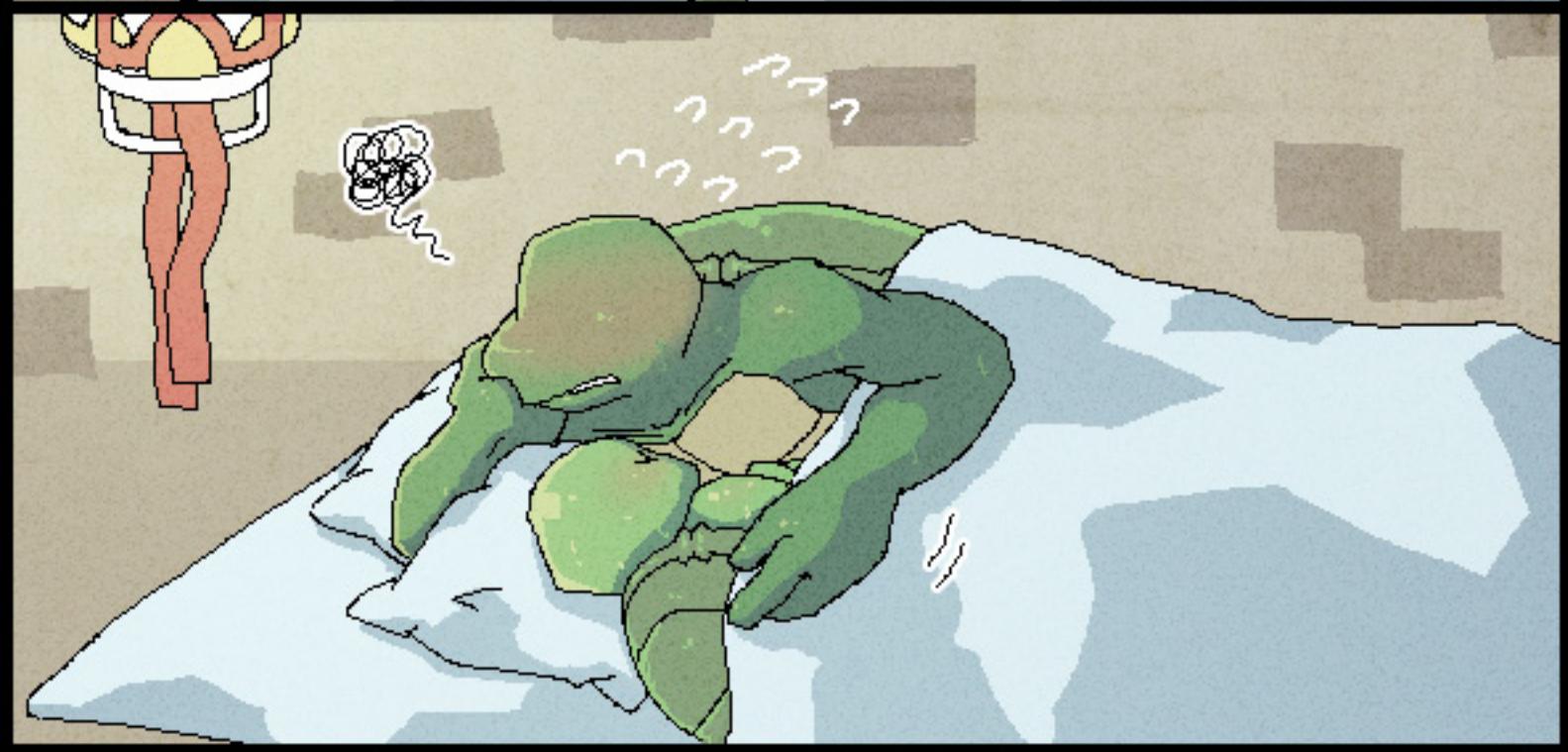
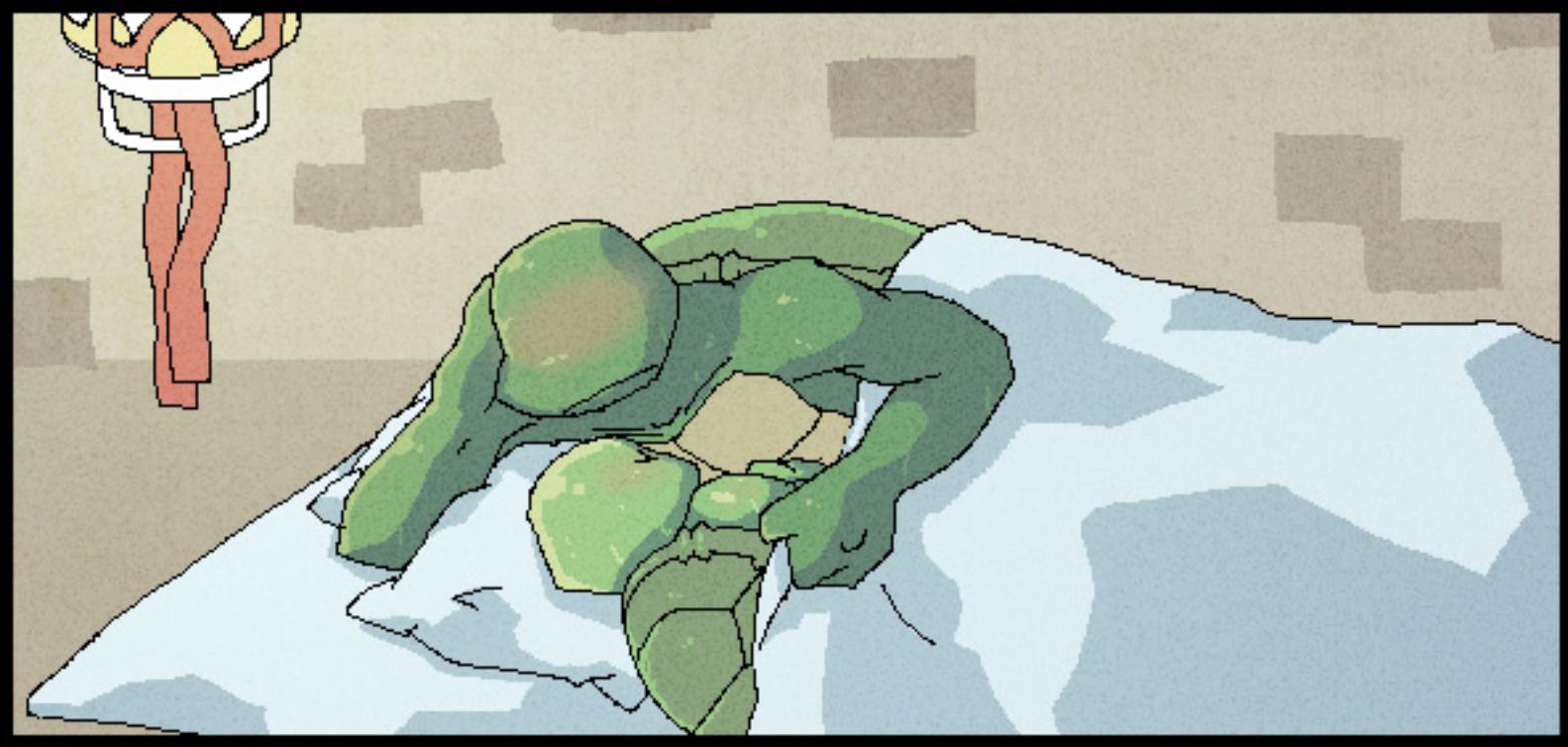
YOUR BODY  
IS COLD

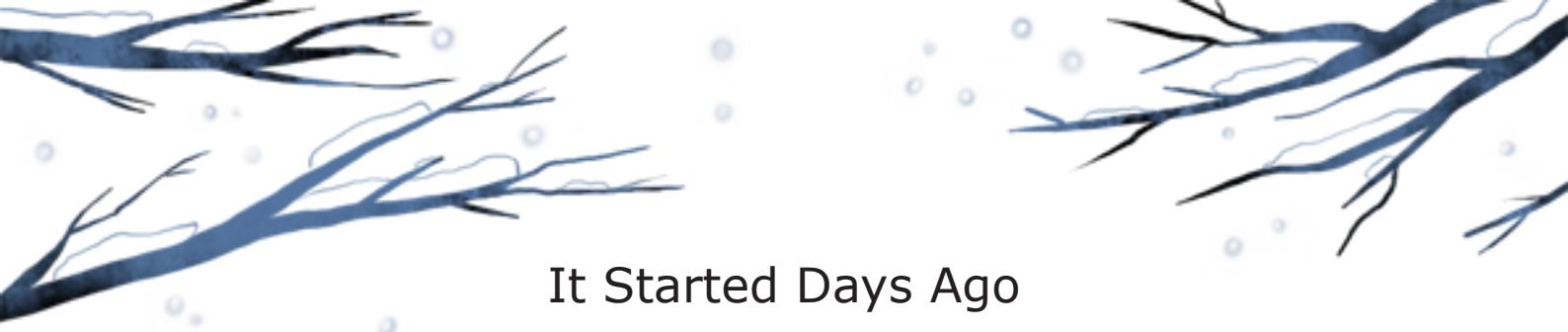
SOMETIMES,

WHEN I TOUCHED YA,  
YOUR SKIN WAS COLD.









## It Started Days Ago

It started days ago, this sense that something had shifted without him knowing it existed. Leonardo let his mind drift as he thought back over the...he wouldn't call them "changes" except for lack of better word. He'd always trained himself to notice everything occurring around him and he'd been unable to miss the difference lately in his own family. Nothing he could put a finger on and say "This isn't the same" but....

He would swear that his brothers were treating him different. There'd been the training matches with Raph for one. Ever since that day when Raph had just walked off when Leo had been braced for a full scale attack, it seemed as if all the lessons on controlling one's temper were finally sinking into Raph's thick skull. Not that Raph was a sweet natured angel or anything. Leo would have proof of something wrong then. It was just that Raph would call quits anytime one of them was continuously getting the upper hand. Leo couldn't even be sure that Raph's excuses weren't the absolute truth, that Raph really did want to work on some move or head topside to visit Casey, except it was becoming too common an occurrence for his hotheaded brother. He hated to admit he rather missed the fights.

Then there was Don, who seemed to just be around more. Not that Leo had ever clocked the time Don spent in his lab or working on some project, but he didn't recall seeing Don around so much. Don would come and chat with him, question him without challenging him, and Leo really enjoyed the debates they would engage in. It seemed like Don found excuses for touching him, shell, Raph and Mike seemed to be finding excuses to touch him, and he wanted to say it was more than before but then... he couldn't, because he'd never tracked the number of times they'd touched. It could just be he was noticing now, and if that was the case, what could he say? "Hey, guys, I know it's a sign of affection between us, but how about less touching, huh?"

He'd never live it down.

And then there was Mike. Who, honestly, was at once the easiest and hardest of his brothers to predict, and yet still managed to completely jumble Leo's train of thought if Leo didn't pay strict attention to what Mike seemed to be ignoring. Mike had the singular ability to be funny and annoying at the same moment, to make Leo want to laugh and groan in just about any situation, and that made Mike the hardest to figure out. Leo knew something was off there too, but he couldn't even figure out a potential answer as he had with Raph and Don. No new amounts of time spent places, though with Mike's randomness, that wasn't a surprise. Where Raph and Don had two or three places they could be counted on to be at within any given situation, Mike had a million. He'd be playing games, or riding his skateboard, or messing around in the kitchen, or talking with Klunk, or playing some prank on an unsuspecting sibling.... So while every sense Leo had insisted he was missing something, he couldn't place what.

He was stuck. There wasn't a way to fix what had changed without knowing the change, and he couldn't name the change in a way to find out what caused it. Assumptions and

feelings were well and good when used correctly, but not much use against Raph's temper, Don's logic or Mike's boredom. Discussing anything with Master Splinter without knowing what he wanted to discuss would have them both going in circles trying to figure it out. No, he was the leader, he had noticed the change, so he had to handle this. As soon as he figured out how.

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Leo finally had to admit that the best way to find out anything was to see if anyone else had noticed the changes as well. He decided to talk to Don first on the theory that Don wasn't likely to laugh at him if he had to admit what he felt was different. Well, at least Don wouldn't laugh out loud.

Finding Donnie alone was rarely a problem. Finding Donnie when he wasn't occupied with some matter or another of extreme importance, on the other hand, could be an exercise in frustration. So it surprised Leo to find his brother staring at the wall. He hesitated, wondering if maybe Don was dreaming up some new thing that would no doubt be amazing, but Don's face held no concentration. He decided to take the risk of knocking.

Don jumped, startled. Leo had a moment to mentally shake his head at a ninja caught so off guard before Don gave a sheepish grin and motioned for him to come in. He caught that quick glance Don gave the computer, but it was on one of those screensavers and Don seemed content to let it stay that way. Leo noted that Don was apparently working on one of his secret projects, which meant that when Don was particularly testy in a few days there would be a reason why.

"What's up, Leo?" Don asked as Leo shut the door and moved to stand a few feet from him.

Here was the hard part. How to explain there was something changed when the change itself eluded him? "I just wanted to talk, if you have time."

"Sure." The statement was accompanied by a tilting of Don's head.

Leo knew his brothers well and knew that Don had picked up on the fact something was bothering him. Having someone understand him that quickly and well could be a blessing. Might as well jump right in and save the roundabout conversation they could have. It'd just have Don get more worried when it was likely nothing was wrong and Leo was over-reacting. "Have you noticed anything...different going on lately?" Leo asked. He didn't really think Don had, but it needed to be asked.

It surprised him to see Don tense slightly and shift just a bit in his chair. "Different how?" Don responded, but his tone was too casual. A clenching feeling began in Leo's gut. His brothers were hiding something from him. While he had hoped he was wrong about that, he couldn't claim shock. He shrugged in answer to Don's question.

"Just small things I've noticed that seem odd. Nothing concrete, so I was wondering if I imagined them." Don's body language became guarded as Leo spoke. It was a bad sign, but Leo kept his own posture relaxed.

The pause before Don spoke worried him more, and confirmed that Don knew something. He just had to figure out what.

"Things do seem different lately," Don agreed. "What have you noticed?"

"Subtle things," Leo responded without thinking about it. "Nothing I can actually prove, but it's there just the same."

Don frowned so briefly Leo would have missed it if he hadn't been looking. "So you don't know what's changed?"

This was getting them both nowhere. Leo couldn't voice the changes he knew about without giving away more than he was comfortable with, and Don seemed reluctant to tell him. Remembering that he didn't want to waste time circling things, he caught Donnie's eyes and stated, "You know. What's causing it, Don?"

He saw the surprise chased quickly by embarrassment flash on Don's face. Don swallowed before speaking, "Well...remember when we were kids and first got a TV? And Mike started that 'Adult Goodnight Kiss' game?"

Leo nodded, a sinking feeling inside. He'd hated that game and had never told his brothers that. It had been a small relief when Mike stopped asking to play and if Don was bringing it up now, all these years later.... "I remember it. How long have you been 'playing' it again?" He didn't want the answer. He needed to know.

"Um...Since the night you got us back together after Karai's attack. While you and Raph were saving what you could." It was like taking a blow to the gut. That had been months ago! Leo would have sworn the changes had only started a few weeks ago at the most. How had he missed any sign before then?

He listened with half an ear as Don talked about the long day of hiding, of talking to Mike and sharing a kiss. It wasn't until Don mentioned Mike leading him to a room where Raph was waiting that Leo gave his full attention again. "Raph had already..." He couldn't finish the sentence.

Don nodded. "He and Mike had been together for awhile. They were quite happy for...uh...me to join them." It was very odd to realize that despite being on the brink of death, despite all the wounds he'd been dealt, a few words from his brother hurt most of all. He buried the pain, eyes on Don. He wanted to scream and rant. That was the easy way though. Calm, at least by outward appearances, he nodded. "So, instead of talking to me, you guys started touching me more often?"

"It wasn't like that, exactly," Don practically muttered. Leo narrowed his eyes.

"Then what, exactly, was it like?"

"We...we weren't sure you'd want to...join. You were the most reluctant as a kid...." Don trailed off, which was fine with Leo. His brothers not only didn't want to just talk to him about being together, they'd felt a need to try and persuade him into coming to them. It was grating to realize their tactics had worked. After all, here he was.

He struggled to control the pain and temper rolling through him so he could speak calmly. "If you three want to...do whatever, that's fine. I happen to think more of my brothers than a good time. Leave me out of it." He turned and stalked out, ignoring Don's call as he headed for the door. It may be Raph who typically left when angry, but Leo needed to run, to settle the whirlpool of hurt inside so he could continue dealing

with his brothers as fairly as possible. He was leader, after all. Holding grudges wasn't allowed.

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"He said that?" Mike's voice was soft, disbelieving. He looked at Don as if expecting Don to laugh and say he'd been joking. Raph stayed silent. He didn't have the smallest hope Don was wrong. Don had grabbed him and Mike and insisted on talking with them. Once in Raph's room, chosen because it was closest, Don had gone over the talk with Leo. None of them had thought Leo'd react like that!

"Yes, Mike," Don said with a sigh. He'd been over the conversation in his mind multiple times already. "I- I messed up. I wasn't expecting him to come talk to me and..." Don waved a hand in disgust. "I wasn't ready."

"What'd he mean by that brothers comment, anyway?" Mike asked, staring at his feet. He blinked in surprise at the small fur covered body bumping his leg and bent down to pick Klunk up. The kitty was quite content to cuddle close.

"He meant that we're nothin' ta each other but a warm body," Raph's anger laced his voice, boding ill for whenever he caught up with Leo. Don and Mike both recoiled at the statement, though neither argued against it.

Silence filled the room for long moments before Mike spoke with quiet determination. "Whether he wants in or not, we can't leave him thinking like that. It's not true."

Two nods answered him. "Here's what we do."

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"Yer an idiot."

The blunt statement from the doorway was Leo's second warning that someone had entered the dojo. He'd been expecting Raph since he got back from his run. It was one of the few times he looked forward to dealing with the hot head. He gave Raph a cool look designed to infuriate his brother. "I suppose you'd be the expert on such things."

Raph shook his head. "Yer trying too hard. And while I'd love ta go a round with ya on this, I doubt it'd get any sense in that head of yers."

Leo blinked in surprise. Well, that certainly wasn't the response he'd expected, but if Raph wanted to play the lip service game, fine. He didn't require a fight to handle irritation, unlike some turtles.

"And what sense am I supposed to have, Raph? To play some game and act-"

"Shut it." The clipped command took both turtles by surprise as much as the fact Leo obeyed did. They glared at each other for a long moment before Raph continued in a tone only slightly more controlled, "Ya believe that junk, don't ya? That we're all

together 'cause of some game we played as a kid? Shell, Leo, name one time, just one, where there was a doubt of how any of us felt about the others." Raph paused

to allow Leo to speak, but no words came. There was no answer and they both knew it.

Raph scoffed. "Like I said. Yer an idiot." He spun and stalked out with a dismissive wave, leaving Leo with much to think about.

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It was hours later before Leo was approached again. He'd been meditating and had sensed a presence in his room, but continued his meditation with the idea that whoever it was would go away if he did. No such luck. The presence stayed, close to him and quiet. Which meant it couldn't be Raph or Mike.

Finally accepting that he was getting no where until he dealt with the interruption, he came out of his trance, musing it was a good thing Mike never figured out the best way to distract him was to not try. Ignoring someone making noises was easier than handling the silence any day.

It was a surprise to realize that Don was meditating as well. Leo wondered absently how long he'd made Don wait, before shifting slightly. Don's eyes opened immediately.

"I suppose you're here to tell me I'm an idiot as well?" Leo asked, thinking he might save himself a similar talk with Mike later.

Don raised an eye ridge. "I have a feeling you've heard that enough for now. It's not like you to not finish an argument, Leo."

Leo blinked and colored slightly. He hadn't given Don time to respond earlier. He'd been too hurt. With an inward sigh, he nodded. "Alright then. So your here to finish it?"

"Close enough," Don smiled, not a sight Leo thought he'd be seeing any time soon.

"You had a valid concern, Leo. While Mike and Raph may not agree, it was something that needed to be addressed. I wasn't letting myself think about why I agreed to resume activities with our brothers. I didn't want to consider the many ways society would look at us in disgust. The ways April, Casey, or any of our friends would react was too frightening on some level for me to work through my reasons. So, I thank you for making me face them. I learned they had less to do with what was right on a logical level, and more to do with what was right in my heart. Not exactly something a scientist wants to admit, but it was as simple as that. There is no one on any world that I trust as completely as I trust the three of you. There is no one I care for more. Logic and society have nothing to do with it. If you find being together repulsive, we will accept that, Leo. It hurts, but it's your choice. That's all I wanted to say on the matter."

Arguments tried to form in Leo's mind, but none of them seemed to have the strength to combat Don's quiet confidence. Finally, Leo just nodded. "I apologize for leaving as abruptly as I did. Thank you for your input."

Don smiled again and stood in a fluid motion. Leo let him leave and repositioned

himself. He had more meditating to do.

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Leo was surprised when he went to bed without seeing Mike. He wondered if maybe Mike figured he'd gotten the point, but discarded the idea in favor of Mike waiting for morning. As it turned out, he was a few hours off. He was awoken by the sudden shifting of air in his room as the door slid slowly open. His first instinct had him grabbing the handle of his katana only to relax upon realizing that it was one of his brothers. The footsteps told him who.

Mike stopped by the side of his bed before speaking. "I had a nightmare. Can I sleep with you tonight?"

"You haven't come to me for a nightmare in years," Leo said skeptically, raising an eye ridge before realizing Mike wouldn't be able to see it.

"Are you going to turn me away?" The voice was soft and sad and not anything like how Mike should sound. Leo hesitated before sliding aside to make room. Mike quickly climbed on the bed and stretched out beside him. Quiet settled over them until Leo wondered if maybe Mike had gone to sleep. A slight stirring convinced him he was wrong again. "I did have a nightmare. You left us. Just vanished one day and we never heard from you again."

"Think you're confusing me with Don," Leo teased lightly. He was rewarded with a slight chuckle.

"Lame dude."

"No more than your 'nightmare'. I'm not going anywhere without you guys knowing about it." It was an easy promise to make. Mike reached out to lightly touch his hand.

"Bro...when this all started, yeah, it was a game. Something that was fun and felt forbidden and cool. It wasn't immediate, for me at least, that it became something more. Seeing Don fall for April, and then Raph's crush on Casey...yeah, he was with me at the time, but I still knew...it clicked in one part of my brain, but I never really had to think about it, you know? Every time Don got a crush, or even you with Karai...I'd be annoyed and...jealous. Then Don came and wanted to start up things again, and...I got greedy. I talked them into trying to convince you to join and...we should have asked. I just didn't want you to say no, and as long as we didn't ask, you couldn't. I thought."

"Mike..."

"I'm sorry, Leo. Just...don't be mad at us, okay?"

Leo sighed. "I'm not. I think you three set me up to not be."

"Maybe." Leo didn't need to see Mike's smile to know it was there. There was only a slight pause before Mike whispered softly, "Leo, would you...would you join?" A slight noise told Leo Mike was quite literally holding his breath for an answer. Smiling, he leaned forward and captured Mike's lips in a quick kiss.

"I might be interes-" his statement was cut off by Mike covering his lips in a return kiss. He didn't remember Mike being this good at kissing....

**Fin**





Winter ends

# DONATELLO

BOOK 2  
SPRING



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Turtle involved



Turtle implied

Paired with/rating  
**NC-17 | R | PG-13 | PG | G**

Warning



Pinup



Comic



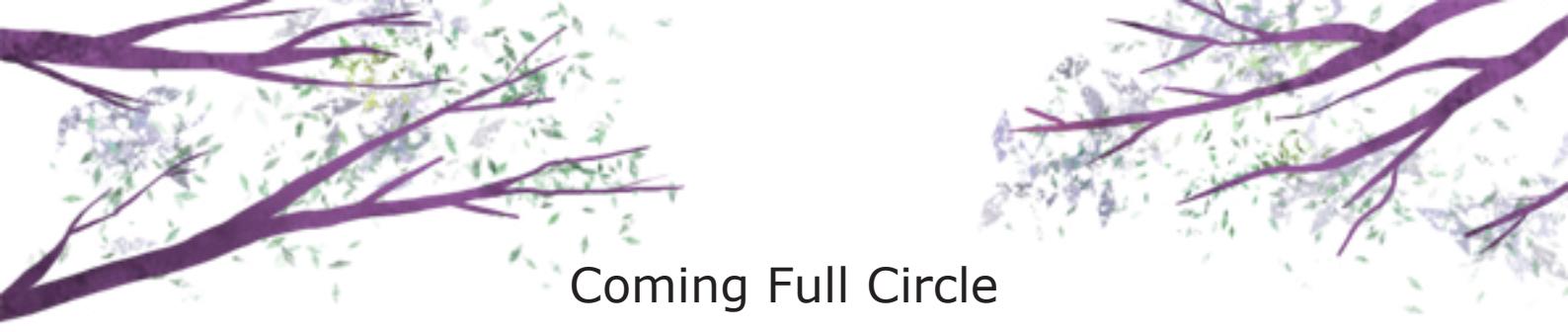
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# Coming Full Circle

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## Chapter 2

~Donatello~  
Spring's Emergence

~~~~~\*~~~~~

Huddling in his cream coat and snuggling into the large purple scarf, Donatello tried hard to ignore the cold weather and focus on his anger. In fact, he wanted to be angry. He didn't want to have anything to do with being kind or forgiving. He wanted to hold onto that black seething mass in his belly and chew on it. But his gut knew, and his mind always came back to the same thing - he was angrier at himself than any of his brothers.

Sitting on the edge of a rooftop and gazing down at the city below, he only vaguely registered the lights and noises, and he certainly didn't hear the footsteps behind him.

Why couldn't he handle it? It should have been easy being in charge even for longer than expected. But it hadn't been. Maybe it was a mixture of being cooped up, a mixture of slowly watching their savings dwindle away all because Splinter forbade them to go topside on patrols. They hadn't been able to bag themselves bad guys and steal their wallets in just over three months. Donatello remembered that fear of suddenly realizing that if they didn't find some source of income, then they would again be scavenging out of garbage cans for food.

He had hated Splinter after his refusal to allow him to go topside to patrol simply to get the funds for the family to survive. Don instead found himself stuck with a job that he should have enjoyed and excelled in – but he didn't. He despised his work, the customers who called, and the added amount of stress it placed on his shoulders. It hurt to feel the disappointment from Splinter. Logically he knew it wasn't true, but Don couldn't help feel like their father thought his other three sons were useless without Leonardo there to watch over them.

That brought him back to the fact that he hated his life. It was the simple abandonment. Leonardo had lied and he hadn't even bothered himself to contact any of them. Nothing; no e-mail, no phone call, not even a low-tech postcard had been sent. Those first few months had been heaven, but the honeymoon had died quickly and all Donnie was left with was ash in his mouth and rubble in his hands. Emptiness consumed the lair after the end of that first year, and the longer it had lasted, the harsher their world had become.

And really, having had Raph so close for those first few months had been wonderful as well as a double-edged sword once Raphael's anger took center stage. The two of them

had begun with simple bickering back and forth; then it had grown heated without any real venom exchanged; and finally they had begun to snap at the other and hiss, leaving scalding wounds left open to the flies. In the end, they had avoided each other to keep from ruining what brotherly relationship they had left.

Donatello looked to his gloved hands and he sighed, his breath puffing and clouding in the cold weather. A week before Leo had left; Raphael had looked at him, staring for a moment before grinning and pointing a thumb at Splinter's room just moments after their meeting had ended. Raphael had made the comment that while the cat was away the mice would play. It had sent a tingle through his spine and Don had smiled, laughing softly – but he had seen it, that look in Raph's eyes. He hadn't known what to think at the time, but now – two years later – he wondered if Raphael still wanted to wander into that territory. They had flirted at first, so subtly that even Don wasn't sure it could be classified as flirting per say. Things really hadn't been so bad that first year, it was stressful, sure, but there was that goal at the end, that light that he could hand the stress back over before long. But it hadn't ended.

Originally, when Leo had failed to contact them after only four months out, Donnie had worried, but it was simply out of annoyance that his brother was being lazy or too caught up in the freedom he had away from the family. Mikey was antsy for a while and constantly disappointed whenever he stopped by April's to check for mail only to return empty handed; and Raphael simply got pissed. He had complained at first, calling Leonardo an ass for not at least keeping them updated, but then he got angry at everything and took his frustration and worry out on other things and on the family emotionally.

Donatello couldn't help but hug himself more, squeezing his eyes shut with embarrassment as he remembered that one night after Leo had left and he had had a particularly good day with Raphael, smiling at him and touching his hand. Warmth had been shared, a true happy moment passed between them and Donnie remembered himself blushing and smiling back. He had thought in bed that night that if nothing else came out of Leo being gone, and if the only thing that was achieved for those left behind was that he and Raph could finally take that step, it would all be worth it.

But then Leo never wrote or came back.

The tension in the family had been palpable. It was intense and everyone had been balanced on the edge of a katana. A whole year of stress did none of them any good and it had turned to dust whatever Raphael and he had touched upon that day. Donnie could still remember feeling his heart flutter and his smile spread when he had considered kissing Raphael that night. He now felt silly for having thought of that in the past. after all."

When Raphael plopped himself down next to him, rearranging his trench coat around him, he twisted on the edge to join him, their clothed legs dangling over the side together. Donatello couldn't stop the yelp from escaping his lungs and he couldn't get his jumping heart to slow. Raphael smirked at his outburst and he chuckled, shaking his head as his dangling, booted feet hung over the side. Donatello hooked his ankles together in embarrassment as Raphael politely remained silent – though Don could see Raph straining to keep his tongue in check. He knew Raphael was dying to rib at him for that one.

Donatello made a grunt of acknowledgement and shifted with a fidget in his fingers. "You scared the shell off of me."

Raphael peeked at him from under his fedora hat. "Sorry." He mumbled. He hunkered down, hands pressing deeper into his coat pockets.

They both looked away, the air between them once again heavy and thick with uncertainty. Whenever one moved the other flinched; and whenever one felt the courage to say something, an abrupt shift and swing of the legs would instantly shatter that bravery.

Donatello's face heated up and he hid his face further into his scarf, hoping to pass off his colored cheeks off as being caused by the cold air.

"Hey... I uh.... just wanted ya to know that I forgave Leo a while back."

The statement was unexpected. Donatello mulled over his choice of words, sampling the idea before he turned to face Raphael with a small shrug; ultimately not knowing what else to say. "O-kay..." Don dragged out.

Raph smiled behind the collar of his coat. "I'm just sayin'... If I can forgive the bastard, then that puts you in last place for this event, Brainiac."

Donatello smiled back. Raph always did have a way of stating the obvious. "Yeah. It's not that... I am still- I don't know." He broke off, frowning down at the lights and watching the street lamps change with the flow of traffic as it shifted. "I don't hate Leo, but I'm not happy either. He screwed up and I guess I feel like I wanted some elaborate apology or... or just something-"

"It's Leo, Donnie. He doesn't think about givin' updates to us about himself. He might whine and bitch about us givin' him a heads-up about what we do, but he doesn't think ta do the same." He shifted on the ledge, peeking at Donatello from the corner of his eye.

Donatello took a moment to mull that over. Raph had a point. Leonardo never seemed to consider that his brothers worried about him just as much as he about them.

But why hadn't he at least sent a postcard saying something dumb like: 'No longer in Cuba. Moving on to Peru.'

Leo hadn't bothered to do any contacting concerning his family.

"You're the smart one, Donnie, but you do forget stuff too." Raphael said, his eyes looking away instantly the moment Donatello's head jerked towards him.

"I do not." Donnie puffed up, glaring at Raph.

Snorting and smirking, Raphael shot him a smug look, "Dude, ya forgot ta eat."

Waving the jab off, Donatello rolled his eyes, "Food's just a minor detail when working on scientific breakthroughs."

"Even when ya fall asleep at the table? Yer hand still holding the damn screwdriver in place where you passed out in mid turn?" Donnie didn't think he liked that cocky look on his face. He was rubbing that particular incident in far too hard.

"Well, at least I don't just leave while lying about why I'm leaving." Donnie glared, his arms unfolding and his hands reaching down to grip at the edge of the ledge.

Raphael nodded, "Yeah, true." He frowned, looking up at the sky instead of the city this time. "And between Mike and me, we keep ya fed."

The silence hung over them and Donatello again tried to keep himself from looking at Raphael. They were getting along so nicely, it was wonderful.

"So... sorry about being a dick." Raph grunted, his head turning away. Donnie knew he was trying to be honest without jeopardizing his dignity. But it wasn't just his fault.

"Raph-"

"No, I'm serious. I was a real jerk. Instead of tryin' to help ya out or make it easier for ya, I was all focused on being angry at Leo." Raphael snorted abruptly and Donatello watched him, feeling nervous and feeling shy as Raph scowled at the sky, his head shaking and his knuckles turning white as he gripped at the snow covered building.

"I was angry he was gone more because he ruined stuff I wanted ta do then because he was bein' an asshole for not giving you or Mike letters."

Donnie turned those words over in his head and listened close, finding himself leaning towards him as he talked.

"Leo up and left, leavin' ya with everything ta do and with no instructions on how ta do it or how ta deal with all his leadership garbage. I mean, compared ta what we all just went through in the last four years before he ditched us, we had survived a lot of shit. It should have been easy but it wasn't and all 'cause old Fearless left not thinking maybe we had... plans, now that we weren't riskin' our lives nightly."

Reaching over and placing his hand atop Raphael's, Donatello felt his face blush and his heart break. Raphael was so honest, the fire in his eyes burned right through him and he wanted to be consumed in that blaze. "Raphie..."

"I felt bad." Raph said suddenly, turning sad eyes on his. "I didn't do anythin' that helped. I wanted ta talk with ya, do stuff with ya because Leo was gone, but instead I... I don't know. It never happened. We fought instead. That's not what I was thinkin' we could do without the babysitter around. I thought the three of us would be able to goof off, skateboard or sneak out and explore the city. I thought we would genuinely have a chance to enjoy life for a change."

Donatello felt his eyes burn and he bit back the urge to gush on him, telling him that's what he had wanted too but had felt restrained and required to be like Leo. His vision of what they could have been doing was so much more appealing than what really happened. Why hadn't they done that? Between Mike and Raph, Donnie knew he would have caved and joined them. Without Leo to be the dominant voice of reason, the three of them could have gotten away with murder, even with Splinter in the house. He wasn't even sure if Donnie realized just how harsh he had sounded right then. Had he meant to bite his head off with just three simple words?

Instead they had drifted apart and it took Leo coming home – and all of them hating him and he nearly dying – before they even attempted to mend their relationships.

"I would have liked that." Donatello admitted, his voice coming out in nothing but a soft whisper, a breathy regret as to what could have been.

Raphael bobbed his head, looking down at their joined hands. Raphael would normally have said something afterwards – always needing some way to get the last word in – but instead Donnie found himself sitting in silence with him. Raph's hand pulled out from under Donnie's abruptly and Don looked to his face. His palm felt cold without Raphael's hand there to keep it warm, and he continued to watch his face, nervous at what he was beginning to see within those eyes.

"I'm sorry." Raph whispered again.

"Even though I said it back then; I never blamed you."

Raphael inhaled deeply and watched the city down below them shift through its phases with traffic dancing in the streets. "Did you..." He began but literally bit his tongue, stopping himself.

"It's okay, Raphie. I knew you weren't mad at me. I could never hate you." Donatello whispered, his fingers curling into his palms to keep his hands warm.

"Besides, it's me who should be apologizing." Donnie smiled.

Looking at him in confusion, Raphael tilted his head, shaking it with befuddlement settled on his features, "Huh? Why?"

"For being so snappy the past year. I didn't help the situation at all. I was so irritable and I was... I was blaming everyone."

Smiling, Raphael shook his head and Donnie watched his eyes soften into two warm pools of gold. "Don, I'm just amazed ya put up with me for as long as ya did."

Donnie had never felt so wonderful. It was like something similar to pure light welling within his belly and rising up out of his soul. He felt joy and comfort, excitement and timid delight all at once. For Raphael being the brash one in the group, he sure could say some pretty things from time to time. "No, the fact you put up with me acting like I was, is what amazes me. I mean, if we can survive that, we can survive anything, right?" He queried, his fingers twitching against his palms.

The heated look in Raphael's eyes caused his entire body to freeze up and his stomach to twist into a knot. Raphael shifted towards him in that moment, his hand reaching out and taking Don's fingers in his this time. "Did you feel it too?" he breathed, fog puffing between them from his urgency.

Donnie didn't want to deny that he didn't know what Raphael was talking about; so he didn't. He nodded, his tail sending a shiver up his spine.

"I still remember your promise." Raph blushed, joining Donnie as their faces colored simultaneously.

The lights flashed below and ambient noise filled Donatello's ears as blood rushed, powered by his out of control pumping heart. He couldn't stop the memory from surfacing. Don's tongue wouldn't work. He was lost in Raphael's sincerity and his desire for him

to understand what he meant. How could he not? This revelation was captivating, rewarding, but his joints locked up, his fingers numb and his belly trembling with a herd of butterflies. He didn't want to find he was just hallucinating. To awaken from such a dream as this would be a harsh mistress to accept. He wanted to realize those heated looks; during their fights they had been used on several occasions against him. To have those eyes promising more made him weak and short of breath.

He nodded - it was all he could do, it was all he wanted. With his permission he granted them both amnesty from consequences and awkward mornings to follow. Like a ship sailing into port, all he could focus on was the appearance of Raphael's eyes, inches away from his. The moment Raphael touched him, taking his hand and tugging him forward, it was like fire, powering its way through him. Their mouths bumped together, awkward, hesitant, and clumsy. The kiss was gentle and Donatello shivered, his fingers reaching out, touching the lapel of Raph's coat while moving his lips and inhaling deeply of the other. He savored those lips, spicy and warm all at once.

Embers settled in his belly and Donatello melted into him, returning the chaste kiss. The feeling in him welled and it was like an awakening. He awoke after years of starving in the darkness simply by a gentle touch. Breaking the kiss and gasping for air, Donatello stared at him, entranced with the emotions surging to the surface till Donnie turned away, blushing and fidgeting. Why did he feel so embarrassed? He had silently hoped and dreamed of this for over two years. But the intensity of the kiss, the tenderness and loving touch of Raphael practically worshipping him surprised and thrilled him all at once. If such a first kiss was this all-encompassing, what would a real hot and heavy kiss feel like? Donnie wondered if it was possible to die during something like that because if plain actions made him feel like this, there was no way he could survive the passion he knew Raphael would consume him with.

"Sorry." Raph mumbled, scooting away - or he would have if Donnie hadn't grabbed his arm, his face again hot and his dark eyes boring into the amber in front of him.

"I-I think I've loved you for a long time now." He blurted out, feeling so raw and exposed. "You're like a live wire sparking on the ground and I feel like if I touch you I'll... I'll be consumed." It was only after he said it all did Donatello realize what he had admitted. It had rushed past his lips in a torrent, gushing past his lips; and all he could think about was how hard would Raphael laugh?

Raphael stared at him and Donnie felt so silly. His stomach flopped wildly within and he couldn't stand the flicker of amusement within Raph's eyes. "Is that so bad?" Raphael whispered, cautiously dipping his head and reaching for him, his cold, bare hand cupping Don's heated cheek.

Hesitating, Donatello finally shook his head, his fingers gripping at his coat sleeve tightly. He tugged on it faintly, his whole body trembling. "No..." He trembled.

Raphael's smile was slow as it grew, lifting his features and bringing him to life in such a way that Donnie's breath caught in his throat and he drowned in the smug happiness that became Raphael. "Then kiss me." He ordered, his voice husky and deep, reverberating down to his very core.

Raphael lunged forward, pressing his mouth to Don's and kissing him hard and deep. Donatello managed to stifle a moan though a whimper escaped instead and he melted into Raph's arms. Even sitting hundreds of feet above the bustling streets, they sat on

the edge of the building, leaning into each other so Donatello could search out Raph's lips. The moment Raphael wrapped his arm around his shoulders, Don no longer had even a sliver of fear of falling off the ledge. He was safe, secure, and the feel of Raphael's lips upon his was the only important thing in the entire world. The realization they had their entire lives to explore each other and to actually pursue what both had been dreaming about for so long, was both a relief and a reward for the harsh years they had endured. And Raphael was so warm.

Winter didn't seem so cold anymore.

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*Pressing his finger to his lips, Raphael glared at Donatello, telling him he had to be quiet if they had any hope of getting up into the rafters without the humans seeing them.*

*The two twelve year olds used everything they knew to sneak past the men laughing and drinking around them and they slipped past the women serving drinks. Raph had found an open door out back and had managed to get the two of them inside. Now they just had to find the access to the rafters so they could hide in the sea of lights above their heads.*

"Are you sure we should be here?" Don whispered, grabbing Raph's hand so he wouldn't lose him if Raphael decided to dart off when a blind spot opened for them to slip into.

"Course not. We're too young. But you wanna watch, right?"

*Frowning and mulling that thought over, Donatello finally nodded, his dark eyes picking up hints of green and red from the fluorescent lights above. He was always curious and something like this, being in a place where grown men went to have fun and drink left his curiosity insatiable.*

*Grinning smugly, Raphael nodded and then tugged Don after him when the legs opened up and the human's had their backs turned for just that trembling moment in time and the two boys were once again buried in the shadows along the wall.*

*Donnie was the one who figured it out how to get to the roof. They slipped behind the black curtain and climbed the ladder. Once they were above the humans, the two boys found a secure perch where they could see the stage perfectly and everyone else below without them seeing them.*

*Rubbing his hands together, Raphael smiled. He was anxious and he couldn't wait to see. He had heard of these places, but he didn't really know what it was. He grinned at Donnie and gave him a thumb up, his amber eyes wide and fiery.*

*Frowning and wrinkling his nose again, Donatello shook his head. "I don't know Raphie; we'll get in trouble if Splinter finds out. We're not even supposed to be on the surface, and yet here we are, sitting in a bar filled with humans."*

"Drunk humans." Raph pointed out. "If them humans even do see us, they won't remember us or think we was hallucinations."

"Were." Donatello corrected.

Raph scowled but looked back below him. The lights had dimmed and had been replaced by a softer, shimmery type of lighting. The pole on the stage picked up this new light and reflected it back at the audience, blinding them for a split second and once the men – and two boys – had opened their eyes again, there was a woman standing on the stage with a black top hat on. A white gloved hand pressed to her belly dramatically and her wrist was pressed to her forehead.

Donatello gasped and leaned forward and Raphael smirked, shooting his brother a look. He knew Don would like this.

The woman's head fell to the side and music thrummed in the building. Men hooted below and Donatello was disappointed by that – somehow having those men yell and shout ruined the picture she was creating. He wanted to tell them to be quiet, but it was useless and he'd have to just ignore them.

Dragging her hand along her belly and down the length of her thigh, the woman's face contorted, her large red lips forming an 'o' as though she were cooing to the men below her. She grasped the silver pole and walked around it slowly, her high heels clicking, her black stylized tuxedo hugging her curves tightly and left nothing to the imagination – even though it strangely did. Don found himself wondering what exactly where those black tails hiding, what was beneath that black bow at her throat, what did her hands truly look like without those white gloves on.

"She's pretty." Donnie breathed out, tilting his head. He caught glimmers of her blue eyes and saw flashes of her red hair, but it was intriguing, the way she dipped and turned, pressing a hand here, a finger there, a contort of her face to look oh so helpless or completely in charge. She was fascinating.

"So?" Raphael whispered, just as captivated as his brother.

"Wow." Was all Don managed out.

Grinning and sneaking a peak at Donatello, Raphael couldn't help watching how pretty Donnie's eyes looked in the flashing lights. His eyes were almost black usually, but at the moment, they absorbed every color around him and they danced with the rhythm of the music, they seemed to breathe with life that was typically absent except when Donnie was taking apart and fixing something. Something about those strobes capturing the usually hidden emotions of Donatello's character was beautiful and he stared.

The woman below suddenly pulled her black coat off and Donnie's brows twitched upwards – her butt was so round, so high looking and tight. She spun on her toes and twisted around the pole, using it more for balance than anything. Her vest followed next and then her top hat was flung out into the crowd of cheering men – her hair was gorgeous, cascading down her body like that. But her shirt came off next.

Maybe it was the cut of the costume or the way those fishnet stockings were painted onto her body, but she suddenly seemed fake, somehow seemed fashioned to look this way. Her breasts held up and high with a corset that left them bunched and overflowing the small cups. The illusion broke and he was disappointed. She had been so alive moments before, but now she seemed like a painted girl playing dress up in mommy's closet.

*How had that happened? He looked over at Raphael who looked away from him and down at the girl only to shyly look back at him.*

*"Is this what human men do a lot?" Donatello asked, not completely believing that men paid money to be disillusioned like this.*

*Raphael shrugged. "Some do." He stared down at the woman, blushing softly as she fell to her knees, allowing a man to put a dollar bill between her breasts.*

*Donatello looked back down and tilted his head. "I guess I can see why they like it; but I liked it more when she was dressed up. Though, I do like her hair down. She looks pretty like that."*

*Chuckling, Raphael nudged Don in the arm with his elbow, grinning at him wickedly. "Jus' wait a minute an' tell me what ya think afterwards when she takes off the top."*

*"What?" Don asked, scandalized at the very idea and his face contorted to show it as well.*

*"Well, this is a strip club. The women aren't just here to look pretty." Raphael pointed out.*

*Looking back down at the woman in a mixture of horror and curiosity, Donatello's eyes never left the woman as she danced a bit more and proceeded to undress further, moving across the stage sensually and even crawling when a man waived money at her so she appeared to stalk him like a large cat.*

*By the time she finished, she was left in only the stockings and high heels. She was pretty naked and Donnie couldn't help but agree with the men below that her breasts were fascinating; but that first image of her, dressed head to toe in black and white with lushes red lips and blue eyes stuck in his mind – she was far more pretty like that.*

*"Wow." Raph mumbled, staring at her intently.*

*Donatello glanced at him, surprised. "You like her like this?"*

*"Yeah. She's awesome." Raph grinned, looking back at his brother.*

*They watched her dance, now using the pole as part of her act as she dipped and twisted, her head being thrown backwards and her hips moving against the pole.*

*"Do ya think we'll ever get ta see stuff like this... you know... for ourselves?" Raphael asked suddenly, watching her intently.*

*Donatello frowned and shrugged. "I don't know."*

*Raphael frowned at that and fidgeted in his seat while his eyes remained intent on her as his mind twisted with an idea that made him nervous but hopeful. "Could-could you maybe dance like that for me one day?" Raphael asked suddenly, blushing profusely and shyly looking towards Donatello.*

*To say he was surprised was an understatement that left his belly fluttering and his*

*heart pounding. Once his brain restarted and he was able to think again, Donnie looked back down at the woman and tilted his head, thinking it over. "Yeah, I guess..." He blushed, shifting atop the rafter.*

*Bobbing his head and mumbling something, Raph reached out and took Donatello's hand; his fingers sheepishly twisting around his.*

*Blushing and watching his brother, Donatello's heart thumped with a flurry and his stomach jumped. It was weird, but he liked the feelings tumbling through him, even though he did feel a little confused and like he couldn't think anymore. It was scary to think he couldn't reason something out because of these emotions, but at the same time, Raphael's hand was so warm.*

*She ended her dance to a loud whoop and hooting of men down below. The two boys watched her leave and Donatello couldn't help but tilt his head and watch her butt move as she walked – he decided he liked that part of her the best – well, and her red hair.*

"Wanna watch another?" Raph asked.

*Donatello considered it a moment then shrugged, nodding his head, "Okay; if you want to stay that's fine, Raphie."*

*Raphael's smile grew and he scooted closer to his brother, his eyes already looking down at the stage and at the woman dressed in a nursing outfit strolling out on stage while swinging a stethoscope at her side. He liked this one and smirked, nudging Don in the ribs. "I wouldn't mind gettin' band-aids from her." He teased.*

*A small smile dragged at Donnie's face, but his tummy again flipped and his heart hurt a little. He didn't know why he was upset to hear that. He tried to ignore the feelings and looked down at the stage again because he suddenly wanting to focus on anything other than Raphael.*

*But it was really hard to do when he caught Raph staring at him now and then while his hand that was wrapped around his squeezing his occasionally. It only confused him more.*

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Months had passed and Donatello smiled into the kiss Raphael had initiated. They were supposed to be patrolling in groups – but tonight Raphael had grabbed Donnie's hand before Leo could split them up like he had been for the past five months and had shouted he was partners with Don and the two of them had disappeared before Leo could argue it.

Raph had taken him to central park – not for a moonlit walk like the other couples around them on the foot paths, but so he could press him up down into the fresh spring grass with flowers budding all around them and the fresh scent of new life filling their minds until the kiss descended and everything was pushed aside.

He wrapped his arms around Raphael's neck and Donnie churred, his legs spreading easily and rubbing along his sides. Their kisses had grown, lengthening into make out sessions that still left them breathless – himself more so than Raph.

With every kiss, their hands found new places to touch and explore. With each exploration some new form of pleasure burst from them, and with each brush an ember of desire was fanned and had grown over time into a flickering flame. It was going to burst any day now, Donatello knew, he could feel it. He wanted it to happen. But rushing it was out of the question. The pace was perfect and neither had any desire to rush into this. When the dam did finally break, they would both be ready for it.

Till then, nothing wrong with mapping out locations they planned to explore more thoroughly when the time came.

Donatello gasped and he gripped hard at Raphael's shoulders, shuddering and trying to breathe.

"Raphie..." he cooed, his hips wiggling, both trying to get away from the curious fingers as well as press further against them as Raphael manipulated and stroked his tail.

Smiling against his throat, Raph mouthed at his neck, teasing his tongue across its length. "Mmmm, I can't help it, your tail is sexy."

Something about the kiss, something about his touch and the tongue playing across his skin was powerful and he felt lost. Something about his body dangling dangerously over the edge of some unseen danger made his heart race and his body respond. Donatello's leg shifted and he lifted one, rubbing it across Raphael's side while his other leg fell aside, settling in the grass and was being quickly followed by Raphael's fingers dancing up the exposed length.

Heat pooled in a familiar area, but Donnie's mind was foggy, lost in a storm of emotions and there was a tumultuous storm of physical needs he wasn't familiar with on this scale. His belly curled and jumped as his loins hungered for something.

Forcing his eyes open, Donatello gasped, catching Raphael's attention. Amber eyes locked with his and his groin ached from that look. He shifted under him, his toes curling and his fingers clawing at his arms. What he wanted, he didn't know – he had an idea but it was far too embarrassing to ponder. Instead, his tail thumped excitedly in the grass.

Raphael's tongue moved out, wetting his lips. Donnie could only imagine what he tasted like and he copied him, tasting for Raphael upon his lips – and he shivered upon capture a portion of his flavor. He moved his leg again but this time Raphael's hand pressed down on his knee, capturing the limp and keeping it pressed into the cooling earth.

Trembling fingers fluttered along the outside of his free thigh and slid into place, brushing across his slit and then hovered there. Donatello's lips opened, threatening to make a sound. He didn't know if he was going to tell him to stop or beg him for more before. At the same moment, they stopped; scared and earnest; they were eager and hovering on flight.

Donnie licked his lips and somehow that answered their questions. Raphael bowed his head, inhaling sharply and growling in his throat, his fingers pressing down and rubbing against Don's body, teasing that slit, and Donatello moaned into Raphael's lips, his penis sliding free while his body curled under him, trying to hide as well as expose more. His fingers were warm and strong, commanding but just as nervous as his en-

tire body felt. It was too much, just the feeling of Raphael touching him and holding him was too much for him to deal with.

Whimpering against his neck, Raphael pulled his hand back to fumble between them. Donnie's mind didn't care what he was doing, he just knew he wanted him to touch him again. When he did, something else was also in hand. Hotter, harder, so much more eager than Raph's fingers before he wrapped his fist around him and pumped his hand over him, his thumb sliding over the head of his erection.

Struggling against him and moaning into his mouth, Donnie arched against him and looked down, watching Raphael's fist pump over their erections, he had pressed them both together and with a small shift of his hips as well, his penis slid against his while his hand continued to pump.

"Raphie... Raphie..." He moaned, his mind fuzzy, his body so tense and desperate to break. He moved his hips, watching as his erection disappear in Raphael's fist and rub its way back into sight against Raph's thrusting dick. It was beautiful and frightening; it was delicious and he cried out, arching against him, bucking his hips and drinking in the wonderful and erotic passion.

Donnie had touched himself before, but nothing compared. He was helpless and couldn't even beg for more. He writhed under Raphael, his fingers tugging and clawing at his biceps, and just as suddenly as this overwhelming lust had taken them both, Raphael kissed him and they moaned, releasing together, soiling themselves in their seed as it burst between their bodies. Don had never felt that level of release before. It was powerful, his body tingled and faded into the night, his mind drifted, lingering in the swell of pleasure and the feel of warm, strong fingers relaxing their grip on his penis, but lips pressing to his neck. And that sensation was whole new area of bliss. He loved it.

They lingered; panting, whimpering, soft churrs and faint noises escaping them. Raphael's hand moved slightly against them, and Donatello jerked, gasping and moaning from the unexpected jolt and then they were still, lying in the damp evening grass with Raphael's face buried against his neck. The lethargic feeling he had was overpowering and Donnie didn't want to move, he wanted to wrap himself in their scent, in the heat they had generated, and he didn't want to leave.

It was many long minutes before they finally moved; a soft kiss here, a touch there, a slight movement between his legs before Don was capable of turning his head, nose brushing Raphael's. They smiled and then promptly colored, embarrassment heating their faces and forcing them to kiss in order to conceal it.

It was wonderful though; perfect. The new and fresh spring leaves quivering above them, the smells of life blossoming all around them, and the gentle sounds of life coming alive. They were serenaded by crickets, cloaked in darkness and starlight, and the sounds of the city were faint and distant in the depths of central park where they were hidden away from the world.

Nothing needed to be said. They kissed, they smiled shyly, their warm fingers lingering upon cooling skin, and they just were there, in the moment.

The tinkling of bells from a shell-cell ruined the moment and Raphael shook his head, quickly grabbing Donatello's wrist and pulling his hand away from his belt and thusly

from the rude awakening. "Ignore it. Let them wait." He kissed him hard, wrestling him away from the distraction.

Donatello churred and returned the kiss but continued to fight, his arm struggling towards the shell-cell, but he too could only last so long against Raphael's kisses. He arched under him, arm raised above his head and Raph's lips and body promising more things to come. "Mmmmm, Raphie..."

Raphael smiled and kissed his jaw, but the blaring reminder of life again called and it rang annoyingly from his belt. He groaned and bowed his head, pressing his brow to Donnie's shoulder.

He couldn't help it, he giggled. Donatello watched him, eyes shining and his wrist wriggling free from Raphael's fist. "If we answer it now, we can get him off our backs for a few more hours." He whispered.

"I don't want him on my back; I want you on my back." Raph snipped, biting at his neck and allowed Donnie to answer the damn phone reluctantly.

Don gasped into the phone and winced, shuddering in pleasure. "We're fine... yeah, still... uh... yeah... patrol, right." Donatello didn't remember what he said, all he did remember though, was that once the phone was hung up, it fell from his fingers, off over his head and into the bushes and his arms wrapped around Raphael's shoulder. They smiled, their kisses once again resuming and hands rubbing across skin. It was spring, a time for growth and life – and it seemed appropriate.

Lifting up on his elbows and gazing down at him, Raphael hovered and licked his lips, hesitating with something that peaked Don's interest. Donatello rubbed his hands across his chest, waiting and tilting his head.

"Come away with me." Raphael fumbled out, staring down at him with wide eyes.

Blinking, Donatello stilled and unlike when their cells began ringing, the moment was completely shattered. "What?" His belly flipped and fear gripped at him.

"I don't mean forever, I just... I mean, like a trip, just us. Let's get away for a while." Donnie could tell Raphael was nervous because he was babbling and his eyes were already beginning to avoid his. He was still touching him and stroking him, but Don could feel the difference. "I don't know..." Donnie started, shaking his head and shifting under him. "We couldn't just up and leave–"

Raphael looked to him sharply, his head shaking, "I was thinkin' just a few weeks. We could... we could do stuff; see things we haven't before." He looked away and Donnie felt his face heating up. "I just thought it'd be nice... us together..."

Donatello shrugged slightly, rubbing his hands along Raphael's arms. "I don't know... I guess it'd be fun." He whispered, "But... we couldn't.... we have too much stuff to do here."

Grunting suddenly, Raphael nodded and looked away. He sat back on his heels, leaving Donatello feeling far too cold and alone suddenly. He watched Raphael brush away invisible mess upon his plastron and his mumblings were low. "Yeah, right." He grunted and stood, rummaging for their belongings in the brush. "We should get goin'. Leo

will be lookin' for us soon."

"Raph-"

"If you don't wanna go, whatever." Raphael snapped at him and brushed him off all in one move. "I'll go alone."

Sitting up and opening his mouth to protest, Donatello was cut off by a simple hand being held out to him. Raphael stared, jaw hard and eyes stormy. Donnie felt horrible; he seemed to have killed something in Raph. He reached for his hand and took it. Raphael dragged him to his feet and quietly offered his things.

Donatello could tell he was mad, but at the same time he wasn't storming off like usual. He wanted to say something but he knew it would only make him more upset. So he did the only thing he could do before they left this grove of magic that had overwhelmed them and left them gasping in this fantasy – he took his hand and pressed his cheek to Raphael's shoulder, his nose resting against his throat.

It diffused the bomb because Donatello felt Raph relax faintly with a sigh and he soon had Raphael's arms wrapping around his shoulders; but it was heavy and forced. Somehow by not agreeing to go with him, Donnie had formed a rift between them. The two stood like that for several minutes, waiting it out till they were able to look at the other without avoiding eye contact.

Grunting and pulling away, Raph shot his thumb over his shoulder. "Let's get goin'."

Don nodded and his stomach flipped. He just hoped he hadn't shattered whatever it was Raphael had been holding onto. They had finally beaten back the tides after years of denial and he didn't want to lose him over a trip.

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Avoiding Raphael was hard the first few days, but after the awkwardness had faded they had picked up where they left off. Whispering in the dark, playing footsie under the table, or dragging one another around a corner of buildings on patrol to kiss and touch before moving to catch up with Leo and Mike. But at the same time, he felt guilty about what he had said to Raph about not going away with him.

It wasn't that he didn't want to, it was because there were things here in the lair that needed to be fixed before he could even think of allowing himself to leave.

"Hey, Don? The light is out in the kitchen." Leonardo called, poking his head into Donnie's room.

Donatello shifted in his chair, not turning towards Leonardo. "Right, I'll get on it." he called back, staring at his computer coldly, his heart pounding while he ignored Leo and he flinched just slightly when Raphael touched his wrist. Don didn't want to look at him. Raphael had come in here purely to spend a little time with him after his work out – he was deliciously sweaty and smelled man-turtle-ish. But Leo was ruining it for him.

Leonardo hesitated behind him till Raph waved him off and he felt the air lighten the moment he left.

Sighing heavily, Don bowed his head and he rubbed at his eyes, shaking his head. He was still mad at Leo. Even little things like the light in the kitchen got on his nerves.

"You know you can't hide forever." Raphael whispered, rubbing his fingertips along Don's arm.

"I know." Donnie sighed, wiping his hand down his face and looking over at Raphael. He leaned back in his chair and turned slightly. "Why am I so angry with him?" he asked, dark eyes pleading with Raph to have him answer that question.

Smirking and shaking his head, Raphael sat back in his chair as well and propped his foot up on Don's desk, pointedly ignoring the annoyed look Donnie gave him for that. "Because he's a dick."

"Raphie...."

"Okay, fine." Raphael sighed, his fingers interlacing together behind his neck. "I can understand where ya can be annoyed with him. He's always thinkin' he knows what's best, he thinks that just cause he's Splinter's protégé' that he knows what everythin' is. And he also thinks that just 'cause he gets sent off on vacation in lala land that he can stay there forever without droppin' a friggin' line."

Donatello listened quietly, his eyes darting away from Raph's the moment he began to read right down the checklist of things he was upset about.

"But honestly Don - I wouldn't have sent anythin' either."

Blinking and looking at him in surprise. Donatello's brows knitted together and he opened his mouth, meaning to ask what he meant but Raph cut him off.

"I mean," Raphael leaned forward again, his foot dropping to the floor so he could place his elbows on his knees. "He was in a tropical jungle. He got a cool name like, 'Ghost of the Jungle', and he wasn't expectin' his judgment call for his personal welfare ta go over this badly. He thought by bein' all responsible and shit that he would be congratulated for being wise like a Jedi."

Don scowled at his Star Wars reference, but it made sense nonetheless.

Sighing, Raphael placed his hand on Donnie's knee. "Look, you ain't vindictive. You're upset. But it's been months now. Get over it."

He shook his head, snorting. Donnie couldn't believe Raphael; so blunt and straightforward. And what he hated the most was that he was right.

"Anyway - I'll let ya go back ta surfin' for porn."

"I do not-" Don shouted but got a kiss to the lips as Raphael's form of interruption.

"Dude, I saw them furries." Raphael smirked and Donnie knew it was because he was blushing hot and guilty. "I ain't into all of that - though I gotta say, that one ninja fox lady was hot. You should try and find more of her - but if you wanna play, I ain't goin' to stop you." he smirked and winked at him.

Donatello shyly lowered his eyes.

Raphael kissed his brow and then was off.

What was annoying, though, was that Raphael was right - he did need to get over it.

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The lair was quiet for a change. Even Mikey was out of the house, doing a rare evening birthday gig for an 8 year old kid. Donatello liked these moments when he had the lair to himself. Sure it was weird and if he had to choose he'd always want his brothers around, but tonight was relaxing just the way it was.

With the silence and with no pressure coming in on either side of him, Donatello watched the cursor blink at the end of the sentence he had written out an hour ago.

Hitting that send button scared him. It was silly really, why should he be so nervous? Quitting his IT Tech job would be the best thing to happen to him since Raphael. The release he knew he'd feel the moment he pushed it was haunting; but not having that job security, not having that guaranteed income was somehow frightening.

Licking his lips, his finger hovered over the Enter key. Just one click, that's all it would take-

"Hey, Donnie?"

He jumped, his finger smashing down on the keyboard as he twisted, looking over his shoulder wide eyed at Leonardo.

Jerking back towards the screen and watching the hourglass flip over before a 'Your Message Has Been Sent' message popped up on his screen, Donnie felt like impending doom was about to rain down on him. Moaning and falling forward, his head hitting his desk, Donatello let a small whimper escape him. It was too late.

"Don?" Leo asked cautiously.

"It's okay. I swear I was going to send it anyway... I think." Donatello raised his head to look at the screen, staring at that pop up and hoped his churning belly was not a bad omen. "What is it?"

"Uh... everyone is out doing stuff tonight. I was wondering if you'd, maybe, want to watch a movie?" Leonardo asked, his face twisting up in question.

Donatello sat up and turned in his chair, staring at him. Somehow that annoyed him, his brother acting so small and scared. But he couldn't blame him. He had been horrible to him from the beginning.

The computers thrummed with life as their fans kicked on and the lights flickered momentarily when that happened.

"Hey Leo? I'm sorry I've been so... horrible to you." He said, forcing himself to stare at Leonardo directly.

They gazed at one another and he saw Leonardo's hope rise up in his eyes. "It's okay—"

"No, it's not." Don sighed heavily. Pushing from his chair, Donatello stood and walked to Leo's side. "I mean, don't get me wrong, you screwed up, but..." he began to fidget – the awkwardness needling at him, "I was upset and took it out on you that day. I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry."

"Everyone's been telling me that." Leonardo smiled sadly, looking Donnie in the eyes. "I understand now." Leo whispered, watching Donatello's brows knit up. "I really do."

Mulling over that, Don weighted the evidence and when his sigh escaped him, he nodded and moved to walk out past Leo. "I'm still mad, but.... Maybe I can get to that kitchen light now."

Leonardo smiled. "Thanks."

Don shrugged and turned, heading out of his room and towards the kitchen. He felt lighter. Donatello smiled softly – and it felt good. It was a pleasant experience smiling around Leonardo again. He had forgotten what it was like.

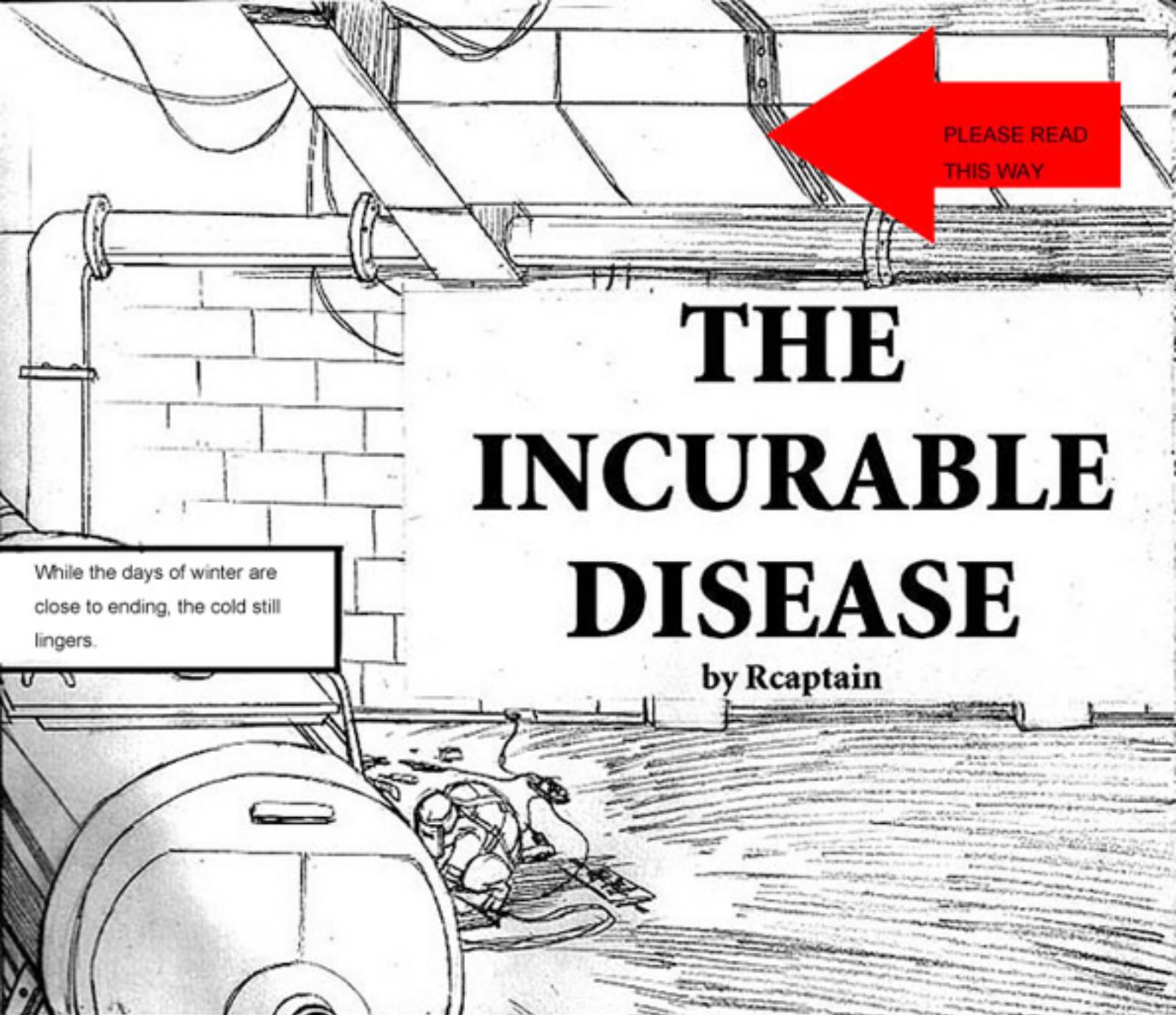
"No, really, thank you." Leo said again, and this time Donatello turned, staring directly at him and feeling his spine tingle from the intensity in his eyes. Leo was being honest – he understood now.

Smiling back at him, Donnie again felt that lightness settle over him. He nodded, studying Leo's brown eyes till he knew what he had to do. "Can you help me change the light? It'll only take a minute." He asked, pointing over his shoulder.

And with one word, the healing process began. It was so simple but exactly what they needed. The olive branch had been extended and Donatello finally took it.

"Sure."

**Fin**



PLEASE READ  
THIS WAY

# THE INCURABLE DISEASE

by Rcaptain

While the days of winter are close to ending, the cold still lingers.

DAY 1  
5:00AM

HUFF

Our heating system hasn't been working well lately. It's not an easy fix.

HISS

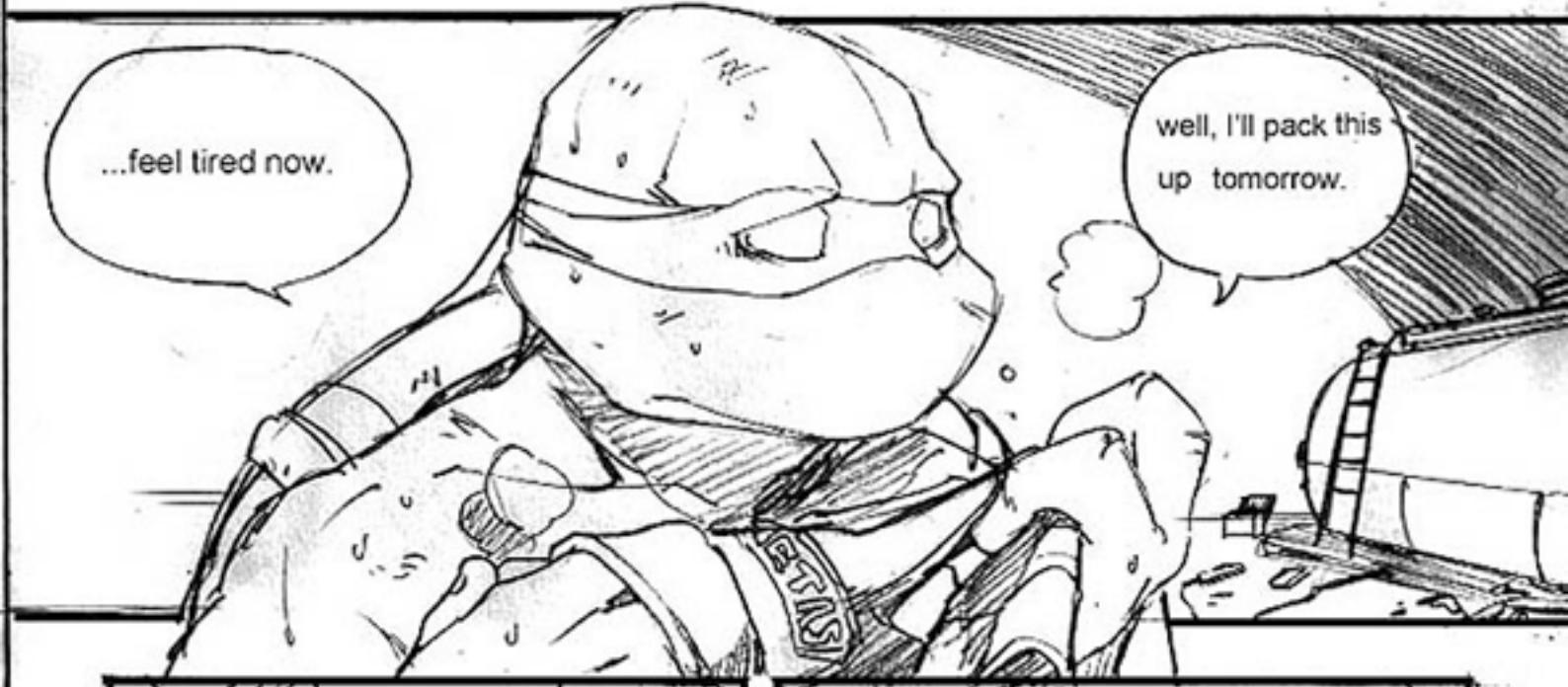


But in the past  
10 hours, I've  
been suffering  
from the "warm-  
ness" next to the  
heating machine.



Finally done.  
Now no one  
will suffer from  
the cold.

click

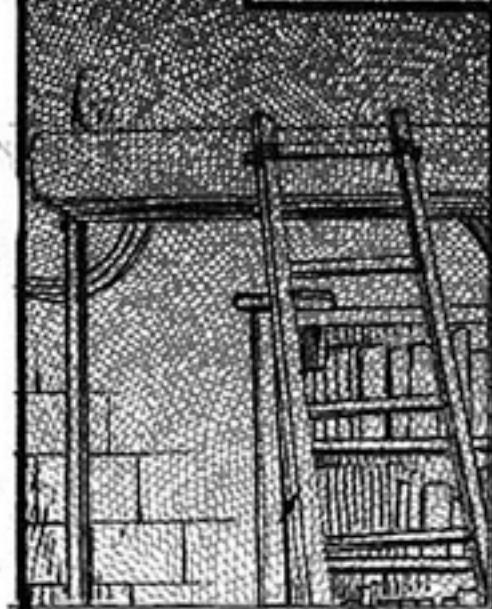
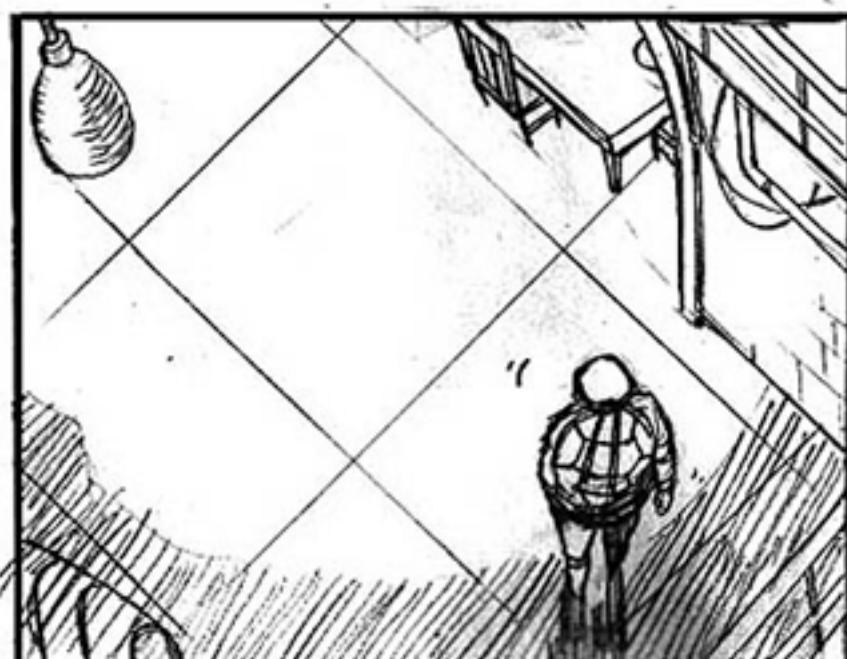
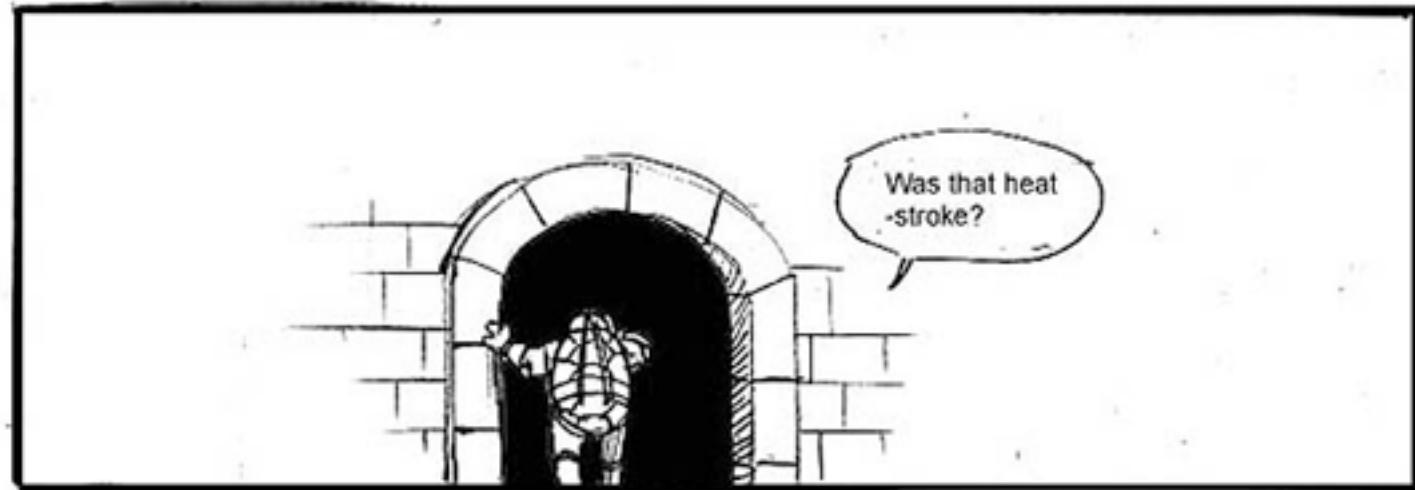


...feel tired now.

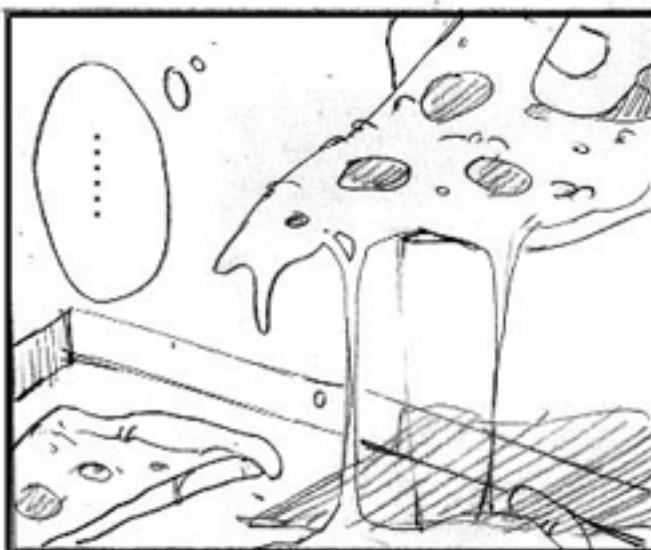
well, I'll pack this  
up tomorrow.

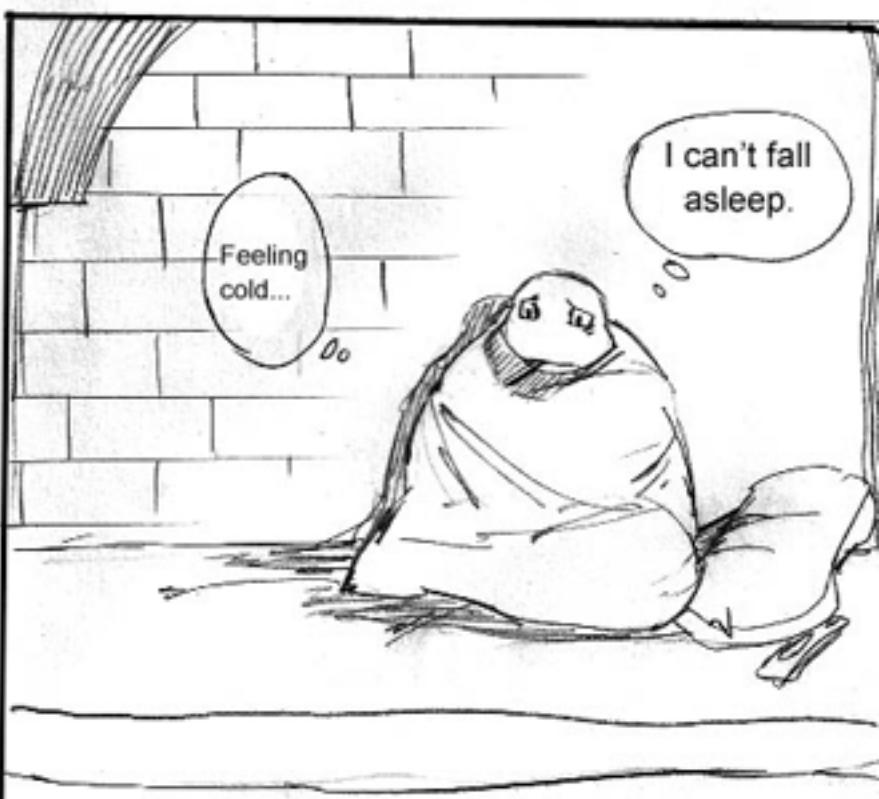
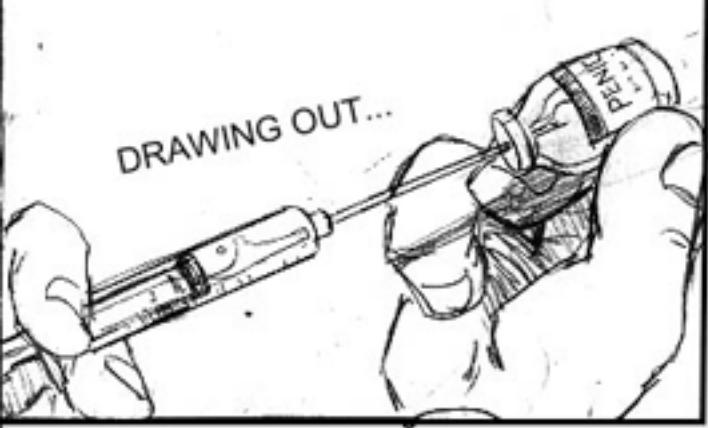


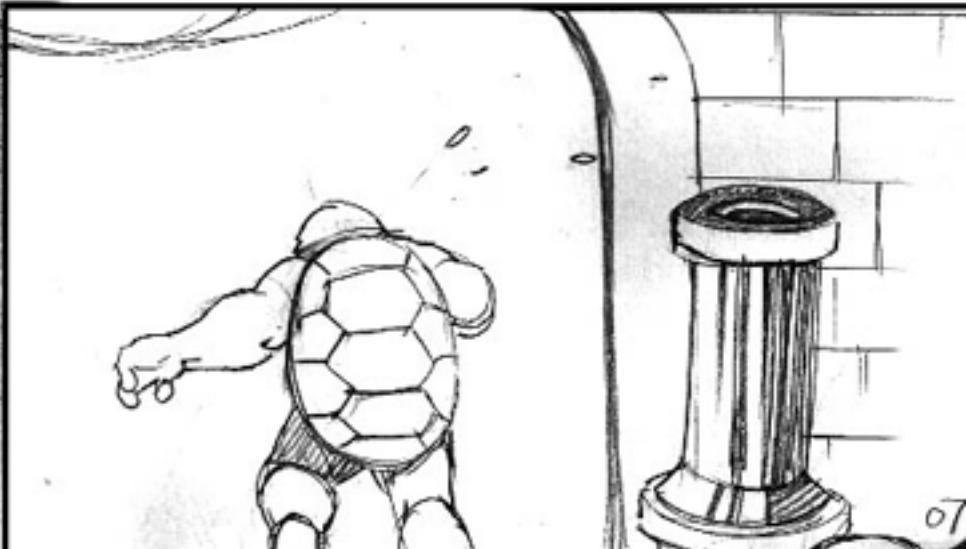
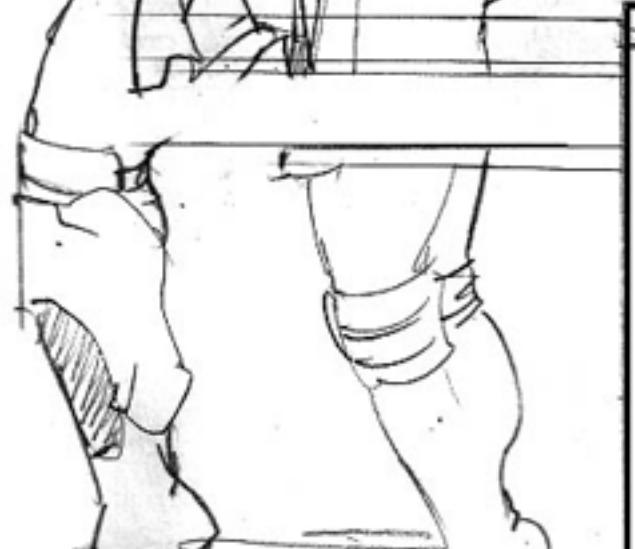
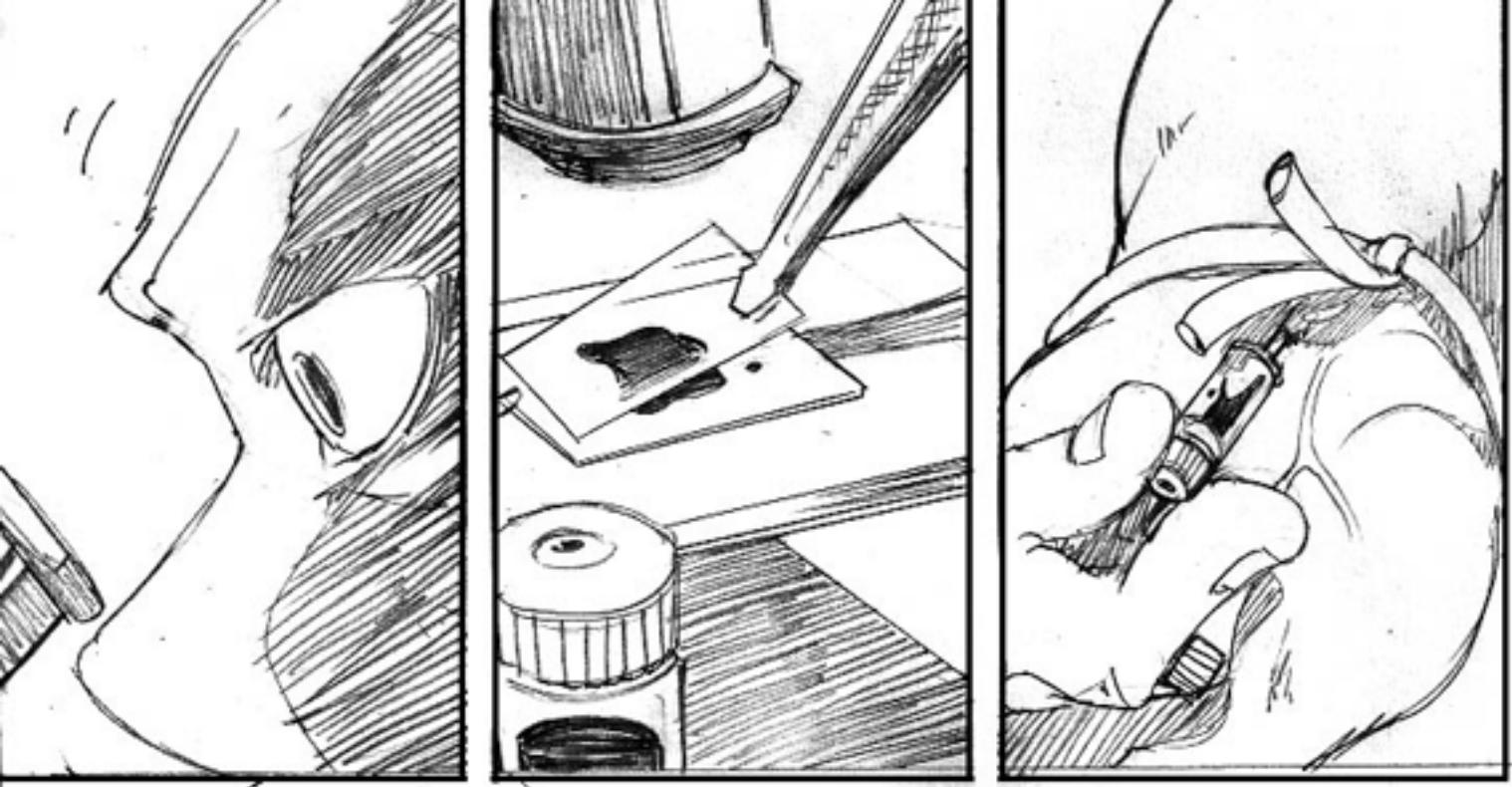
?

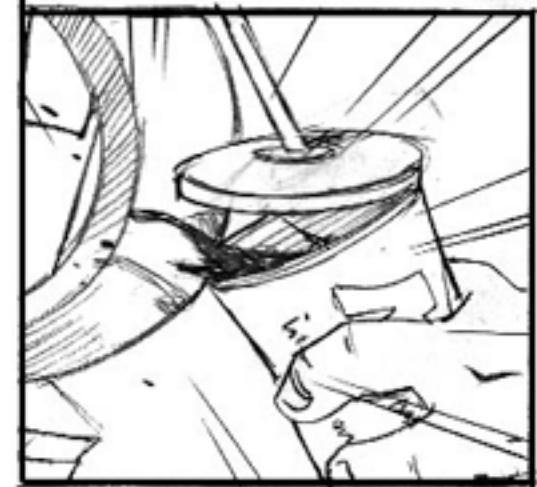
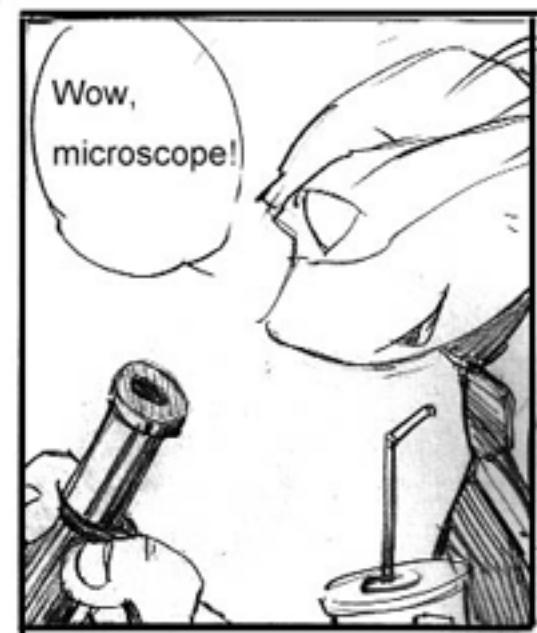


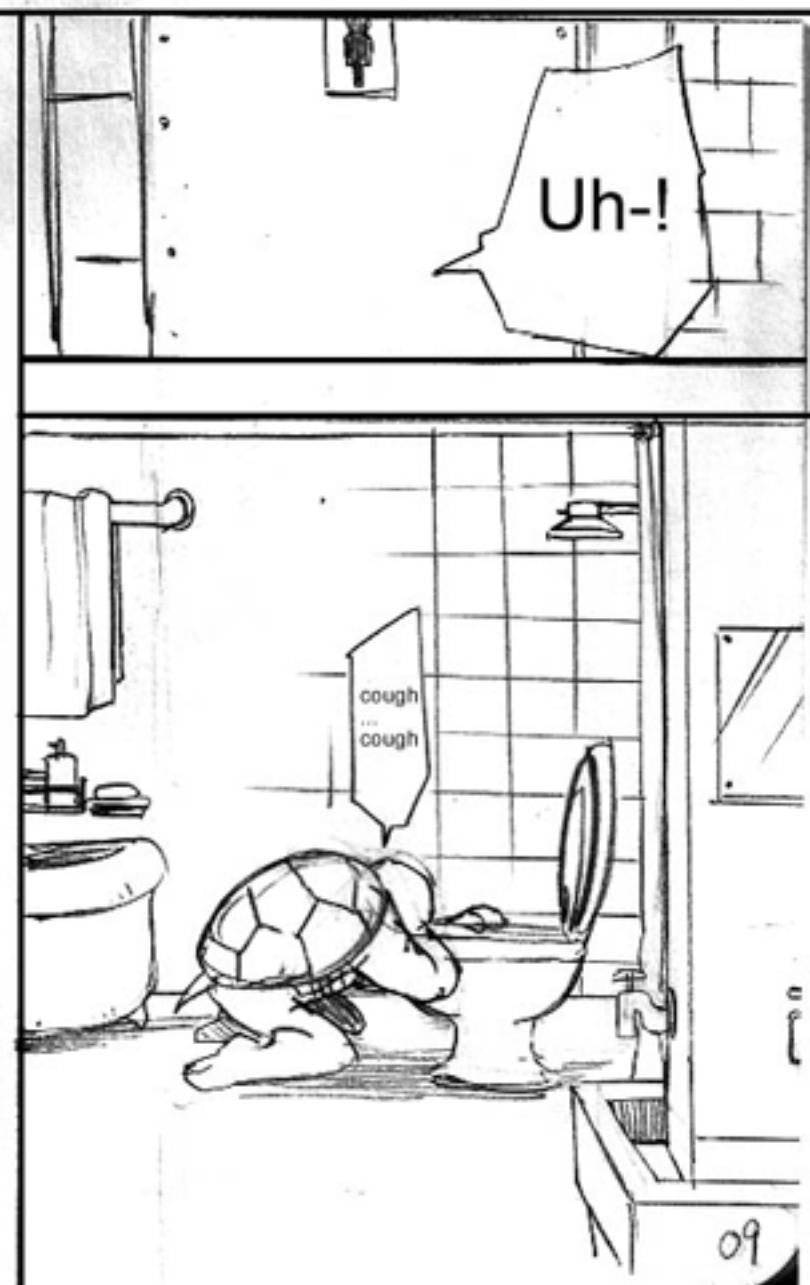












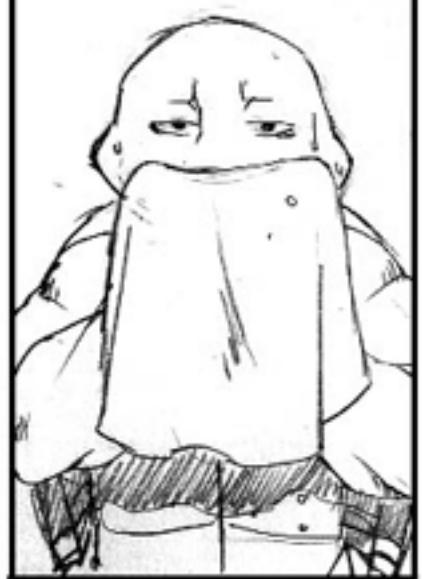
Hope it won't be a  
serious problem...



Doesn't seem like  
the common cold  
or flu ...



Appetite lost, and  
vomiting.



Headache goes on.  
Cold medicine's not  
working.



What are  
you doing  
here?



Shouldn't you  
be in bed, Mikey?



You said last  
time, once the  
heater got  
fixed, you'd  
make out with  
....

Don't you  
remember,



Please do not come into the lab if you can avoid it.

Huh?

GET DOWN.

Did I make you angry?

Not now

But you promised me last week!

Don't touch me!

CLAP!.

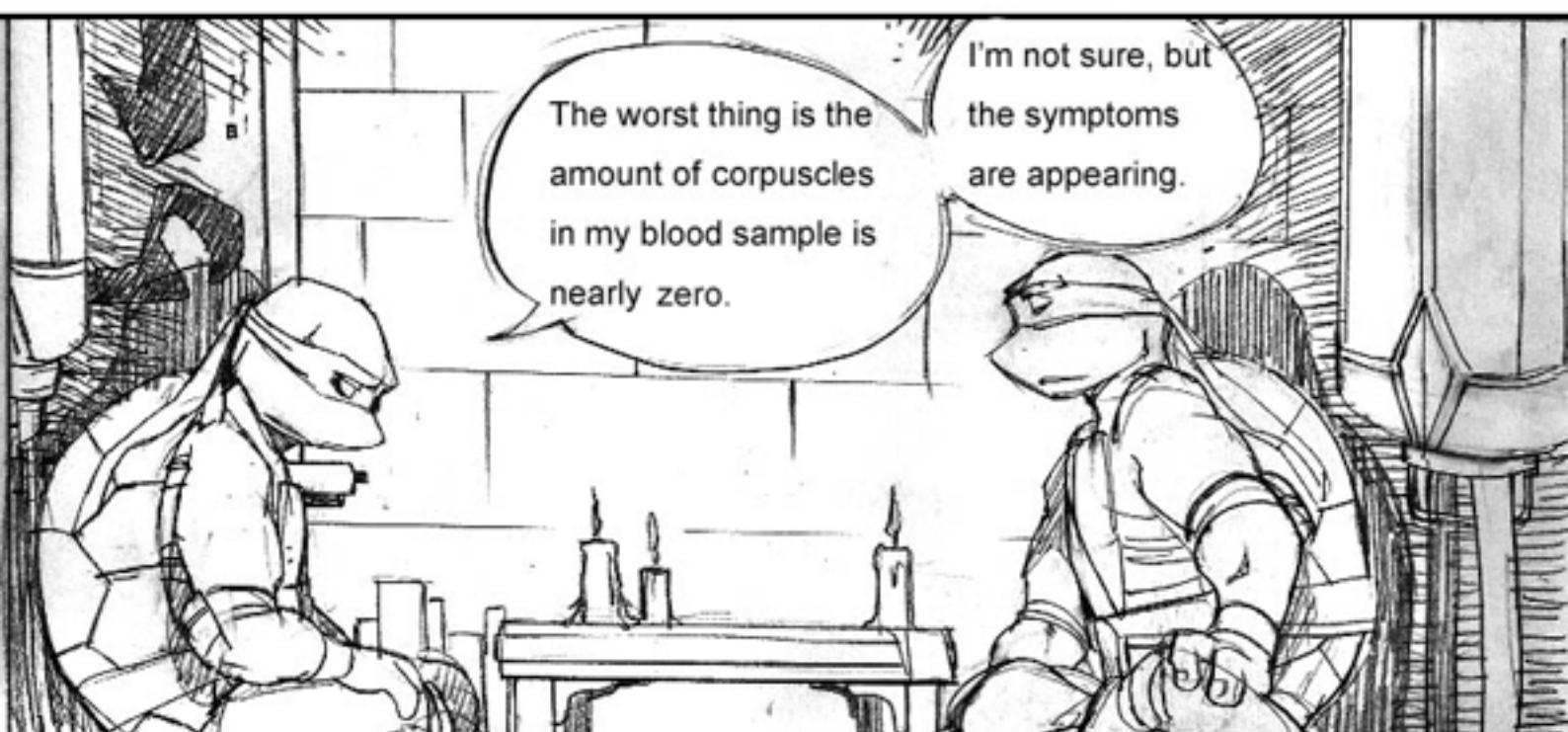




DAY2  
5:00 PM



Blood cancer?



The worst thing is the amount of corpuscles in my blood sample is nearly zero.

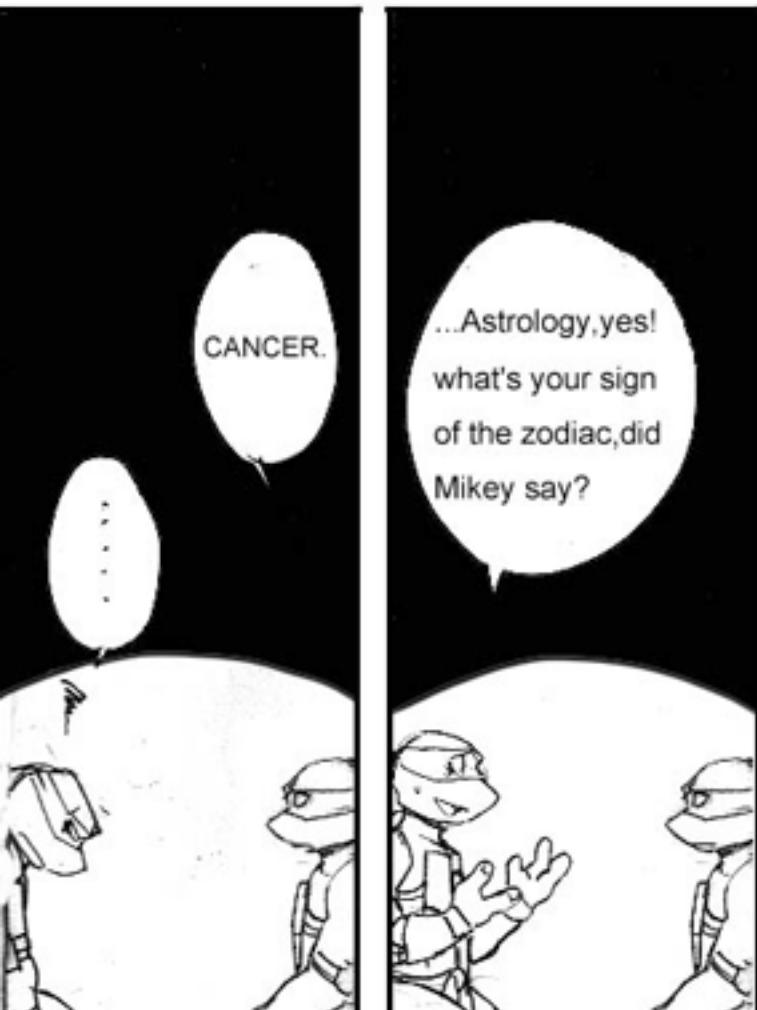
I'm not sure, but the symptoms are appearing.



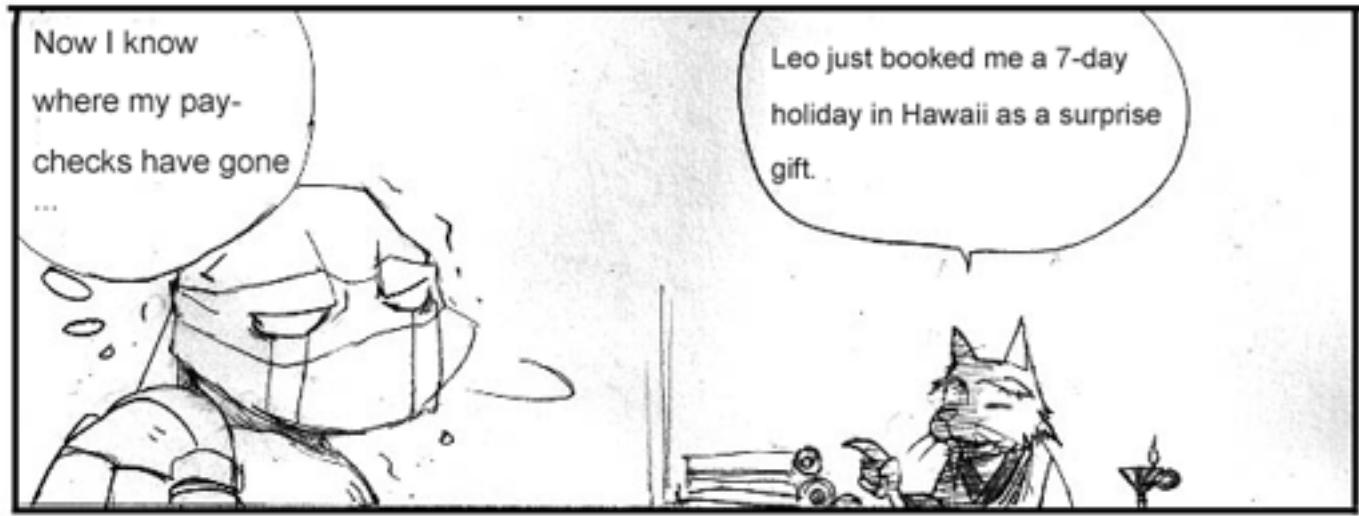
If I can't make it some day, please do me a favor...



Leo, please keep this secret from the others at the moment.







However you  
should know,  
short breaks  
achieve a long  
journey.

I am very grate-  
ful for your  
hard work,  
Donatello.

But not  
without  
you.

The family can  
stay without  
heaters or nice  
televisions.

I know,  
sensei.

DAY2  
7:00 PM

Donnie.

Hey dude,  
you don't look  
well. Are you  
ok?

He's gone.

Why're you  
here? Where's  
Leo?

Tell me what  
happened, I'll  
do anything to  
help!

You're  
absolutely  
not!

I'm  
fine.

Come up if  
you really  
wanna do  
something  
for me.

But please  
stop lying  
to me...

Wow, Your  
body's hot! Did  
you get a fever?

It's OK, you  
won't be  
affected.

Where've you been for the past 30 years, Donatello?

Em, Mikey... I love you...

Leo, take me somewhere away from home, if I can't make it.

huh

So no matter how many years have passed,

Leo said you'd died.

huh

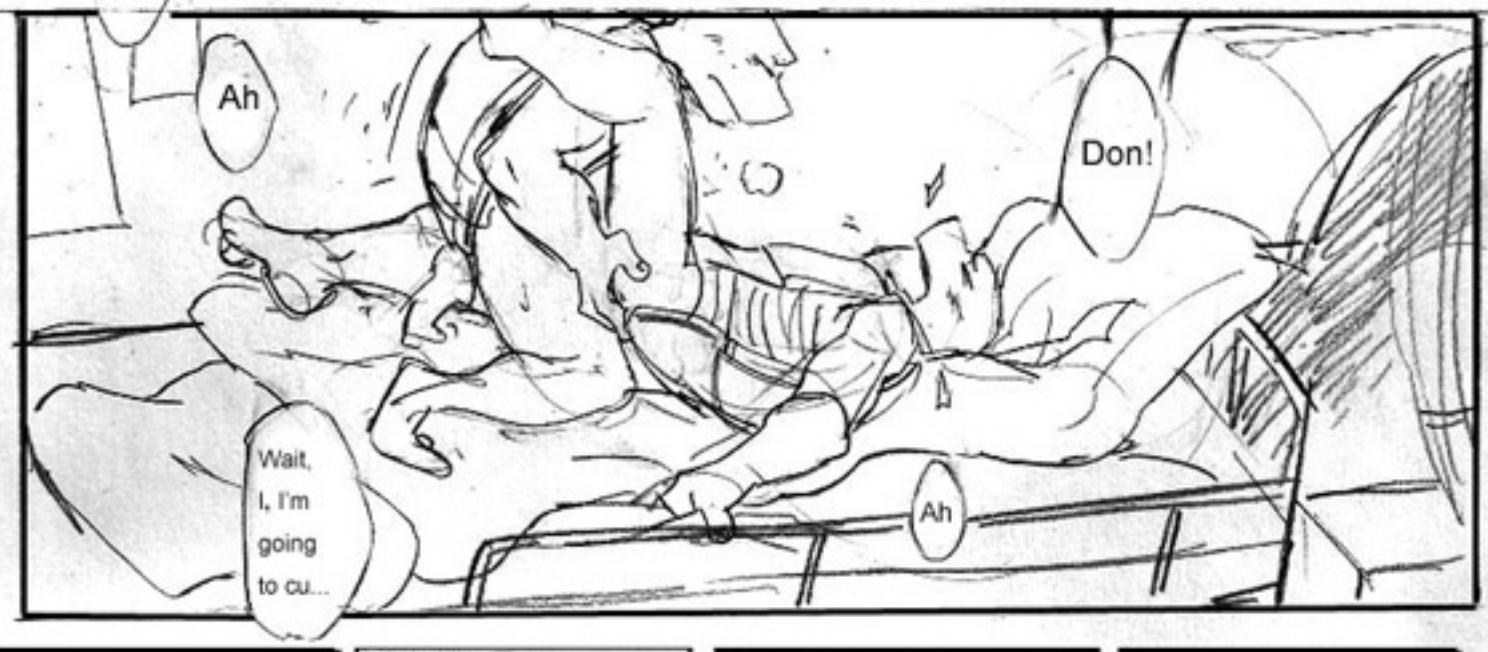
huh

Don't forget me.

?

Don, help!





NIGHT



DAY



NIGHT



DAY



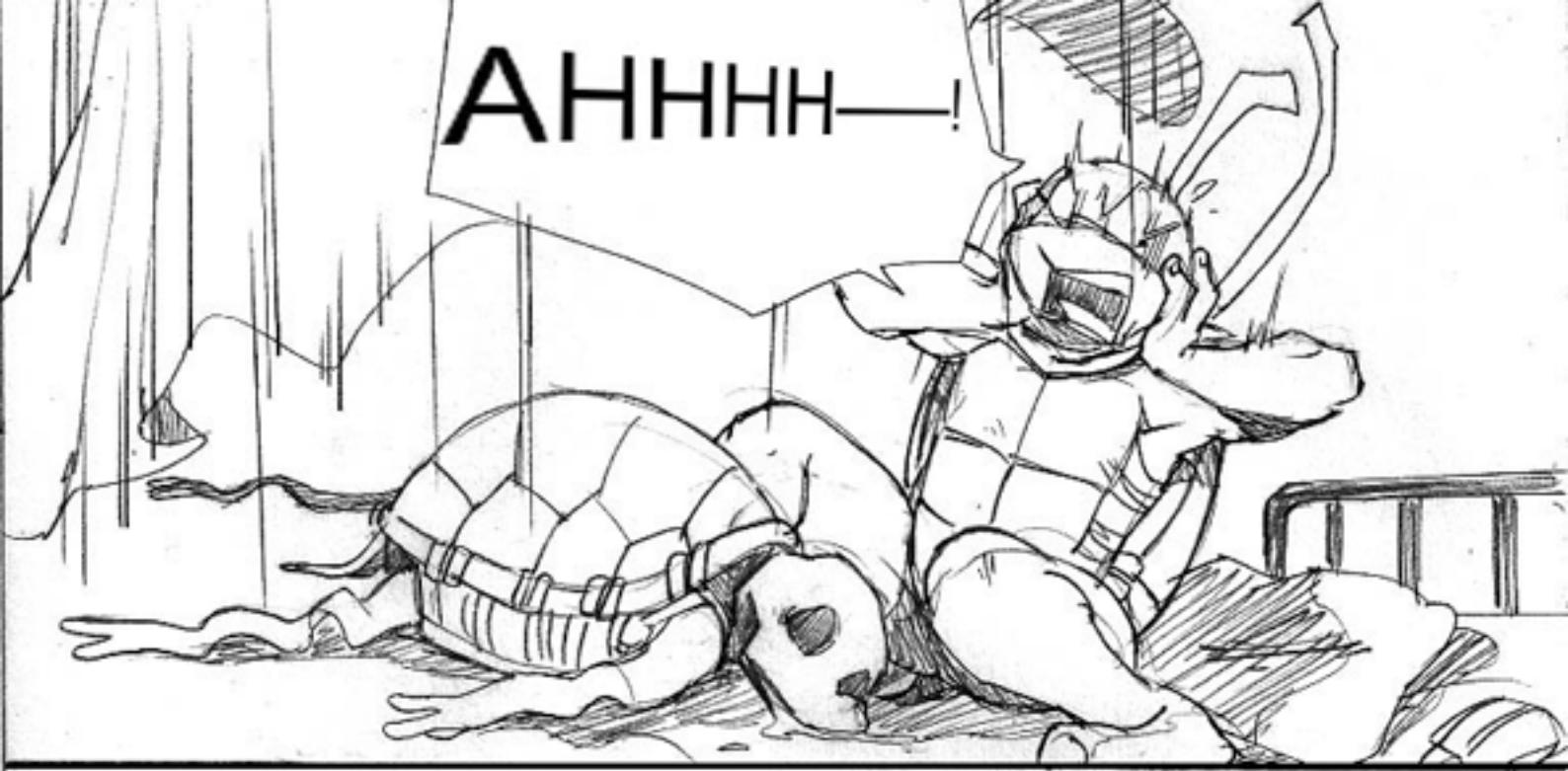
Mikey, I love  
you!

Never forget  
me, please...

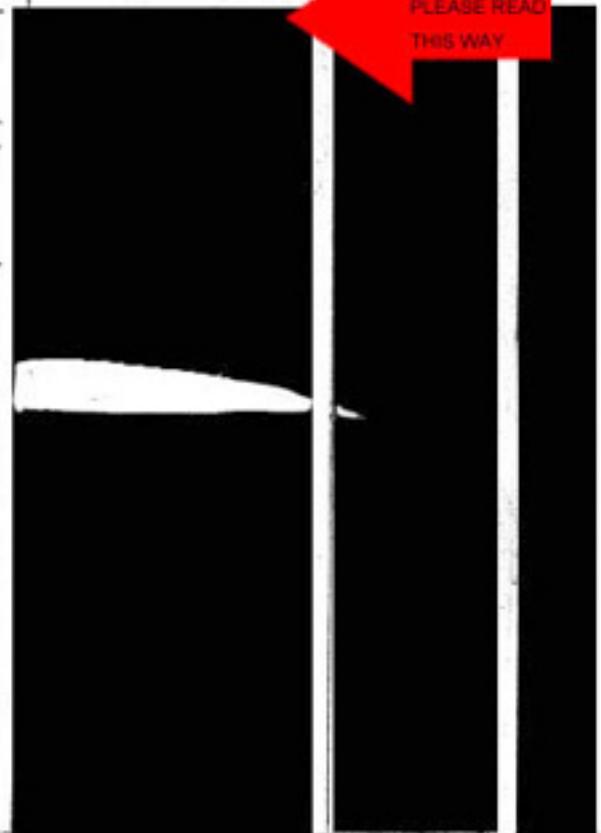
never

Don...

# AHHHH—!



PLEASE READ  
THIS WAY



Well, I guess I see  
how it occurred now.  
But strangely I couldn't  
feel anything.

Dehydrated?

You'd be in  
serious danger  
if I'd come  
any later.

You didn't feel  
feel thirsty because  
you lost more salt  
than water.

Hypo what?

'Cause it's hypo-  
tonic dehydration

All you need to do  
now, is drink the  
saline water.

D'you know where we found Leather Head?

Er... where's Raph?

How much salt should I add?

No!  
Stop it,  
Mikey!

Raph spent the night searching for him and then brought him back without any rest.

So he fell down to sleep as soon as he arrived home.

How did you get back?

He was having a sun bath at West Virginia.

Hoho

Really?

Of course, this testing machine was left by the Utroms, so it's the best one on earth.

Are you sure?

Wait a sec, have you done my blood test?

Yes, there were no problems with it.

and not only the red blood cells, but all of them were nearly gone!

I did the test myself a few days ago,

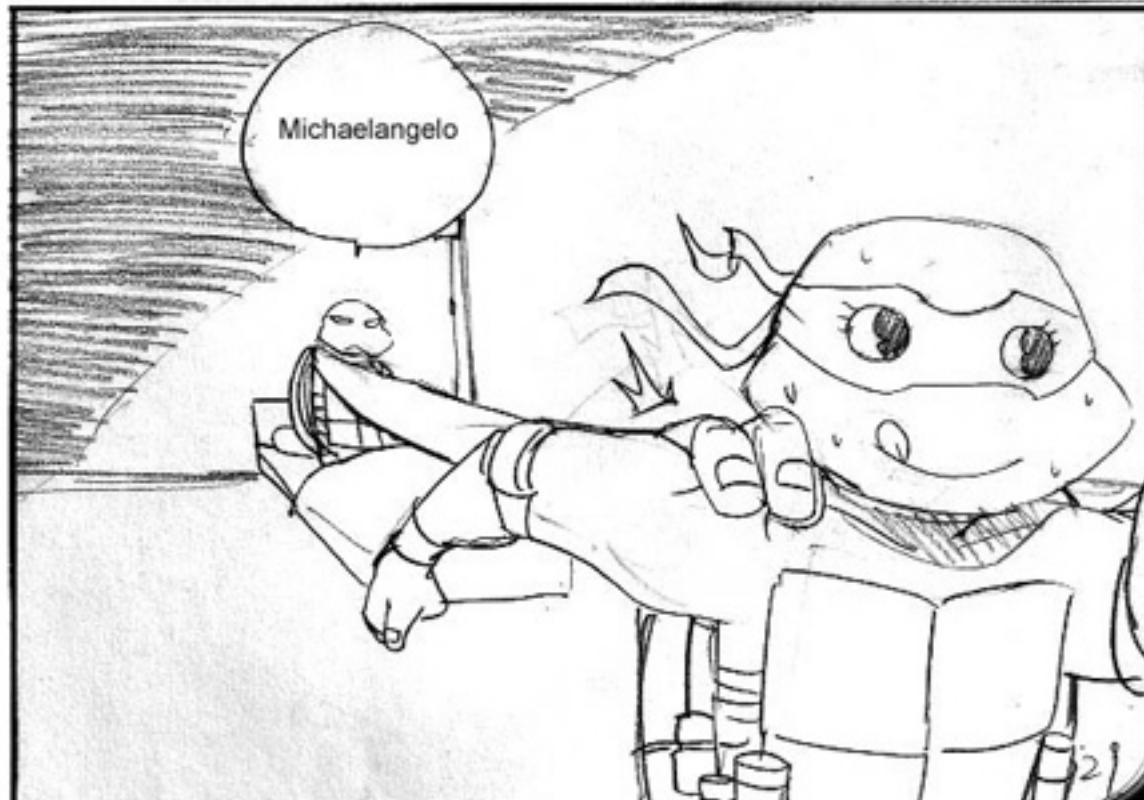
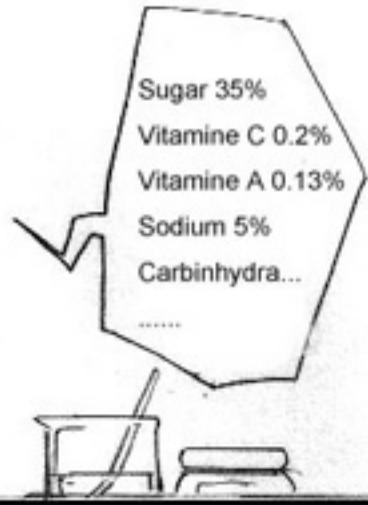
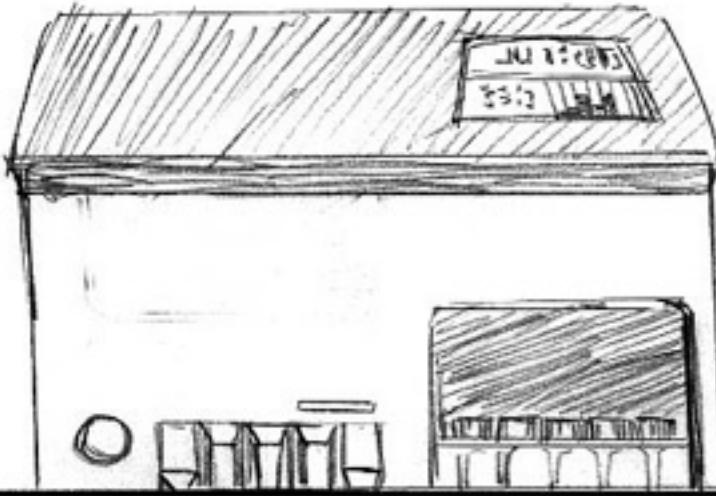
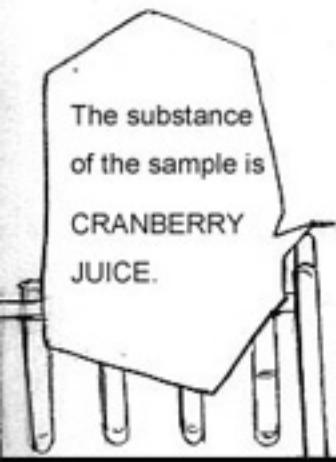
NO WAY!!

The result is coming out.

Do you still have that blood sample?

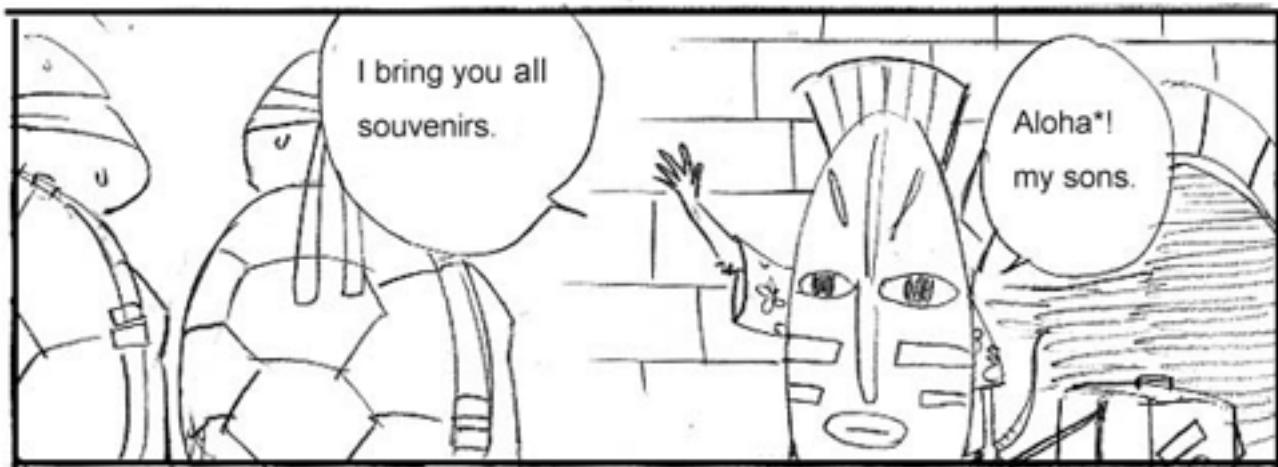
It's in the drawer on your right side.

But it must be dried by now ...





A WEEK LATER



\* Aloha means "Hello" in Hawaii language

END



## Beltane's Flame

Springtime, Donatello muses, is a completely different experience between those who are free to enjoy the world, and those who must hide from it. More so than any other season, March to May is a time of great opportunity intertwined with nagging bitterness.

The media depicts Spring as a great awakening as the world stirs from its winter slumber. It is true that the temperatures rise and the plants begin to grow again. However, such joys rarely affect those who dwell below the bustle. Underground tunnels are bombarded with the rapidly dissipating snow and newly arrived rain-showers that converge together in devastating floods. Many paths used for travel are submerged in standing water for weeks. Structures are compromised by the stress, and support beams that cannot take another year promptly collapse at this point of turmoil. While Don does what he can in the winter months to secure the most vital of routes, the Hamato household is often bogged down in a time where only necessary expeditions are undertaken. Food, immediately needed supplies. Don appreciates the fact that they always manage to get by, but their sanity is annually tested.

As a great positive, their most exemplary achievements in the physical arts are spurred by the annual pulse of activity; their minds and bodies become energized, as if shaking off the frost of winter and leaping into a new year. Even Donatello masters new katas and techniques with enough exuberance to give Mike a run for his money. Although this seasonal push of energy is used to its fullest in training, it leaves its mark within the home. It can be seen in the frustrated slamming of doors, the wear on the floors from pacing, and the rapid flipping of channels that fail to be adequate distractions. It is this time of year, and this time alone, that Don makes little effort in refilling the supply of coffee.

Their lives have been as such since the earliest years of childhood, but more recently, life has been thrusting something new upon them. Donatello's hands itch, and he fills them with projects that improve their living within the lair. His brothers feel similar effects; he can see it in desperate look in Raphael's eyes as he trains harder than he even has the energy for. Don observes it in the mysterious appearances of certain magazines stashed haphazardly beneath Mike's mattress. Leonardo is the easiest to read, if only because he tries so hard to conceal it. When meditation does not clear his mind, it drifts and he sets to activities that feed into his obsessive compulsions. The lair is never so clean, as in the Spring.

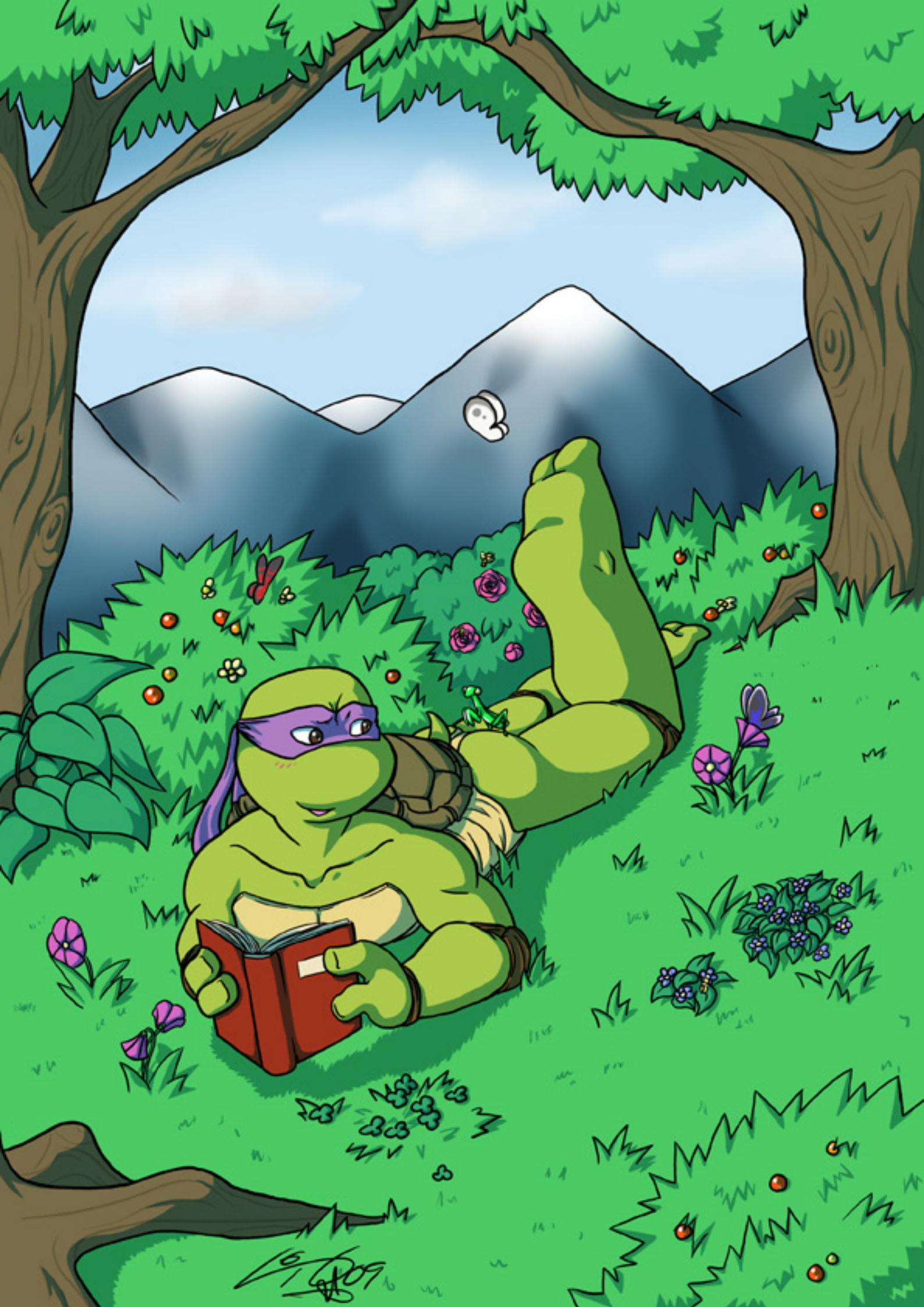
It was actually Mike who first made the connection aloud. While Don prided himself on his logistic abilities, Mike would often surpass him in the field of Sociological analysis. He remembered that It was brought to light as a joke, as many of Mike's points are. Their habits were comparable to a nature documentary: in the coming of Spring, males exhibit particular mannerisms. In the case of himself and Leonardo, the energy was channeled into nesting behavior. Raphael turned it toward physical preparedness, and Mike unsurprisingly took it nowhere but its most hedonistic feeling. Lust.

These are the constants in their life, the very same yet completely different constants in the life of every organism affected by seasons and tides and the very rotation of the Earth. It is this thought, amongst the frustration and loneliness and emotions unnamed, that bring a significant amount of comfort to Donatello.

He reflects that the others must have come to a similar peace at some point or another. In their life of unique solitude, their love has come to exceed that of traditional brotherhood. The four of them exclusively comprise an entire species, and Don finds that such an experience is like living in a world separate but parallel to everyone else. There are no mates to be found in the Spring, and they certainly do not court one another. The idea of romance finding its way into their bond is both laughable and a little disconcerting to him. They do, however, feel compassion, love, and specifically strong in the Spring: desire. On nights where the tunnels run quick with water and a teetering, frustrating energy vibes through the lair, two or more brothers share deft touches and quiet gratitude.

It is on these nights that Donatello finds himself wandering through thoughts of seasons, habits, and life-cycles until a small shudder or hushed gasp breaks his mind from the aimless musings and brings his focus back to shadows and sheets. A hand brushes against him in a thank you, which is returned with a gentle pat and understanding smile. Spring is a time of diffuse bitterness, made bearable by love.

**Fin**



EVER SINCE THE 'CHRISTMAS INCIDENT',  
MIKEY WOULDN'T LEAVE IT ALONE.

SEE THE 2008 CHRISTMAS ANTHOLOGY

THE IDEA OF HIM AND I DATING, I MEAN.



PATIENCE IS BITTER,  
BUT ITS FRUIT IS SWEET.

BY SNEEFE

THE FACT THAT OUR BROTHERS' "SITUATION" HAD BEEN ACCEPTED (MOST LIKELY ALCOHOL INDUCED ACCEPTANCE, BUT LETS JUST IGNORE THAT) BY OUR RESTRICTED SOCIAL ENTOURAGE (AKA MASTER SPLINTER, APRIL AND CASEY) HAD IGNITED SOMETHING IN HIS HEAD.

IT OPENED A DOOR THAT HE WAS SURE WAS, AND WOULD ALWAYS REMAIN, LOCKED TIGHTLY.



WHEN I CONFRONTED HIM ABOUT IT, HE MADE CLEAR THAT HIS SEEMINGLY SUDDEN INTEREST IN ME HAD STARTED PRIOR TO THE 'CHRISTMAS INCIDENT'. THAT HE WAS ONLY VOICING HIS ATTRACTION NOW BECAUSE RAPH AND LEO'S 'COMING-OUT' SERVED AS SOME SORT OF INSPIRATION FOR HIM."



I ACCEPTED A FEW DAYS LATER, ON NEW YEAR'S EVE.  
WE SHARED OUR FIRST KISS.



SINCE THEN... NOTHING.



HE INSISTS THAT WE GET  
TOGETHER AND NOW HE ISN'T  
EVEN DOING ANYTHING!



IT'S BEEN 4 MONTHS  
FOR GOODNESS' SAKE-

OKAY CALM DOWN, DON.  
THIS ISN'T LIKE YOU.

YOU'VE BEEN  
PATIENT UNTIL NOW.



SOMEONE,  
ENTERTAIN MEEEE!

YOU CAN HELP  
ME IF YOU WANT.



SURE! WHAT ARE WE WORKING ON?

BUDGETING.

OH.

HEY!

WOOHOO.

YAAAY.

WE'RE GOING FOR A RUN OUTSIDE, YOU GUYS WANT TO JOIN US?

NO THANKS, I'LL STAY HERE, I'M ALMOST DONE.

YEAH. WE'RE ALMOST DONE.

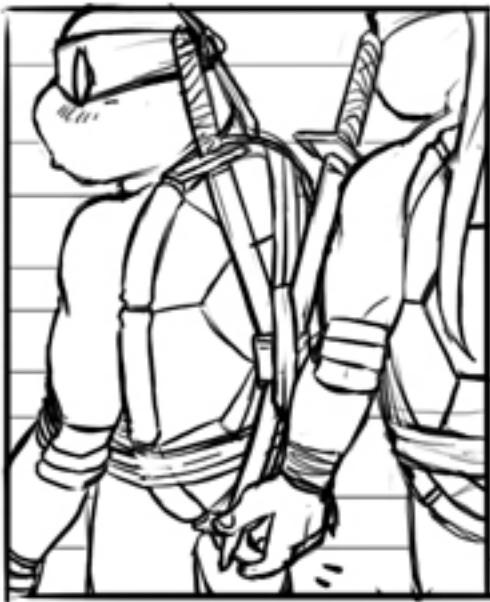
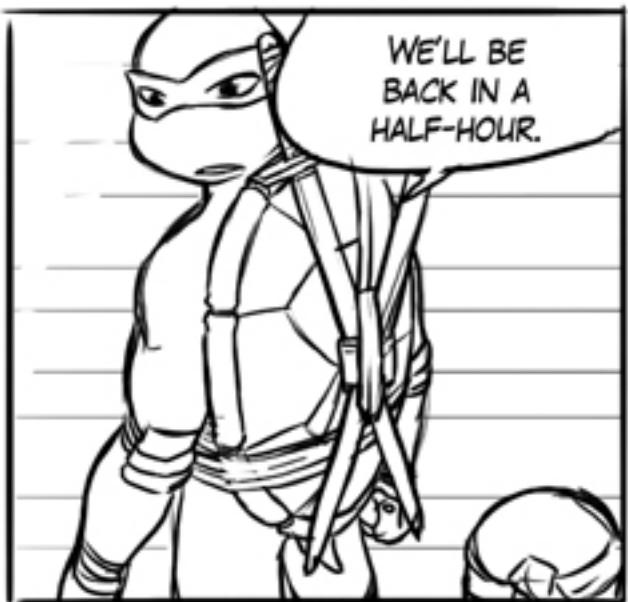
SUIT YOURSELVES!

YOU'D JUST SLOW US DOWN ANYWAYS.

EXACTLY!

FFFF..

HEEEY! I COULD OUTRUN YOU WITH TWO BROKEN LEGS!







...A WEEK REALLY ISN'T THAT MUCH TIME FOR COURTING, MIKEY.





WHAT'S STOPPING  
YOU?



...

YOU TALK LIKE I'M THE ONLY ONE  
WHO HASN'T MADE A MOVE BUT YOU  
HAVEN'T DONE MUCH EITHER!

GOOD POINT.



OKAY, LOOK.



I'M THE ONE WHO CAME TO YOU TO  
TRY THIS RELATIONSHIP THING OUT.  
YOU HADN'T EVER THOUGHT ABOUT  
IT BEFORE, YOU AND I... TOGETHER.  
AND I'M NOT AN IDIOT.

I KNOW YOU ONLY SAID  
YES TO SHUT ME UP.



I JUST DON'T WANT TO SCARE YOU  
AWAY. DON'T WANNA... GET IN YOUR  
BUBBLE AND THEN YOU'D WALK OUT  
ON ME. I WAS JUST... GIVING YOU  
SOME SPACE, THAT'S ALL.



MIKEY...

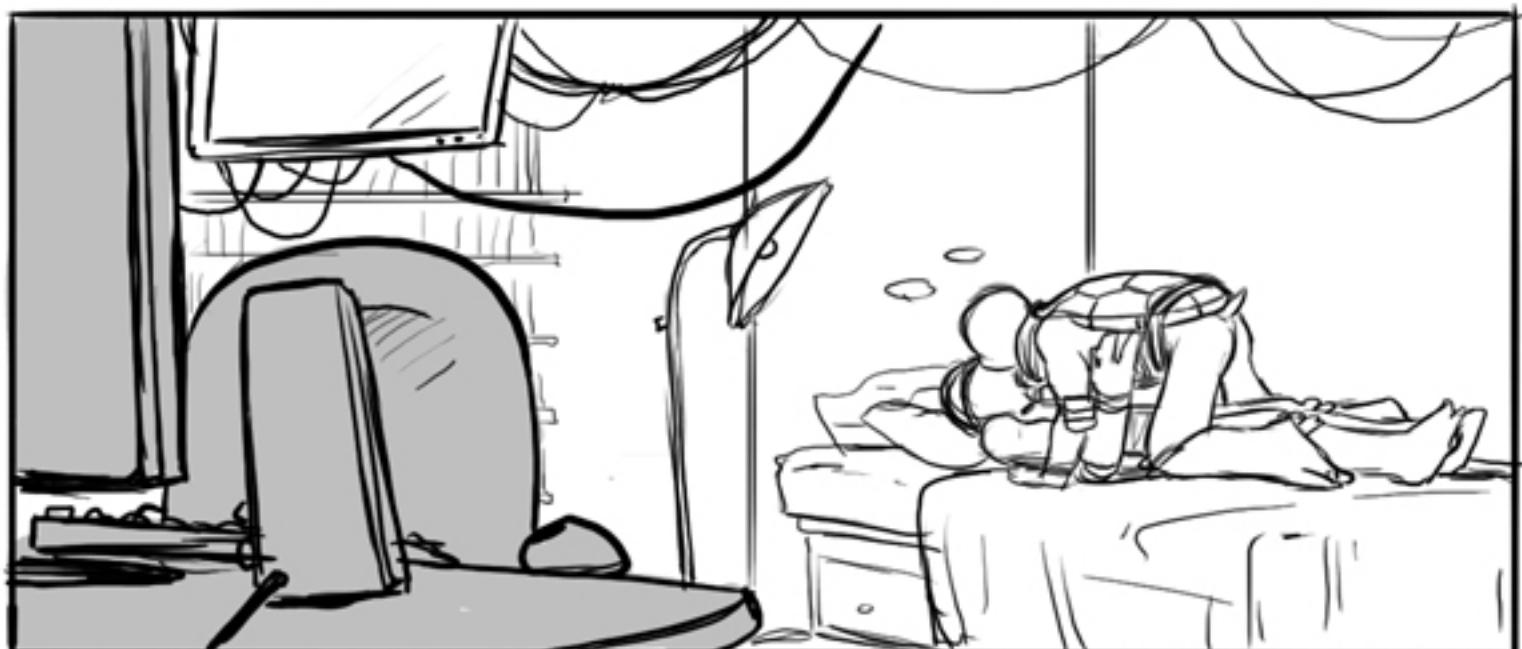
SQUEEZES

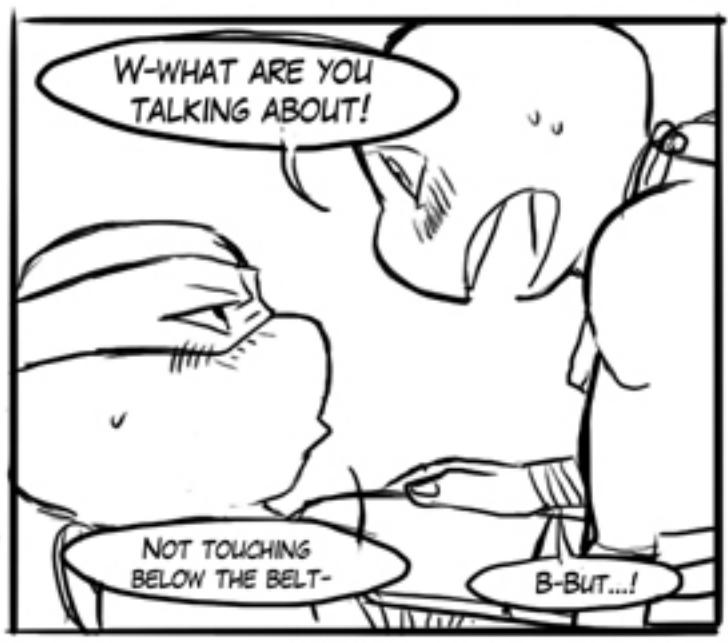


I WOULDN'T HAVE SAID YES IF I  
DIDN'T WANT TO TRY THIS, TOO.

PLEASE, DON'T HOLD BACK.









I'M THE ONE WHO ASKED YOU OUT!

I'M SUPPOSED TO BE THE ONE DOING NAUGHTY THINGS TO YOU, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND!

YOU HAD YOUR CHANCE.

SO WHAT?!

BESIDES, YOU WANTED ME TO BE MORE FORWARD, SO HERE YOU GO.

HANN!

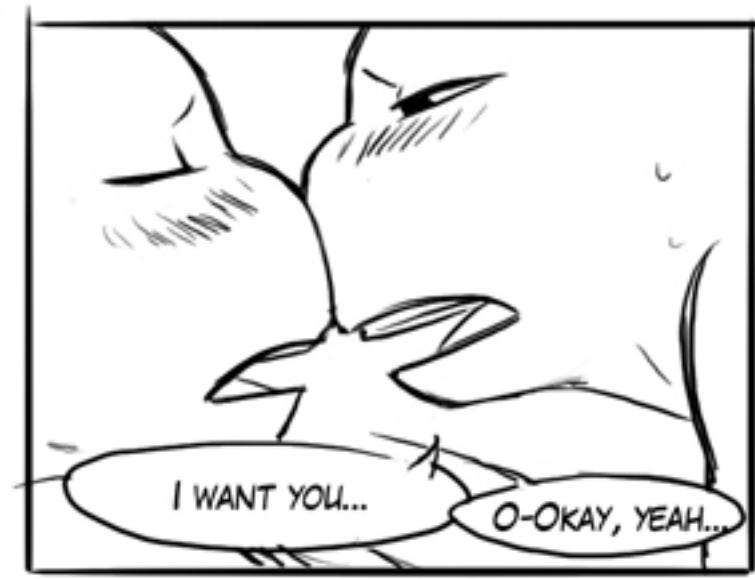
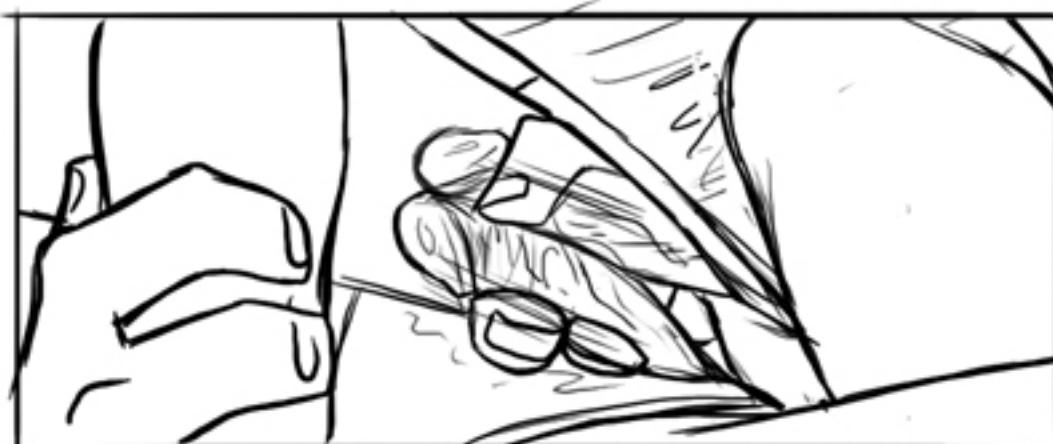
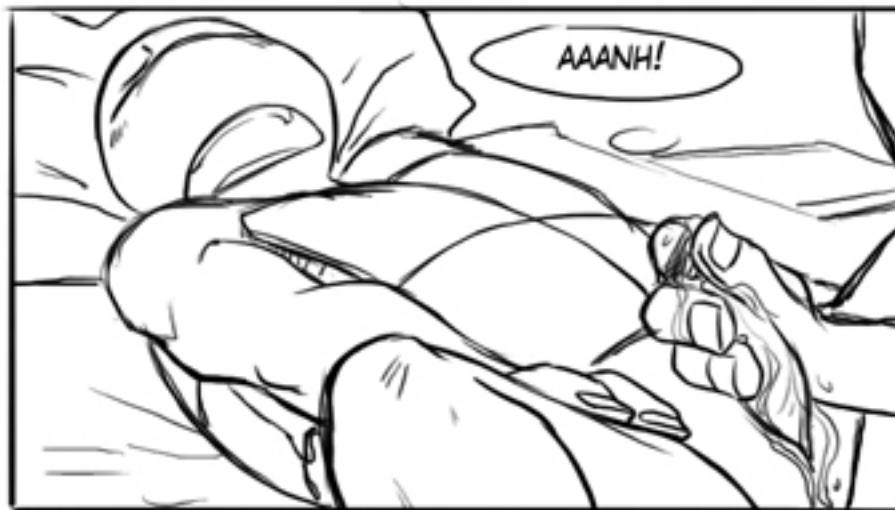
AAH...

W-WELL YEAH BUT-

DONNIIIE...

HNN..! S'cold...

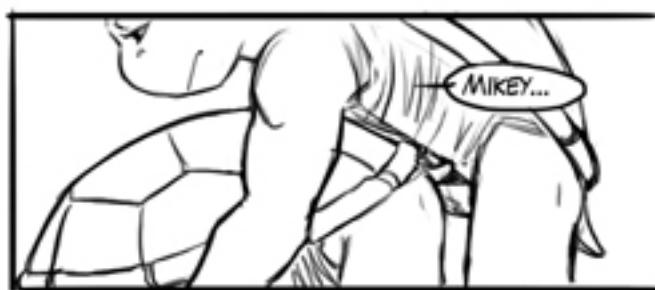
S-SORRY.

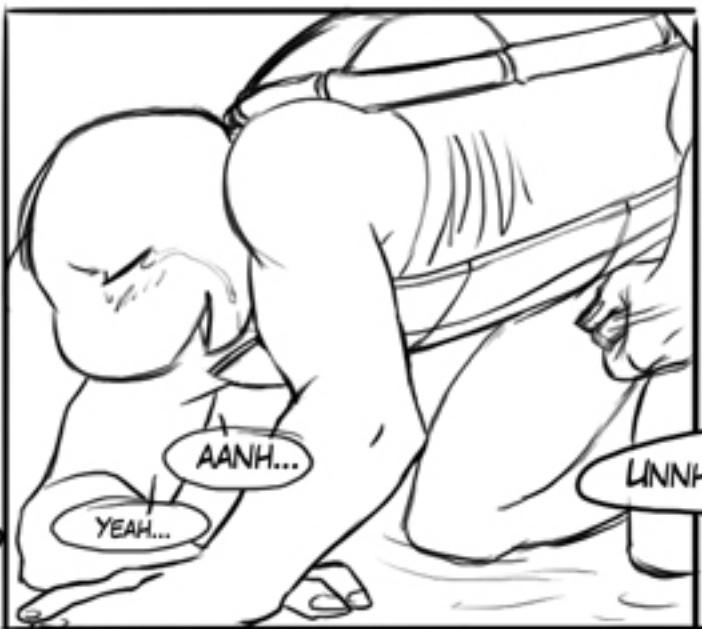


YEAH... SURE.





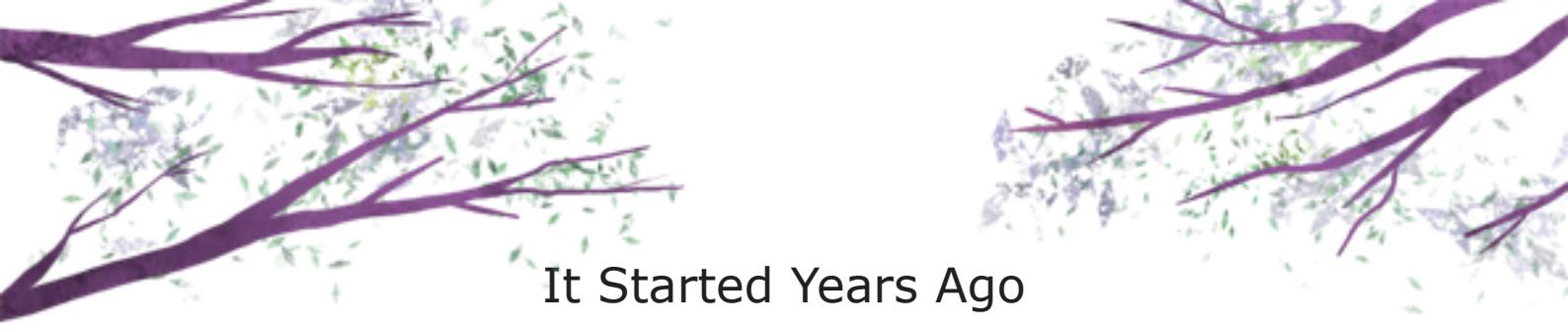












## It Started Years Ago

It started years ago, when they had first gotten a television. None of them knew what "child friendly" shows were at first and so they watched whatever happened to come on. That led to many programs that were designed for adults shining into their eyes. Master Splinter quickly learned to observe what his sons watched, but he was often out gathering food. Few young children can mind their parents when the parent is absent.

So it was that the television often showed romantic kisses and wild explosions and sometimes a lack of clothes as two bodies moved together. Michealangelo was the first to voice the question on all four young minds. "Why do they keep kissing on the mouth like that?"

"She said she loved him," Donatello mused, "so maybe it's like...the adult version of goodnight kisses."

"But they aren't going to bed," Michealangelo protested, turning to look at his brother.

"Oh yes they are," Raphael cut in, pointing to the screen as the two humans stripped off clothes and fell into bed. The camera panned around them as they touched and kissed each other. The four turtles watched in silence before Mike spoke up again.

"Adult bedtimes are complicated! How do they have time to sleep?" His brothers ignored the question, none of them wanting to admit they were as lost as Mike. The silence gave Mike the chance to ask the question that would set them on one of the paths of their futures. "Can we try it?"

"We don't got a girl. Why should we try it?" Raph questioned, eyeing Mike.

"Well, if it's an adult thing, we should practice so we can do it too."

Three pairs of eyes turned to Leonardo, the unofficial leader in Master Splinter's absence. The young turtle hesitated before shrugging. "I don't think I want to kiss all over like that."

"So we'll practice the lip stuff. Maybe the rest will seem better when we're older, anyway. THEY seem to like it!" This last Mike said while pointing to the screen. He bounced in place, a sign his brothers knew meant that they either gave in or else be pestered.

With some reluctance, Leo agreed to try which convinced Don and Raph to agree. They didn't want to be left behind in learning any new skills, after all. A game of Rock, Paper, Scissors soon had the paired off: Raph and Leo, Mike and Don. Their first kisses were an awkward affair, leaving all four laughing at the silliness of adults.

Still, there was a fluttering in their bellies and the sense of a great secret in those kisses, since Master Splinter never found out. They were getting away with things adults did,

and that was enough to have another agreement when trying again was suggested. None of them ever spoke of the kisses exchanged as they aged unless they intended to suggest trying again. All four would switch off, sometimes with the other two present, on rare occasions when it was just two of them. Raph and Leo broke off first, their arguments meaning they wouldn't kiss each other, though they still agreed with Mike or Don. But the game wasn't as fun with that line of tension and the requests came less and less.

It was a surprise for Don to realize that the requests had stopped completely after they met April. It was odd enough that he was thinking of that old connection now of all times. He and Master Splinter had managed to get into the warehouse which seemed rarely, if ever, used after running from the Foot. He still couldn't believe Karai had destroyed their home and separated them like this.

The day had dragged by for them as they alternately feared the Foot tracking them down and the possibility of too many humans in their hiding spot. Luckily, both worries had so far been in vain. Don didn't know if Raph and Mike had been as lucky as him. That was probably what prompted this trip down memory lane. Certainly, it was better than worrying about what he couldn't change. With his ankle hurting the way it was...well, he could walk well enough, and he'd been fine if he had to be, but it was a liability to staying invisible that they couldn't afford after how badly Karai had hurt Master Splinter.

It was very odd to realize that thoughts of their old game brought the same fluttering feeling it had in his youth. Odder still to realize that it was the same feeling he'd had when he'd been crushing hard on April. He'd have to actually take a look at his feelings sometime and figure out why two different circumstances gave him that feel- a bit of movement in the shadows caught his attention. His bo slid to a ready position and he moved forward, Master Splinter just behind him, to face the mysterious opponent.

He'd never been so happy to hear Leo's voice.

-----\*\*\*\*\*-----

The family was together again. Don still had a hard time believing it. Leo had come back and found them all. They had a new home now, one he already had ideas for. It was good to hear Raph and Mikey bantering about how to set up rooms, to see Leo and Master Splinter sitting together with smiles as they listened to the familiar teasing. Now, however, was when it really hit him. Today had been the closest they'd come to losing each other without knowing how.

It was a depressing thought to say the least. His earlier thoughts returned, reminding him of the game they once played. There was that odd feeling in his stomach again as he considered the closeness they had then, before Leo and Raph's fights. He found it disconcerting that he hadn't realized there was a bit of a distance between them, grown from the individual activities they enjoyed.

The fight for rooms was settled, sort of, by Raph bracing to lunge at Mike. Leo quickly suggested that he and Raph head back to the old lair and check for anything salvageable. It was probably more a sign of Raph's relief to have his brothers back than an actual desire to check the old lair that had Raph agreeing. None of them held much hope for anything being recovered, but it was better than the alternative. After they

left, Master Splinter went to bed, leaving Don and Mike to entertain themselves. Or, to be more precise, leaving Don to entertain Mike. Don glanced at his brother to try and gauge his mood.

Mike was still looking at the door, a sad look on his face. "Getting tired of recollecting stuff. All those lasers, all the time the Foot had there...not gonna be anything to bring back. Our practice stuff, your computers, my comics...my Battle Nexus Trophy..."

Don nodded in agreement. "We have each other back at least."

Mike sighed before agreeing. "Yeah, as much as I liked that trophy...I can't replace you guys. Well, can't really replace it either, but if I had to choose, I'd rather have it gone than one of you. Who else can I tease and annoy without getting killed?"

"And you have a knack for talking us into things. Like me building the Battleshell, or playing some game you want."

"Yeah, but you guys are getting more stubborn in your old age. I miss being kids. Could get anything back then." Mike was grinning broadly, thinking of the many times he pulled one over on his brothers.

"Hm...like the 'adult goodnight kisses'?" Don kept a careful eye on Mike, though his attention seemed to be on measuring out the area for his new lab. He saw the way Mike froze in shock and wondered if maybe it was silly of him to even bring it up again. Before he could try to pass it off as the past, Mike spoke.

"Yeah...didn't think you remembered that. Or, you know, would talk about it," Mike shrugged. "I mean...been awhile, you know?"

Don nodded. "I just thought about it today. Lot of time to think and not do much else." He made a mental list of things to check the dump for, trying to figure out what to do now that he'd mentioned the old game.

"So...just thinking like you tend to, or thinking like you want to join in?" Mike's voice had that note to it, as if he was trying not to sound as anxious as he was. Don blinked in surprise. Had he been thinking of starting the game again? And what did Mike mean by "join in"? To "join in", there had to be something for him to join. Did that mean his brothers were still playing the game? Without him? Before he could think of a response, Mike moved forward, kissing him as if this was the one thing Mike wanted most.

It was nothing like the awkward and shy kisses that had been part of the game. Don didn't recall Mike being this good, for one. The way Mike's lips slid over his, the way Mike's tongue played about, seeking and gaining entrance into his mouth...no, this was completely different and exciting.

Mike ended the kiss way too soon to Don's way of thinking, but he couldn't help but smile back at Mike's grin.

----\*\*\*\*\*----

Don followed Mike through the sewers, wondering what was going on. All he knew was that Mike had asked him to meet up not long after Raph left to hang with Casey for the night. Mike had insisted Don not say they were meeting, and had actually left the lair

before him to do some skateboarding. It seemed very odd to Don.

They took a few more turns before Mike stopped at a closed door. Don waited and had to wonder at the quick, nervous look Mike gave him before leading them both inside. Feeling a bit of unease, Don followed him and froze at the sight of Raph waiting for them. He glanced between his brothers in uncertainty.

"Ya didn't tell him?" Raph asked, glancing at Mike. It didn't take a genius to figure out what was going on, and that left Don over qualified. Between that comment and the earlier "join" idea, it was easy to figure out .

"How long have you two...been together?" Don asked. Mike looked embarrassed but Raph just nodded.

"Knucklehead, ya shoulda told him," Raph sighed. "Since we met Case, give or take some time. And if yer uncomfortable with this, ya don't have to stay."

Don blinked and considered that before shaking his head. He didn't mind and wasn't letting himself think beyond that. Glancing around the room, he noticed it was small and set with a bed and not much else. His gaze returned to his brothers. "I want to be here."

Mike smiled and grabbed his hand, tugging him forward. They both sat, Don between Raph and Mike, and Mike leaned over to kiss him again. Raph placed a hand over Mike's mouth before the kiss came to be. "Ya already got yers, remember? Bragged about it too."

Don could feel his face heating at the thought of his brothers fighting over him. Mike tried to come up with an excuse as to why he should be the one kissing Don, but Raph wasn't allowing it and...it was very odd to be embarrassed and pleased at the same time. This shouldn't be about who did what how often. Besides, Don could already see the two making some challenge or playing Rock, Paper, Scissors for him. Without allowing himself to think about it, Don moved quickly to press his and Raph's lips together. The argument was effectively stopped as Raph easily took control of the kiss.

It was so easy to just go with the flow. Don's body seemed to take on a mind of its own, bending and arching as Raph and Mike positioned him and themselves on the bed. He wound up lying on his shell with Raph beside him, his legs spread for Mike to carefully play with his tail. Sensations he'd never imagined raced through him as he let his brothers show him this new bond and its depths. His skin had never been so sensitive to the touch as when Raph's hand skimmed his side. He'd never known such heat as Mike's tongue on the inside of his leg. Was it any wonder he dropped so quickly?

There were no teasing words that brothers could share. Mike and Raph seemed intent on ensuring he received nothing but pleasure and he gladly drowned in it. Even when he tensed at the feel of an unfamiliar grip on delicate skin, there were touches and kisses until he relaxed again before the next unfamiliar thing. He felt treasured, like a rare gift granted to those who knew its worth. How they managed to do such care and not necessarily be gentle was a mystery he didn't care to know the answer to. They weren't rough enough to hurt and he was enjoying this too much.

He didn't know how long it lasted before he felt his climax take him. It was his first regret. There was so much more, things he'd only briefly glimpsed when younger and not allowed to stay up late, but all his brothers had done was touch. While he cooled, he watched them come together, feeling his body stir again as they kissed and touched so near to him. He wanted to join them. Wasn't that why he was here?

His first touch was shy. Mike glanced at him and grinned, pulling him towards both of them and murmuring hot promises of the night's coming pleasure. The next touch was more sure and Don let his brothers be his teachers on this new path.

In the morning, he had to admit it was a choice he couldn't regret.

**Fin**





## Backstory

"Yo, Casey. Can you get me the DW-40 from the tool bench?"

"Sure thing, Raph."

"Thanks. Just make sure not to touch Donnie's bird while you're over there, okay?"

"Yeah, yeah. Here we go . . . hey, is this the bird thing? It's all metal. What's it do?"

"S'a kind of music box. Keep your mitts off it."

"Relax, Raph! I'll be *real* careful-like. I just wanna see what it does. I think- you push here, right? So- Aw- aw crap."

"What? No, wait. Lemme guess. You broke it, didn't you?"

"Eh . . . Kinda. A little."

"Shell. Gimme a sec. Okay, maybe I can fix it before Don- Seven pieces ain't 'kinda' broken, you *bonehead*!"

"But I didn't do nothin'! I just picked it up, that's all, so it can't be *that* bad. Eh . . . right?"

". . . We're toast. All these little moving bits - I got no idea how they fit together. Casey, you naked monkey, I told you not to touch it! Donnie's gonna be so freakin' pissed. He spent months workin' on that thing! Shell. *Shell*."

"Geeze, calm down. It's just a music box thingy, right? It's not like we trashed the Battleshell or somethin'."

"Casey, you've got no idea what you're talkin' about, so just shut up right now, okay? I'm trying to think what to do."

"Well, don't strain yourself. Use your brain too much and smoke'll start comin' out your ears. Uh, if you little green guys have 'em, that is."

"Wha- of course we got ears! How else do we hear all the stupid shit you-"

"*Besides!* It was an accident. Donnie'll understand, right?"

"That ain't the point, Casey. Don works his ass off on the stuff he builds us. The least we can do is not break it."

"Oooh. All sensitive to his feelings, huh? What, he make you sleep on the couch if you bust up his stuff?"

". . . fuck you, Casey. That's got nothin' to do with this."

"Yeah right. Like you'd care half this much if you weren't screwin' him."

"I care because I know how much he does for our family, you nimrod! I *respect* him, which is something I learned to do a helluva long time before we started fooling around in bed."

"Yeah? What, Master Splinter beat it into you or somethin'?"

". . . No."

"Leo? Mikey?"

"No, okay? Just drop it, Casey. We gotta focus on-"

"Don't tell me Donnie beat it into you himself!"

"No, Donnie didn't beat it into me. He *scared* it into me, okay? Are you happy now? Can we focus on what we're going to do about your fuckup?"

". . . man, I gotta hear this story. How'd he do it? Jump out and yell 'boo' each time you broke his toy car?"

"For the love of- okay. Okay, I got it. Here's what we'll do. Donnie's been bitchin' since forever about getting some kind of decent setup for his tools. Now, Crazy Stan's been advertising a sale on toolchests this week, so you and me, we're going to go out with the Battleshell and buy one, and hope that he's so happy with it that he forgets to be pissed about the bird. You go in, pay for it and all that jazz, and I'll tell you the story and cover your ass with Don."

"Deal! And totally worth it!"

"Heh. I just hope you got paid recently."

"Why's that?"

"Nevermind. Get in the van- shotgun side, Casey. I ain't lettin' you drive Don's baby at this point."

"Aww. It was one mistake!"

"It was the project Don's been working on for weeks, and it's the sixth time this month you've busted something. So suck it up."

"Okay, okay."

". . . I hate driving in spring. It's like you humans all forget to watch for ice the minute it gets a little warm, and suddenly it's a demolition derby on Main street."

"Yeah. Lousy for motorcycles, too, with all the slush and rain."

"And hell to run through barefoot. It almost makes me wanna ware shoes. Is left or right to get to 7th?"

"Left. You gonna tell me that story now?"

"Yeah. Just lemme turn- Okay, yeah. Story. About how Don made me stop acting like an asshole and show a little respect."

"I dunno about the asshole bit, Raph. You're still pretty much an-"

"*Zip it*, Casey. Like I was sayin': How Don made me respect him, something he managed to do back when we were six. In spring, actually, like we are now. But it was uglier that year. Worst spring the city'd seen in years. That's kinda ahead of things, though. First, you gotta understand what I was like back then."

"What's there to know? I mean, you were shorter and dumber. So what?"

". . . dumber, huh? Yeah, that's not a bad word for it. But a better word would be angry."

"Raph, you're always angry."

"Not like I was back then. At six I'd just figured it out. What was wrong with me. Shell, what was wrong with all of us. Why we had to live in a sewer and pick through garbage and run from humans. Why I wasn't going to school in the fall. Why I'd *never* go to school, or get a job, or have a fuckin' *life*. I'd figured out I was different, Casey, and that there was nothin' I could do, and I was *pissed*. But I was pissed in that dumb way kids get, you know? Not lashin' out like I still do, but just generally being a total asshole every damned day.

And breakin' stuff. I used to break a lot of stuff, tryin' to feel better. Wreck it the way I felt my life'd been wrecked, see it in pieces and laugh. I used to snap all of Mikey's crayons, mess up Leo's bedding. But what I liked most was wreckin' Donnie's toys. Because they were the best, you know? The shiniest, the most delicate. The ones that made the biggest mess and got the best reaction from the others when you broke 'em. Everyone paid attention when I broke Donnie's toys.

Except they weren't toy- Fuck! Hey! *hey*, you asshole, learn to signal!"

"Gyah!"

"Hold on, Casey- 's one of them little old guys. Probably can't see the steering wheel, never mind the damn road. Yeah, there he goes. That right, grandpa, get off the road!"

Anyways. Like I was sayin'. I know you had a shit life, Casey, and you had it rough, but at least you could stroll into any store and get what you wanted if you had the cash, and do it without worrying that some wackjob would try to shoot you 'cuz they thought you were the man from Mars. We were stuck in a stinkin', wet hole in the ground, with nothin' but what Master Splinter found or stole . . . or what Donnie managed to fix.

You got no idea what it was like, Casey, that day when Don figured out how to fix the

busted bulbs in our tunnel. He was four years old and somehow pulled light right outta the air. It was- It was incredible. Pure magic."

"Geeze, Raph. You make him sound like Jesus or somethin'."

". . . he kinda was, Casey. I'm tellin' you, you got no idea what it was like back then. Dark and wet, and fuck it stank in the summer. And winter was cold. Really, really cold. When we were smaller we could huddle down with Sensei, but as we got bigger it just wasn't enough anymore. Even with blankets, everything got so damp down there that the cold went right through it. By the time we were six it got so bad that Sensei tried to keep a fire goin' for us, which was a real risk because the smoke would make people come lookin', you know? But again, too damp, and not enough to burn. So finally, he took a risk and brought Don with him topside, and they brought back an old plug-in heater. Don fixed it up in about a day, patched it into the electric grid somehow, and it purred for him like a kitten.

That thing became *the toy*. Don babied it like it was his own kid, and everyone wanted to sit next to it, touch it, snuggle up against it. Except me.

Me . . . I broke it.

Again and again and again. Didn't matter what Master Splinter did, either, a couple days after bein' punished I was back at it because I got such a rush out of it. Everyone paid attention. Everyone got as angry as me. Even Donnie would get pissed off, and *that* was somethin'! He was usually always so quiet, but this made him spark and snap, you know? Made him *interestin'*. A month or two and we pretty much had a war goin' on. I thought it was the best thing ever.

But Don *hated* it. I think he hated me, too, though he's Don so he'll never admit to it. I wouldn't blame him. Shell, lookin' back on it, sometimes I'm amazed he doesn't still hate me, 'cuz he put so much effort into that thing, Casey. So much work. You see him now and he's got tools and a workshop and plays around with engine blocks like they're Lego, but back then he had a big rock for a hammer, someone's cheap pocketknife as a screwdriver, and two rolls of wire he'd snatched out of old VCRs. And he was just a kid! I don't think he understood half of what he was doin' except that it made stuff go somehow. Must have- no, I *know* it drove him crazy that I kept messin' stuff up and wastin' his time.

I know, because eventually it pushed him too far, and he snapped.

You've never seen Donnie mad, Casey. You've seen him pissed and cranky and unhappy. But you've never seen him totally nuts with how angry he is. I have, and I never, ever wanna push him to that again.

Because he ain't a hothead like you an' me, Case. Donnie burns *cold* when he's mad.

. . . what is that?"

"Looks like- yeah. An accident. Pretty big, too. There's gotta be four-five cars piled up. You're gonna have to go around, Raph."

"Detour, huh? Figures. Shit, okay. I think- yeah, we can turn here and go through some back streets. And what was I sayin'?"

"Donnie burns cold-like, instead of hot."

"Right, yeah. Okay, it was spring when it happened. The sewers were always miserable, but the reason changed from season to season, you know? Spring in the sewers was miserable because we'd get flooded from all the melting snow and the rain, and the temperature would flip around like Mikey after too many Twinkies. Nice one day, a cold, wet slice of hell the next. And it was on one of those ugly days that I broke the heater again, and Donnie flipped out.

I'll always remember- I'll always remember how he stood there staring at it for, like, an hour. Dunno if it was really that long, but it sure felt like that because he wasn't actin' right. I don't mean yellin' or screamin', because he never did that. But he didn't tear up or clench his fists or anything. Just stood there with this scary blank look on his face. Mikey couldn't get him to budge, and Leo couldn't either, and finally Master Splinter tried and Donnie looked up at him and said- he said- 'I'm not fixing it this time.'

And that was it. He just turned around and went back to his stuff. He was foolin' with a radio I think. Yeah, yeah an old clock radio. Red numbers on the face. I remember 'cuz- well, we ain't at that part yet.

Anyways, we didn't really think anything about it, you know? Figured maybe Donnie was just sulking. But it got later and later in the day, and it started getting colder and colder. By the time night came around there was frost forming along the walls. And Donnie still wouldn't go near that heater.

Finally, it just got too cold and Splinter went over and asked him to fix the heater. And Donnie said, 'No. I'm not fixing it.'

And that's when we started to figure out that somethin' was up. And when Don got really fuckin' scary.

That night was one of the nastiest we'd been through all spring, Casey. The temperature dropped like a rock, we were all stuck to Master Splinter and each other tryin' to get warm and had every single blanket piled one on top of another and we were still freezin' our shells off. And Don still wouldn't go fix that damned heater. Didn't matter what we said, he wouldn't do it.

Master Splinter tried everything, too. Pleaded, bribes, *threats*. Don just looked him in the face and said 'There's nothing you can do to make me fix it.' Meant it, too. And Splinter just gave up and asked him *why*. Why was he doin' this? We could all freeze to death, and Don had to know it. It wasn't worth dying over a heater.

And Donnie said, 'It's not about the heater. It's about Raph.'

And I gotta tell you, Case, I felt more scared then than I ever had before.

He said, 'The heater I fixed has been keeping us warm and alive. But Raph keeps breaking it. Every time, Sensei. So fixing it- it's a waste of time. Not just because I have to do it again and again, but because someday he's going to break it when I'm not around, or I'm hurt, or unconscious, and I can't fix it, and then we'll all die.'

What he's doing is *dangerous*, Sensei, for all of us, and I'm tired of it. I'm tired of fixing the mess he makes just because he likes being mean. So I'm not going to this time,

Sensei. I'm not fixing the heater today, and if we all die, well, it's Raph's fault, and anyways he was going to get us killed eventually."

". . . Holly fuck, Raph."

"Yeah, I know. Word for word that's what he said, and I'll always remember it because complete and utter *fear* carved it into my brain. I figured it was the last thing I'd ever hear about me, you know? And it was even worse because he was *right*. What I was doin' was dangerous. When you live like we lived, you can't afford to be a selfish dick because it'll get everyone else *killed*. That's why Splinter kept punishing me, that's why the others got so upset. But I didn't really understand until that night when Don just shut Sensei down with that argument, and we all nearly froze to death.

It- it was a really near thing, Casey. Even with Sensei, even all together in a pile like that. That clock radio Don'd been fixing earlier flashed it's numbers at us the whole time. Hour after hour, and none of us dared fall asleep 'cuz we were too afraid we wouldn't wake up . . . I hated myself that night. I hated myself more then I ever did before, and I ain't ashamed to admit I cried about it, because at that point I'd got the message about what I'd done and it scared the shell offa me.

And then- And then the alarm on the damned clock radio went off. Donnie'd set it to ring at a minute past midnight.

He pulled himself outta the blankets and said, 'It's tomorrow. So I'll fix the heater now.'

And he did. Took him maybe three minutes. Guess he'd got a lot of practice from all the times I busted it. Though, you know- I never asked, but sometimes I think he mighta rigged it so that it didn't *really* break that time. It just made it seem like it so he could make a point."

". . . Donnie would do somethin' like that?"

"When it comes to stuff that counts, Don is the most ruthless bastard in our family, Casey, and don't you ever forget it. He's a shit liar, but he's good enough at scrapin' through loopholes and tellin' half-truths that he doesn't play poker 'cuz he's not *allowed*. Too good at it. Only Master Splinter can beat him, and then it's an iffy sorta tie.

So that was my wakeup call. Don scared the piss outta me, and suddenly I realized that his 'toys' were important. That what he was doin' was important. And more then that, I started realizin' it was hard work. Because Splinter and Don had a long talk the next day after Donnie pulled that stunt, and Don took me off to one side afterwards and started teachin' me about machines. Not much, because I ain't and never was the brainiac he is, but enough so that I could do the basics. So that if the heater broke, I could fix it.

He's a real good teacher, you know.

And- and the more he taught me, the more I sat up and listened and just- it just all came together, you know? Suddenly, Donnie was more then just the bro who had the best toys and talked funny. He was- he was someone I respected. I guess in a lot of ways it was the first time I really saw Don for who he was."

"He taught you machines? Wait- did he teach you about bikes, too? 'zat how come you

could build one?"

"Casey, *Don* built my bike. Because I liked 'em so much and he wanted me to be happy. And yeah, he taught me most of what I know. Other stuff I figured out myself, but most of it comes from *Donnie*."

"Shit, man, I didn't know *Don* built it! Holy cow, no wonder you suck his dick."

". . . you're an idiot, Casey. But, yeah. That's a good part of the reason me and *Don* went further with the whole relationship deal and started screwin'. Ever since then, *Donnie's* always let me into his workspace, play around with his stuff. Just hang out and get my hands dirty. And he'll build things just for me. He's thoughtful like that, and- and he's just easy to be around, you know? Gets upset in ways that make sense, stands up to me without bein' an ass, generally just lets stuff slide."

"Huh. But that's why you're all so careful around *Don's* stuff? Because of the heater thing?"

"That, and because what he built let us go from just surviving to actually *living*. Big, big difference between those two things. It's why even Master Splinter's careful around *Donnie's* stuff - you ever noticed that he lets *Don* skip practice if he's workin' on something? That's why. Because *Don's* got the pull for it. None of the rest of us get that."

"Huh. I guess I get it."

"Right. And then *you* come along. And lemme tell you, Casey, you are a shit guest for *Don*, you know that? It's great havin' you visit and stuff, but you wreck more of *Donnie's* projects than me and Mikey combined, and it's startin' to get to him. And he don't deserve that kinda crap. Which is why I'm gonna park right here, and you're gonna march into that store, and buy him a nice, shiny new tool cabinet as a 'I'm sorry I'm a bonehead please don't use me as your next science experiment' present."

". . . yeah, okay."

"Good."

"I dunno how you manage to paralel park this tank, man."

"Practice. That, and actually knowing how to drive."

"Ha, ha. How much're the tool cabinets, anyways?"

"Something like a hundred and fifty."

"*What*?! I thought you said it was a sale!"

"Yeah, normally they're two-fifty. Anyways, you said yes, so cough it up. Plus, it's less then how much you'd pay to replace the stuff you've broken, so you've got no room to bitch."

"Aww, but I wanted to save that money for- Fuck. Fine! I'll get the lousy tool cabinet."

"Good."

"Lousy little green men suckerin' me outta date money- I'll be back in fifteen!"

"Yeah, yeah. Go!

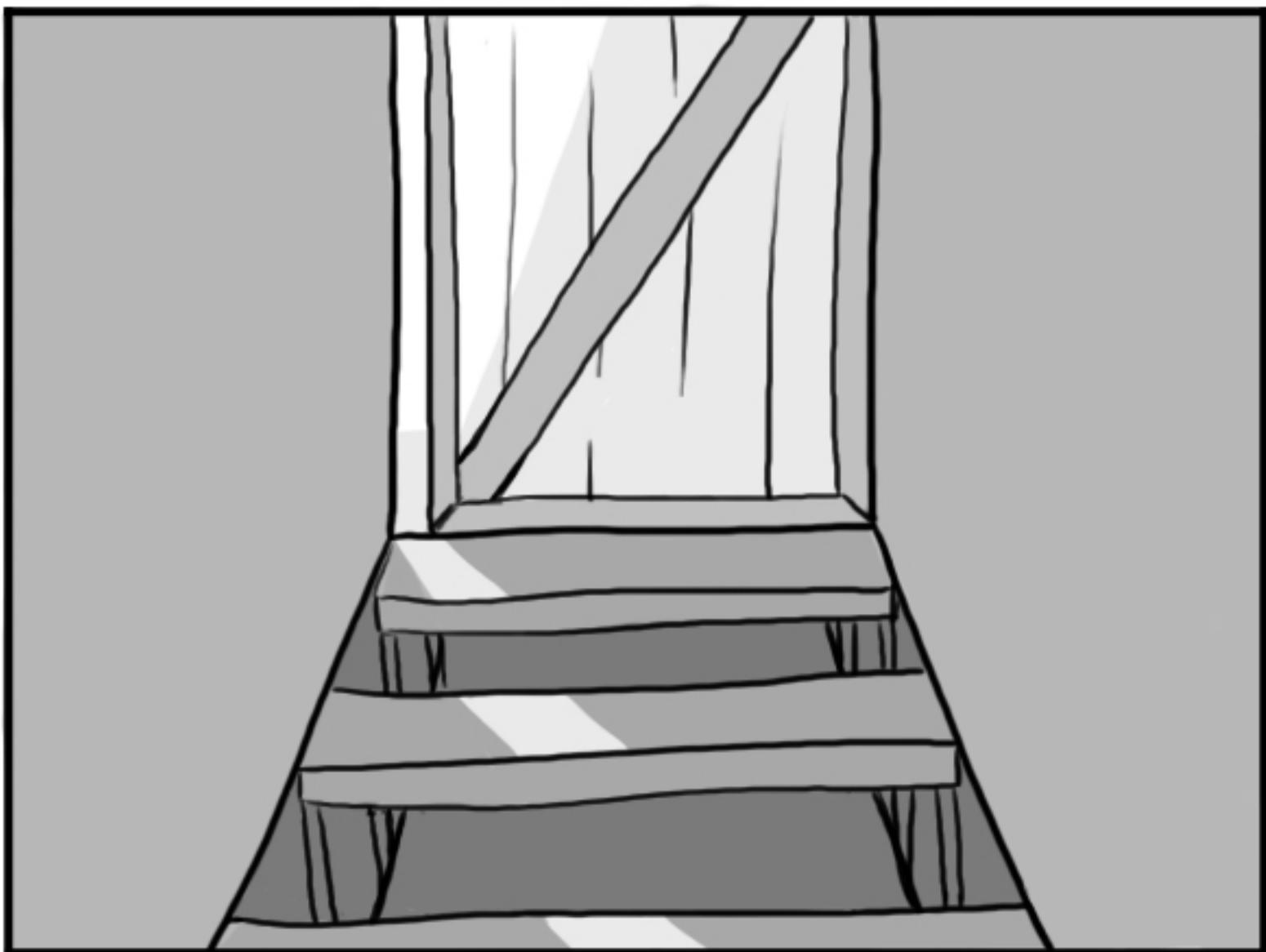
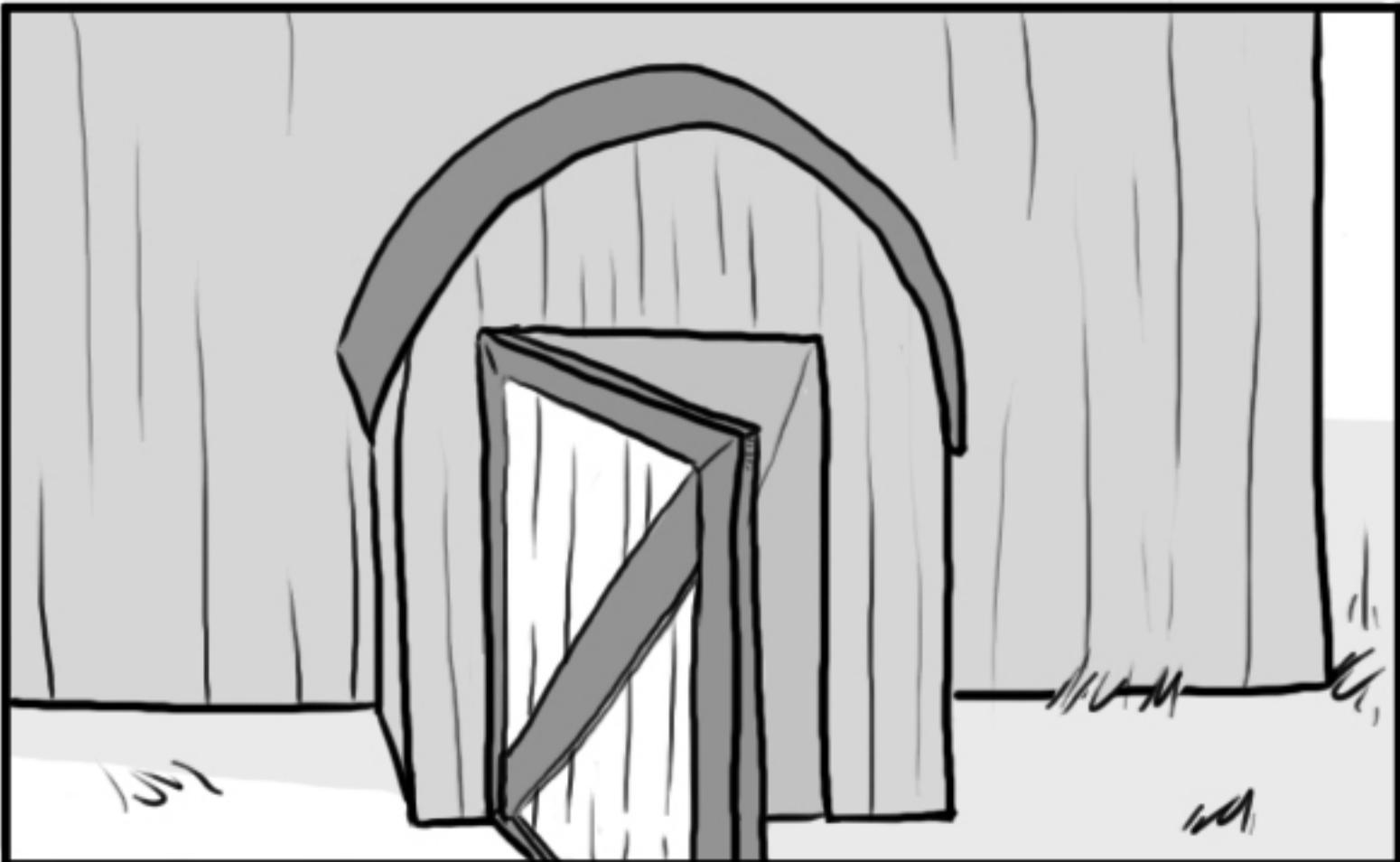
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. . . heh heh heh. It was cheaper at Loopy Bob's, but Casey totally had it coming for that dig about sleepin' on the couch."

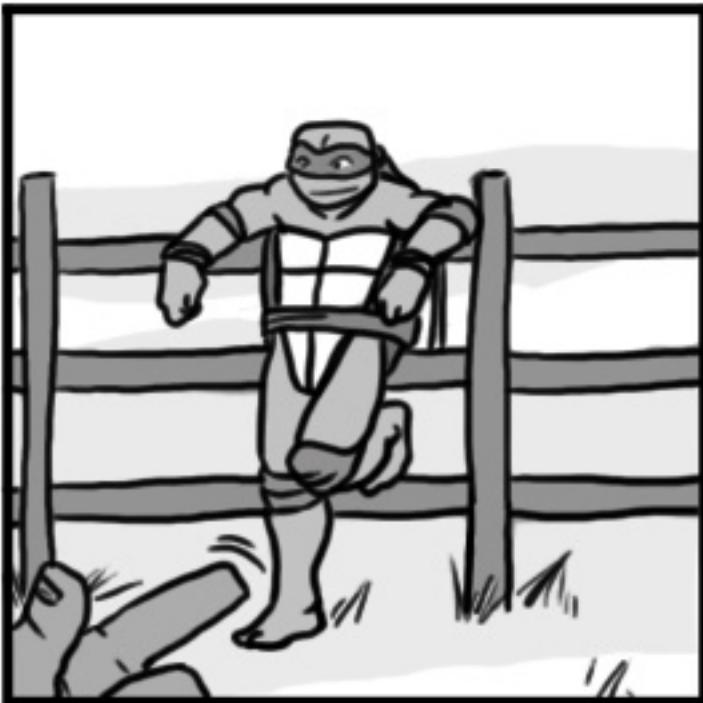
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Spring ends

# MICHELANGELO

BOOK 3  
SUMMER



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SAND...





# Coming Full Circle

~~~~~\*~~~~~

## Chapter 3

~Michelangelo~  
Sweltering Summer

~~~~~\*~~~~~

"I love this." Four year old Michelangelo giggled, smiling up at the television as the Price is Right flashed across the screen and Bob Barker appeared. Mikey set the cockroach onto his leg and began clapping, joining the television audience. He loved that about this show, everyone was so happy and clapping and smiling. Michelangelo grinned up at the TV. and picked up the cockroach again, cradling him in his hands. "You like it too, Bob, right?" The cockroach's antenna waved in the air, his shiny eyes reflecting the t.v. "Right." Mike giggled and looked back up to the show.

Mikey grinned and clapped, so happy for the woman who had just guessed the right numbers and was bouncing around on stage, practically assaulting Bob Barker - while Bob the cockroach was now on his head. "Oooo, what numbers are next?" Mike asked, eyes wide as he watched. He didn't know what those numbers did, but there were lights and noises and applause; how could he not like it?

The Lair's scrap heap of a wooden door scraped open and Mikey screamed, eyes wide and his hands raised in the air, and all the while Bob scurried from one side of his head to the other, antenna waving about. Splinter raised a brow at his son - Donatello poked his head out of their make-shift kitchen from the scream before he ran back, probably to try and put the toaster back together before their father found out he got to it, again.

Raphael pushed his way past Splinter, shouting something about: "Me fir'tht!" and Splinter scolding him, ordering him to share the chocolate they had found with his siblings. Leonardo sighed, looking at his father to make sure that is what he was feeling - exasperation. Once he was confident he was just as thoroughly dissatisfied as his father, Leo remembered what it was he was so excited about and he began to rummage through his rucksack to find his treasure.

"Oh Raph~" Michelangelo cooed during his commercial break.

Raphael shoved the chocolate his father had found while they were out scavenging on the surface - it was one of those rare pieces of food where it was still in the wrapper and everything! He liked chocolate but he knew Mikey liked it more so he wanted his share now before Mikey got a hold of it and talked everyone out of their pieces!

Mikey grinned and tiptoed up to Raphael, a big grin on his face and pure evil in his eyes. He waited till Raph was just about to say something before his hands shot out from be-

*hind his back and Bob was thrust into Raphael's face. "Give Bob kisses! He loves you!"*

*Raphael cried out and backpedaled, throwing the chocolate at Mikey. "Ew! Gwoss! Ge' im awa~y!" He yowled, a slight lisp marring Raphael's otherwise vehemence cry.*

*"But Bob loves you, Raph!" Mike insisted and giggled, taking a step towards Raphael, and before long, the two were running through the lair, Mikey chasing Raph with Bob held out in front; his antenna quivering in the wind and little feet gripping onto Mikey's hand for dear life.*

*"Boys, please do not run in our home." Splinter scolded, helping Leonardo unpack their findings. His son, whom he was beginning to consider the eldest of the four due to his big brother factor, dutifully went about putting their findings away or on the table to be better sorted through. When the two of them got down to the bottom of the bag – Raphael still shouting for Splinter to stop Michelangelo – Leonardo found his prize and he grinned, looking up at his father pleadingly. Splinter couldn't help but smile and nod, giving him permission to stop his work.*

*Splinter eventually managed to get Mikey to stop - only after mentioning that his television program was about to end. Michelangelo gasped and ran back to the TV in time to see Bob Barker instructing a woman on how to spin the big wheel.*

*"I want to spin a big wheel like that." He declared to everyone who was listening.*

*"Bu' it'th dumb." Raphael said - from the other side of the room next to Donnie with a nice big fly swatter.*

*"Is not!" Mikey shouted back with his lower lip pouting out in annoyance that Raphael would dare and say such a thing about Bob Barker's show.*

*"Leave him alone, Raphie. Mikey likes the pretty lights and the buttons." Donatello explained then grinned, handing his brother a toasted bit of cheese with olives, ketchup and a saltine cracker, all of which was atop a stale slice of bread that they found at the grocers. "Here! I fixed the toaster! Wanna see if it makes toast and cheese any good?"*

*"Meh...." Raph grunted but eyed the food anyway - he was hungry.*

*Leonardo sat down next to Mikey, fidgeting as he pretended to watch the show. He was holding a thin book in his hand, the pages crinkled and slightly torn at one corner, and there appeared to be a stain on the back of it - from what, he didn't want to know.*

*"Leo, do you have to go potty?" Michelangelo asked suddenly, blue eyes staring expectantly at Leonardo with a wrinkled nose. Bob on the TV announced the winner and the audience clapped; Bob on Mike's head scurried to his brow and seemed content for a moment gazing down from the cliff of Mikey's brow ridge.*

*"Huh?" Leo asked, looking at Michelangelo finally and then blushing, shaking his head.  
"No...."*

*"Oh... I do. Wanna race?"*

*Leonardo wrinkled his nose in thought and eventually nodded, "Okay." He agreed, suddenly realizing he did have to go.*

*The two got up and wandered to the bathroom. Standing side by side, they aimed and counted to three, "One, four, nine, twenty-seven.... three!"*

*And off they went, peeing into the toilet, Mikey's tongue sticking out in concentration and Leo remaining calm and relaxed as always. Michelangelo was so serious about winning that his face began to brighten with blood in his rush to win. Leonardo won on a technicality - he didn't have to go as bad as Mike. The two soon returned to the main room, hands dunked in water to constitute an honest response when asked if they washed their hands. Michelangelo continued to pout from his defeat. He had believed he would win. It wasn't fair.*

*"I wanted to win!" Mike whined, looking at Leonardo pleadingly as though just by giving him the blue puppy eyes he could change the results - and Leo did.*

*"Okay, you win." Leonardo announced, smiling as he sat down next to him. "I even have a surprise for you!"*

*"Oh! Present!" Michelangelo giggled, clapping excited - Bob mercifully having been placed on his head again.*

*Shifting closer to him, Leonardo smiled shyly and blushed, his fingers fiddling with the book behind his back. "I thought you'd like it when I found it, so I got it for you." He pulled the comic from around his shell and handed it over to Michelangelo, a Justice Force issue 37.*

*"It has these really cool guys fighting the bad guys, and the pictures have color and words like Splinter says we have to learn to read, and this one guy-" Leonardo opened the book, flipping through the pages till he found it, "-here, he seems like he's the dad of them and takes care of them and so he's really cool."*

*Michelangelo's mouth formed into an 'o' his eyes drinking in the colored images and action poses the pictures displayed, telling a story that made even the words unnecessary. "Wow..." Mikey whispered, his hands reaching out reverently for the book. "It's pretty..."*

*"Yeah. I thought that 'cause you like watching that cartoon in the mornings before we have to go practice that maybe reading a book about it could be fun. You like fun." Leonardo said, smiling sheepishly, his cheeks burning with a blush and his eyes peeking up at him shyly. "Do you like it?"*

*Leo's voice squeaked and Mike grinned, staring up at him before he nodded quickly, giggling in joy. "Yes! I love it! Oh thank you Leo!" He squealed and jumped at him, hugging Leonardo tightly around the neck.*

*The brothers began to giggle after they fell to the floor, still hugging each other.*

*"Can we read it together?" Mike asked, perked up and sitting atop him while hugging his new prized possession to his chest.*

*marched out of the kitchen, tossing the can into the garbage. "I'm headin' out ta Casey's." He grumbled, brushing past him swiftly and jogging up the stairs taking them two at a time.*

*Leonardo bobbed his head, loving the shining and happy look in those blue eyes and*

*the way Mikey was biting his lower lip in excitement. "Okay, but you have to do the girl voices. I'm not good at them."*

*"Okay! I am! But you gotta be the bad guy, too, 'cause I wanna be a hero!"*

*"Okay." Leonardo smiled and the two rolled over scrambling to get comfortable as Splinter took over the t.v. to find the channel to one of his stories and Raphael became Donatello's guinea pig on what tasted the best in Don's new toaster machine where everything is crunchy and overdone.*

*Bowing their heads together and little feet swinging in the air behind them, Mikey and Leo began giggling, telling a story of their own making as they looked at the pictures and made 'bam! pow!' noises once the fighting started.*

*It was the best day in the lair Mikey ever had in his whole life. He wanted to marry Leo.*

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Jealousy, anger, betrayal, and confusion. Mikey didn't know what was wrong with him. He had forgiven Leo for being gone so long. He didn't blame him at all in fact even though he didn't think he could do that himself. Donatello had even finally come around – after nearly six months of giving him the cold shoulder and refusing to say some things, Donnie was finally calming down and saying things like, 'Good morning' to Leonardo before breakfast.

But Karai continued to linger in his mind. They had only fought maybe four battles with the ninja clan since last winter after he had found out Leo's secret, but it was enough to make him see red and want to kill the woman. How had she done it? How had she been able to seduce Leonardo when he had been trying since he was four years old?

He hated her. Whatever she did to Leo ruined him. Why had she succeeded – an enemy – where he hadn't?

Glaring at nothing and throwing the hose into the kiddy pool with a rubber ducky, a lawn chair and a table next to it - with assorted junk foods and a Big Gulp soda. Mikey filled the pool and then settled into it, placing his sunglasses upon his nose and he sighed in relief as the heat from the New York summer was joined by the refreshing water in the pool. It was great, he felt warm but cool all at once. He loved sun bathing – even if he could only do it in the very early mornings or in the late evenings. Splinter was very strict about that and it sucked. Sunbathing was the best thing a turtle had ever come up with.

Slurping at his soda pop and munching on chips and donuts. Michelangelo had to think hard of something else that was this perfect. And really, there wasn't much out there.

The sunlight soaked into his skin, and he churred softly – it was wonderful. He forgot everything. He needed this, it had been almost a year since he had fully relaxed.

Opening his eyes and inhaling deeply, Michelangelo watched the clouds color. He still had an hour left of sunlight, but he wasn't thinking of that anymore. He still didn't know the whole story with Leonardo and Karai. What exactly had been going on between them? What did they do, if anything? Why her? That was perhaps his biggest question. Of everyone or anything out there in the universe, why her? She was the daughter

of their sworn enemy and yet, he had time to play Paddy-Cake with the manipulative bitch. It didn't make sense to him.

Mikey wouldn't deny he had been distant with Leo after that. He wasn't as downright cold and dismissive as Donnie had been; but breakfast was no longer their alone time together. He missed having those special breakfasts with Leo. It was the one time during the day that he felt like Leo and he were on the same level. Leonardo had let his hair down and didn't try and be big brother or leader. He was just there with him, enjoying the moment and smiling with him if batter got on his face, looking horrified if he burnt something – and then knowing he would be forced to eat it – and he looked so at peace with himself. Mike had never seen Leo so relaxed as he was with him while making breakfast.

That had been the real reason he had been so hopeful, so open to more. It was why he had flung himself at Leo, kissing him, silently begging him not to leave again just because one brother was angry at him. He had clung and he had wanted to cry like a girl in hopes of not being rejected. But it was all for naught because Leo had ruined it. He didn't want to hold his past over his head, but this was bugging him; the not knowing; having not known to begin with. Leonardo kept a secret from them all. Splinter had deemed it such a big deal as to send Leo away.

Crying out suddenly, Michelangelo shook his head back and forth, feet flailing and chips flying. Glaring up at the sky and stopping his tantrum just as suddenly as it had begun. Mike snarled something worthy of Raphael's temper and he shoved some chips in his mouth and washed them down with his Big Gulp. "Screw him." He hissed – and realizing the power he felt, Mikey stood from his chair screaming, "Screw you, Leo!"

"What did I do now?"

Mike twirled on his toes and pointed, not about to admit that he was terrified that Leonardo had heard. "You lied to us! You went flouncing over to Karai and made googly eyes at her and making-out and playing tonsil-hockey with each other! You thought she was so~o important as to lie to your own family – and you know what? I'm tired of being in love with you! HA! See that? Now you can't have me, how do you like that?" He shouted, folding his arms and looking far smugger than he felt.

Leonardo frowned, staring directly at him. It lasted several minutes and Michelangelo shifted uneasily. How Leonardo managed to look so serious and hurt all at once while having a staring contest was beyond him. He had no idea what Leo was thinking and he didn't want to know either.

"Yeah, cry all you want, cause you ain't gettin' this." He slapped his ass and pressed a hand to his chest, batting his blue eyes. "You had your chance and you blew it, mister." But his eyes stung and Mikey suddenly didn't want to be looking at Leonardo anymore.

Before his lip could tremble he turned, grabbing food and his soda to hide himself as fat tears rolled down his face. He didn't know why he was crying, he really didn't. They just were there. It wasn't like he wanted to bawl, the tears were just falling and he couldn't stop them. He was angry at himself for crying, but down they came, one after another.

He heard the lawn chair scraping on the rooftop gravel, but he wasn't expecting arms to encircle his waist and a chin rest upon his shoulder.

"Karai and I were never an item." Leo whispered. "We... we started talking. We ran into each other late one night. I had snuck out—" He could feel Leo smile as he snorted in disbelief. "-even I break the rules now and then, Mike. I just know how not to get caught."

Mikey shook his head, pushing against his chin to try and get him off him – but Leonardo held on.

"We ran into each other and... I don't really know how it happened. One minute we were ready to fight each other, the next we were sitting there talking and having a great time. I think we both understood the pains of being in command of our father's men and not having the freedom to relax like the troops can."

Michelangelo stiffened and he dared to turn his head slightly, indicating he was listening even though he was still hiding his face to keep the tears a secret.

"So we... we met up again; and again. Before we knew it, it had been a year. I... there were feelings on my part – but I never acted on them. I just; I thought I was too young, and it was also because of who she was. I never did trust her, Mike. And then we got Shredder banished and she tried to kill us. When everything was settled, I told Splinter what had happened and explained that I was confused. So he sent me away and I agreed because it was the only way to purge the emotion from the truth."

Leo's arms tightened around him suddenly and Mikey squeezed his eyes shut, his lip trembling and he suckled on his soda with a clenched throat and shaking fingers.

"It was just a crush, Mikey. It wasn't anything that would replace the feelings of those I truly care about and trust."

He couldn't talk, he just physically couldn't do it, so he nodded and tried to smile.

"But you know what; as soon as I got home, Raph hated me, Don was quiet and getting colder by the day, and then there was you. You were the only one who didn't care, who didn't question, who wasn't expecting anything. I just want to thank you for that. I was so happy when you asked me to make breakfast that day. It was the first time I knew you weren't secretly holding it against me. You only get mad at me for things that really matter – like lying about secretly befriending Karai." He could feel Leonardo smiling and Mike shivered, wanting to pull away because he knew he was about to yell or sob if he didn't get away from him.

Silence took up residence between them and Leo did finally hear him choke on his tears. Mikey's face heated and his eyes felt so heavy and hot, and he didn't want to be there anymore. "Le' me go..."

"No." the whisper was gentle and it ripped at Mike. Why did he have to be so kind? He should have been in the process of lecturing him on being so weak.

Instead, Leonardo sat down, dragging Mike with him and they tumbled into the water.

Sputtering and fighting against him, Michelangelo splashed Leo in the face, glaring at him with those fat tears in his eyes – only to get a mouthful of water as Leo splashed him right back.

It was war. Mikey snarled and attacked, splashing at him and wrestling, fighting to get

his head under the water so he could dunk him a few times into submission, but Leo fought right back, so serious, so determined, his eyes focused and his jaw set. It was like watching emo-Leo fight him with nothing holding him back.

Leonardo won of course. Mike hated that. How Leo still won even with Mikey so eager to mess him up was beyond him – though the little cartoon version of Leonardo he had in his head was holding up a finger and lecturing to him about how anger and fighting never resulted in a victory.

"Screw you!" Michelangelo spat, glaring death up at him where Leo was holding him down.

Smiling, Leo bobbed his head, "Yeah, you said that already...." He bowed forward and kissed him.

It was short and simple, a kiss that was innocent and yet didn't lack a single drop of passion.

Mikey scrambled away from him till his shell hit the edge of the kiddy pool opposite him – the two staring at each other from across the short distance between them. Mike's lips felt flushed and aching, phantom lips still pressed to them and he shook. Then he touched his lips and they trembled.

"I... I was feeling this way back during our breakfasts; but..." He paused and looked down at the water, playing his fingers across the surface, "then you found out about Karai and were so angry with me. I took some time to really think about you and me." Leo explained, his face contorting in pain, his first true emotional reaction during all of this. "I think I was falling in love with you before I even knew it. I wanted to give you time to... to forgive me and then come to terms or... or to ask me what happened. But you didn't and I don't know if I can stand not seeing you smile."

Wiping at his eyes and shaking his head, Mike refused to look at him. This was what he wanted ever since Leonardo brought home the first comic book he ever owned and they read it together. He knew then that he wanted to marry Leo like those people on TV even though he didn't fully understand what it meant as a kid. All he understood was that people kissed and were happy with each other when they were with someone they cared about - someone they said 'I love you,' too.

"I just... I don't expect you to forgive me. I just needed you to know. I've never had this overpowering feeling to tell anyone anything. I felt like I could have died by not telling you." He smiled sadly. "I needed to tell you that I love you."

It was so quiet for a while; both waiting to see what the other would do. Then Leonardo stood and left and Michelangelo realized his chance was gone.

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It was new and wonderful, but it was scary and embarrassing all mashed together into one messy desire. It had started with a gentle touch, a smile and a lingering scent. Years later as Leonardo had headed out the door via Master Splinter's orders; it had been a hard and sad look that Mikey saw even in his dreams. Michelangelo had been wonder about it for two long years till his brother returned, more broken and confused than before he had left. Then several weeks ago it had been declared, whis-

whispered upon the rooftops in a pool of water and sweltering summer light.

Leo had said he loved him. He had told him that after arriving home and being around him again that he had grown to love him in the last year. Why did it have to be so difficult? That confession is what he had wanted, it was what he had lain awake for years dreaming about, wondering what it would feel like to hug him in that way. He had wondered how Leo's kisses would taste; and he had wondered what a touch would do to him. He wanted it to come to pass. He desperately did.... so why was he so angry at him?

Why was he still upset over finding out Leonardo had left them because three years prior he had feelings for Karai and deemed himself unworthy to lead them with a clear head. Why did it bug him? Leo had explained everything. He had sat there in front of him, bearing his heart out, and all he could see in his mind's eye was Leonardo and Karai kissing - which ironically Leo said they had never progressed to that point. Why then, why was he so jealous of a crush?

It was decided, he would tell him. Mikey could see it now, him marching in on Leo, telling him he was wrong and that Leo was not the one who needed to be forgiven, it was he, Mikey, who needed Leonardo's forgiveness after treating him the way he did.

Except his courage failed every time he tried to approach him.

Michelangelo wracked his brain trying to figure out why that was. Was it his eyes, the way Leonardo's gorgeous and rich brown eyes seemed to beg him from across the room that frightened him away? Was it the way he would look surprised to see him only to smile so timidly? Or was it his own fear of Leo rejecting him even after confessing love to him?

It was inevitable though. Perhaps he was tired. Maybe it was because Splinter had paired them together during practice. Or maybe his subconscious mind had finally found a loophole to sabotage him at his own procrastination game.

Leonardo grunted and flipped him, rolling with the throw to pin Mikey to the mat, his hands on his shoulders and locking Michelangelo in place under him.

He gazed at him, losing himself within Leonardo's eyes, and his face twisted up, his heart pounded and he fought against him, grabbing at Leonardo, struggling to get his hold and he hugged him. He wrapped himself around Leonardo's shoulders, hiding his face against his neck and he clawed at his shell. "I'm sorry..." he whispered into his ear, shaken and scared, terrified of what might happen.

Michelangelo didn't know his heart could hurt so much. Leo hadn't moved yet, he hadn't said anything. He just knelt there above him and Mikey felt like a spider monkey clinging to him desperately. His throat hurt now, he felt like crying, he felt like he had ruined the one chance he had had with Leo, and he didn't know what to do anymore but this.

"My sons?" Splinter called, his walking stick tapping lightly on the tatami mats across the room.

He didn't want to move, he gripped at him, Mike burrowed his face against Leo's neck and he felt more than heard the grunt that escaped Leo, desperate to keep him close, to hold onto him for a moment longer.

And there it was, Leonardo shifted and an arm slid behind Mikey's shell. He felt Leo hug him - but it was quick, a squeeze, the type of hug he had always given Casey when the lug head came around. It was empty and he felt cold. It was like Leonardo was humoring him. Leo stood first and Mikey crawled to his feet. He swallowed the lump down and threw on a happy smile, one far too wide and empty to really hide anything. "Just catching my breath, Master!" he laughed and turned and without hesitating he immediately struck at Leo with a backhand, throwing out his fist towards Leonardo's face.

Leonardo easily blocked the blow and twisted his body, reaching down he scooped Michelangelo's ankle out from under him and stepped into him, forcing him back down onto the mats where his heel immediately stopped an inch from Mikey's throat, signaling this particular fight was over due to a death blow. And it continued on from there.

They took turns sparring, fighting each other, testing new moves and perfecting old ones. It wasn't hard but it was numbing. Typically the freeform fighting was Michelangelo's favorite. No rules, no real rhyme or reason to it all, and it was all about personal style. It was just a free for all fight and it was so much fun. But today, feeling Leo's hard hands on him as he wrenched Mike's arm backwards in a leverage tug and he ended up on his back, stared up at Leo while various finishing attacks rained down on him – Michelangelo finally confirmed time and time again that Leonardo wasn't look at him. He never once looked him directly in the eyes.

That was more painful than if he had verbally rejected him. Leo's forms were cold and calculated; and it left Mikey himself hollow and empty.

Then again, he probably deserved it. Turn about was fair play after all.

After practice was over, Leonardo was the first out of the dojo, a move that left even Donatello and Raphael shooting looks at each other in surprise.

Mike couldn't feel surprised. He looked away and rubbed his arm, shivering slightly. If this was how it was going to be from now on, maybe he shouldn't have said anything. Then he cried.

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The morning came far too soon. Michelangelo didn't remember doing much the day before. He hadn't even enjoyed reading his comics let alone junk food or video games. All he could focus on was the faraway look that Leo refused to aim in his direction, and the tears he fought a vicious battle to keep at bay.

The clock on his mantel flashed the numbers, only 6am. It was way too early to deal with right now. He didn't want to get up and face his family, so he lay in bed, curled on his side and staring at nothing within his room. It was messy and disorganized in an organized manner, and Mikey didn't care. He was alone and he knew that in the end this was how it would always be for him from now on.

Sighing and closing his eyes, determined to sleep through the one day off they got from training during the week, Mike decided he had no desire to do anything beyond mope and get up long enough to eat something.

Speaking of food, Michelangelo's belly growled, reminding him of the bottomless pit he called a stomach that was low on fuel. He didn't want to move, but his stomach was a driving force in his life. He honestly didn't want to eat at all, but there were some things in life that were necessary.

Sitting up and rubbing at his eyes – feeling a slight puffiness to them due to the tears right before he fell asleep – Mike sighed loudly and took a moment to breathe deep and compose a plan in case he did run into someone before he could make it back to his room with food in time. Comic Book Marathon; that would work. Read all his comics in one day. He wanted to see if he could re-read everything he owned before the clock struck midnight. He could even pass it off as an attempt at putting together one of the many action figures he hadn't yet put together. That was believable.

Sighing, Mikey crawled from his bed and rubbed at his face, wondering just how haggard he looked after last night. Didn't matter; he just needed to focus on getting some food from the kitchen and getting back to his room.

Trudging out of his room and down the hall, Michelangelo's mind was focused on anything but what lay ahead of him. When the pan hit the stove too hard and a quiet curse drifted to his ears, Mikey froze just outside of the kitchen, staring at the back of Leonardo's head.

This was not what he needed, he didn't want to see the dead look in Leo's eyes; he didn't need to feel rejected all over again just hours after the first. If he left right now, took three steps backwards and around the corner he could get away. But it was like the Fates were laughing at him because at that very moment, Leo turned around; a frying pan in one hand and two eggs in the other; and stared, a look of surprise instantly plastering itself to his face.

Standing there and shifting, his arms folding in front of him to hide his shaking, Mikey didn't know what to do. It was hard enough just breathing in front of him, let alone staring into his eyes without falling apart.

Clearing his throat, Leonardo glanced at the frying pan and hesitantly set it down on the cool stove, the eggs resting inside of it. "Mikey... I uh..."

Mike shifted, taking a step backwards, his flight instincts were kicking in and his body was beginning to respond to the urges to flee.

"I was just..." Watching Leo fumble for his words with his eyes avoiding his left him no choice but to look away, stare at anything but Leo. "I was going to get breakfast started." He whispered, and Mikey found Leonardo's brown eyes suddenly focusing solely on him.

"Oh..." Mike whispered, and he couldn't stop himself, he looked at him. He stared directly at him and his knees turned to jelly.

Bobbing his head, Leonardo licked his lips and stepped closer, his hand waving behind him. "But... well... you know I'm a horrible cook."

Why was he doing this? Was he enjoying it? Taunting him? Or was there a point to this useless talk?

"I was going to come and get you..." Leonardo blurted out, his face flushing brightly. Mikey's belly jumped. "I just wanted to get it all ready first. I thought... maybe... we could—" Leonardo stopped and inhaled deeply, taking a step towards him while balling his hands into fists, trying desperately to calm himself. "I was hoping you'd help me make breakfast."

Michelangelo's face cracked and a weak laugh escaped him. Was he serious? He had to be. Leo's face was still blushing and his eyes were staring at him. They darted away for a split second but they returned to meet his. He was so nervous, and it was an honest request on Leo's part. Mikey's throat tightened and his eyes automatically began to blink rapidly. "Leo—"

"I... if you don't want to cook, I could try and make you something! I'm only good at making omelets but I could whatever you want!" Leonardo rushed out, moving closer to him, his hands uncurling and shaking a bit as though ready to grab him if he tried to run. "I just..." He swallowed hard and Mikey watched his throat bob before he again looked up into his face. "I want to have breakfast with you. I've missed this - between us." he whispered.

"But..." Michelangelo's face suddenly overflowed with heat and his features twisted in pain. "I thought you didn't... I was so mean to you!" He yelped. He hated that he felt tears threaten him; he didn't need tears, he needed logic. He needed to be able to think and talk, he wanted to tug the truth out of Leonardo without the waterworks.

It was Leonardo's turn to twist his face up in confusion. With just a few more steps he was standing in front of Mikey and his large, warm hands were resting gently on his arms. "Mikey?"

Rubbing at his eyes and shaking his head, Michelangelo leaned into Leonardo's touch, wanting more of it as well as cringing from it. "I want to make breakfast with you." He choked out.

He didn't deserve any of this. Mikey felt Leo's hands cup his cheeks and his head was forced up, away from Leo's chest and he gazed into Leonardo's eyes. They were so painfully beautiful. He could feel the devotion spilling from Leonardo like a warm wave engulfing him. Mikey wanted to consume himself inside the promised embrace, but at the same time, he couldn't allow himself to fall into him. He had treated him like trash and in return Leonardo was caring for him? He was asking to make breakfast for him without holding anything against him? Why was it so easy?

"Hey, Mikey," Leo whispered, rubbing a thumb over his cheek and losing himself within those perfect blue eyes. "It's okay."

tire body felt. It was too much, just the feeling of Raphael touching him and holding him was too much for him to deal with.

It was like Leo knew already what was bothering him, and he was instantly telling him all was forgiven. But it was that smile that touched his face that told him it was true. His smile was small but it was genuine; it was like a summer breeze in the morning as the sun rose, melting away the dew and chasing away the minor chill from the night before. Leonardo's smile was soft and loving and it inspired a warm glow to radiate from his eyes and body. Leonardo was at peace, he wasn't tormented anymore and nothing was going to ruin this moment for them. Mikey felt helpless and yet relieved all at once.

"Leo..." He whimpered and reached for him, his hands groping at his chest and working their way around his neck, pulling him to Leo's body and hugging him tight. The concept was so stupid - all Leo wanted was to mend things by making breakfast with him; but it was so much more than that. Everything felt better. The cloud that had been separating them for months now was evaporating. That's not to say they didn't still have a long ways to go. But Mikey could feel it - they weren't going to let stupid past truths keep them apart, they weren't going to hide because this was new and scary, and they weren't going to dance around the issue because that was easier than addressing the facts. Leo was willing and open - more open than he had ever seen him in his entire life. He wanted to be there with him, open and alive.

He was cradled in Leonardo's arms. Michelangelo slumped against him and buried his face against Leo's neck. A few tears slipped free from his eyes, but he controlled them and kept them at bay. Mike clung to Leo and Leonardo hugged his shell, his hands circling it and cupping the back of his neck. He felt so safe. Everything was clicking into place, like it was a puzzle of their lives that was beginning to make sense now. The picture he could see with Leo was so lovely.

"Leo... I'm so sorry-

"Don't worry." Leonardo breathed into his ear, nuzzling his neck.

Mikey's lip trembled and his eyes again filled with heat. "But-"

"Don't worry." Leo smiled and Mikey could feel it against his skin. Leonardo smiling was so rare and so wonderful. It warmed him like the sun and he felt the heat rising into his cheeks.

He held him close for a moment longer. Michelangelo didn't want it to end and he voiced his protest the moment Leonardo pulled away, "How about an omelet?" He smiled down at him.

Mikey smiled; the implications were boundless. Leo really was offering to make him breakfast - and something he didn't make often. He was offering him so much with that one question. Mike did want it and he nodded, his own smile finally teasing the corners of his face. "Yeah, I'd like that." He snifflled and wiped at his eyes with his wrist.

"One pepperoni omelet coming up." Leo whispered, his eyes never leaving Mikey, his fingers lingering on his elbow.

It was awkward for a moment, neither of them really wanting to pull away or do anything. They watched the other, really watching to make sure there wasn't some lingering hesitation still holding tight to them. Mikey couldn't stand it and he moved closer suddenly, his hands holding Leo's wrist and his brow fell forward, resting against Leonardo's shoulder. He inhaled deeply and exhaled loudly, letting everything out; letting every fear and negative thought leave him and he focused simply on the wonderful feeling of Leo's shoulders relaxing. "I'll make you some pancakes."

They moved together then, their fingers brushing, their cheeks warming, their eyes continuing to avert from one another; but their elbows never remained separated for very long as they cooked. They bumped and rubbed, lingering in place as they waited for their food to cook. Somehow, Mikey felt like they were just beginning, just like

the food. They were just beginning to mix together, turning into something else, and in the future when the fire was finally added, they would see what they had cooked together.

He liked that analogy. He wanted to be Leo's Su Chef.

Breakfast was quiet but enjoyable. It was comfortable. It was the best breakfast Mike had had in a long time. And Leo's foot touching his under the table didn't hurt. He really did feel wanted - and that's why he let his toes curl with Leo's.  
will be lookin' for us soon."

**Fin**

# **SWELTER**

OR HOW TO ANNOY THE SHELL  
OUT OF A GOOD OL' GOOF BALL

There are times when  
a mutant turtle teenager  
has to face tough  
problems...

"I MUST TELL HIM,  
I MUST TELL HIM,  
**I MUST TELL HIM!**

AH SHELL..."

"C'MON, THE OTHERS WENT  
ON PATROL, AND SPLINTER  
IS AT APRIL'S PLACE UNTIL  
THIS HEAT WAVE IS OVER.

THIS IS THE PERFECT  
CHANCE!"



JUST BE CAUSAL  
LIKE EVERYTHING  
WAS NORMAL...



YEAH RIGHT, LIKE HAVING A CRUSH  
ON YOUR MUTANT TURTLE BROTHER  
IS TOTALLY NORMAL.



IT'S NO USE...



I MUST TELL HIM,  
EVEN IF HE KILLS ME...



LEO!!!  
I HAVE TO TELL  
YOU SOMETHING,  
THE FACT IS..."

SHHHH...



"AND IF IT WASN'T HOT ENOUGH ALREADY  
IN THE LAIR HERE I HAVE TO WATCH THE  
FULL "LEONARDO-SHOW" TO MAKE  
IT EVEN HOTTER..."



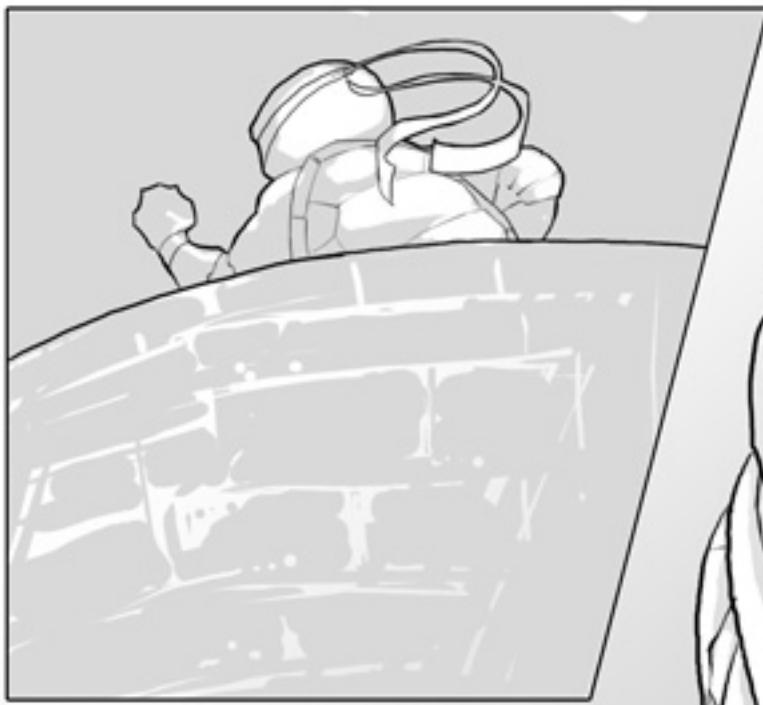
"I SWEAR YOU'RE  
DOING IT ON PURPOSE,  
OH YOU, YOU...  
SMUG BASTARD!"



So?  
WHAT DID  
YOU WANT  
TO SAY?



WHO...? ME?  
N-NEVERMIND...



Three days later...



...LEO!!!

I ALMOST DIED!  
DID YOU WANNA FINISH  
WHAT THE FOOT STARTED  
EARLIER OR WHAT?!

SERIOUSLY, DUDE.  
DO YOU HAVE TO SNEAK  
UPON THE TURTLE ALL  
THE TIME?!

...WHAT?



MIKEY, I...



I CAN'T...

I CAN'T LET  
YOU ACT SO  
RECKLESSLY. YOU  
RISKED NOT ONLY  
THE MISSION, BUT  
THE SAFETY OF THE  
OTHERS AND  
YOURSELF!

YOU MUST WORK  
ON YOUR FOCUS!

GET TO THE DOJO!

OH, AND BRING YOUR  
NUNCHUCKS, TOO!

NOW!!!

"AH SHELL!  
I'M SO DEAD!"

Three weeks later a  
very cranky turtle on  
the sofa...



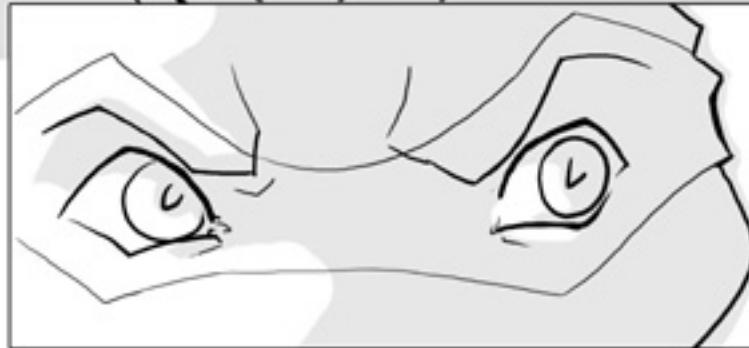
"TCH! TYPICAL!  
THE AIR CONDITIONER  
JUST HAD TO BREAK  
DOWN ON THE HOTTEST  
MONTH OF THIS  
CENTURY!"

"AND HERE IS SPLINTER'S INGENIOUS  
IDEA! HE AND TWO OF US WILL GO TO  
APRIL'S UNTIL THIS SWEALTERING WEATHER  
IS OVER, AND THE OTHER TWO WILL STAY  
HERE IN CHARGE, HUH?"

"NOTE TO SELF - DON'T PUT  
CHILI POWDER ON RAPH'S  
TOOTHBRUSH NEXT TIME YOU  
WANNA TEAM UP WITH HIM.  
SURE, IT'S JUST RAPH WHO  
CAN'T HANDLE TWO WEEKS ALONE  
WITH A CERTAIN BLUE GUY, LEAVING  
ME, ALONE, WITH..."

...HIM!"

HEY, THAT WAS CHEATING!!!  
I PUT ON MY HOLY ARMOR,  
I WAS IN INVINCIBLE MODE!



"AND HE'S BEEN UNUSUALLY NICE TO ME FOR FOUR DAYS ALREADY - BRINGING ME ICECREAM, LETTING ME SKIP SOME OF THE TRAINING AND SUCH. TCH! AFTER BEATING ME UP SO BADLY LAST TIME - THANKS A LOT!"

AND NOW SKIPPED HIS TRAINING TO "SPEND QUALITY TIME WITH ME"?! BUT HE IS JUST READING HIS STUPID BOOK.





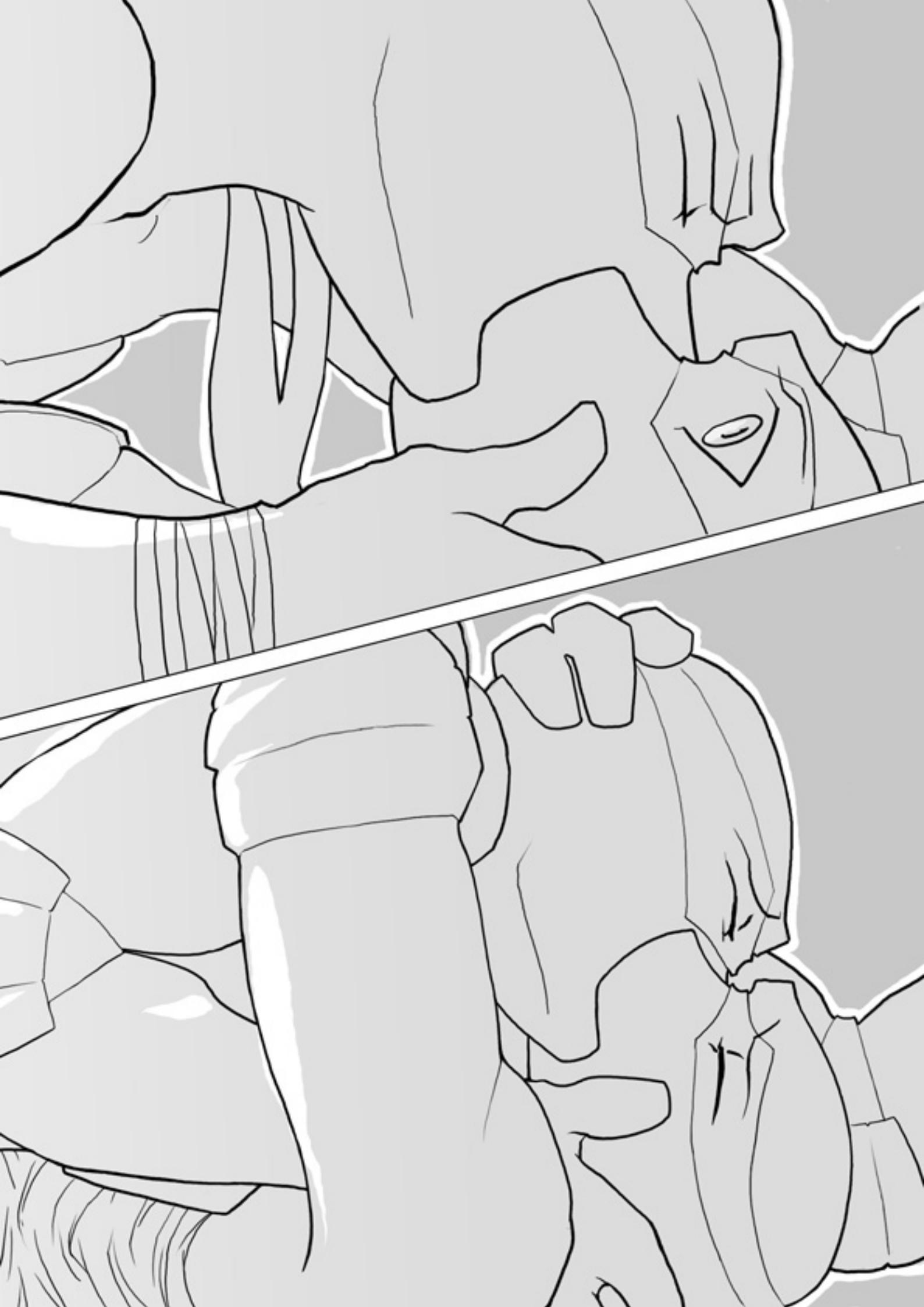
"THAT'S IT!!!!"







"I'M SUPPOSED  
TO FEEL BETTER AFTER  
LETTING IT OUT...  
DAMN YOU, LEO AT  
LEAST THIS ONCE SAY  
SOMETHING...!!!"





FEELING ANY BETTER?

UHUM...

SORRY, MIKE!  
I DIDN'T MEAN TO BE  
CONFUSING. I WANTED  
TO GIVE CLEAR SIGNS.

DUDE! YOU'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING! THIS IS CLEAR FOR YOU?!! YOU ALMOST DROVE ME COMPLETELY NUTS!

YOU TOTALLY HAVE TO MAKE IT UP TO ME!

HOW DEMANDING!  
YOU NEED TO LEARN  
SOME MANNERS,  
MIKE.

OH YEAH?  
MAKE ME!

JUST DON'T COMPLAIN LATER!

"NOTE TO SELF - NEXT TIME YOU WANNA SPEND TIME WIH LEO, CHILI ON THE TOOTHPASTE TOTALLY WORKS."



## It Started Weeks Ago

It started weeks ago, just after they met Casey. They managed to collect their brother from his fellow hot head and head home and Mike figured that was the end of the whole matter. It had been a surprise to him when Raph invited him to spend some time boarding and skating through the sewers. Not enough of a surprise for him to refuse, but a surprise nonetheless. Leo and Don weren't interested, so it was just the two of them.

Mike didn't realize immediately that Raph had wanted it that way.

They'd been taking a small breather, exchanging quips and jibs about each other's skills (or lack thereof), when Raph had suddenly quieted. A stilted apology was given, which Mike brushed off as easily as he had the earlier one. This was Raph, after all, and Mike had long accepted that teasing Raph could have negative effects on his physical safety. Not that he'd meant to push Raph quite that far, but it was live and learn, right? Raph wasn't satisfied with the brush off. He kept trying to get through the whole apology until Mike finally figured out how to shut him up. There in the darkened sewer tunnel, he leaned close and murmured, "If I have to listen to the same thing over and over, I want a kiss."

He'd meant it as a joke, a reminder of a game they'd stopped playing not so long ago before losing their first home and being tossed into these adventures they seemed to be good at finding. When Raph moved forward and captured his lips, all thoughts of the innocent and silly game were lost. Raph had never kissed like this before. It was passion and heat and that tingling in the belly spreading over his entire body, leaving him helpless to do more than kiss back. His shell hit the wall and he churred, a sound that before embarrassed all of them. Raph didn't seem to be reacting to any of this normally though, and started touching him while making an answering churr.

That didn't embarrass Mike at all. It ignited something inside him to the point that he wasn't completely sure just how Raph had wound up holding his cock. The climax was sudden and surprising for both of them. Adrift in this new version of a game that had been familiar, Mike nuzzled into Raph. Neither spoke as their pulses slowed, as their breaths calmed. The silence continued between them until they both moved as if they'd agreed upon it to resume their ride through the sewers.

Mike had wondered if the game would slide back into the past, something of their childhoods that was no longer needed, but Raph came to him again. They hid from their family because they never had told Splinter and their brothers seemed to be much more interested in improving themselves and exploring the joy of having someone who understood their intelligence. It stayed between them, a hot rush of blood and desperate touches in stolen moments. He wanted more though, which was scary and exciting to think of.

The ceiling of his room was becoming a familiar sight. Instead of sleeping, he was trying to figure out what to do about this desire.

Sure, he liked feeling Raph's hand over him. And he loved getting to touch Raph because it made the tingles in his stomach travel over his entire body as he watched his stubborn brother drop barriers and enjoy. Still, he wanted more and wasn't sure just how to get it. Though he had Don to thank for knowing at least the general idea of what he wanted. Well, Don and TV, though Don had done more than the television could. The websites he'd gotten Don to check out had been fascinating. Mike rather missed the days when Splinter would punish them for staying up so late. He no longer had any leeway to make Don see what he wanted.

How to get Raph to let him use that knowledge, though? Would the game be enough? Maybe not, but Mike was willing to try anyway. He'd have to prepare. If this went bad, Raph wouldn't agree to try anything else and might refuse to play like Leo and Don had.

Well, Master Splinter often commented on his creativity. It was about time he used it for more than pranks and witty remarks!

-----\*\*\*\*\*-----

Mike was officially the lamest of all lame turtles. Seriously, here they were at Casey's farmhouse, entire months after he'd decided he wanted to go farther with Raph, and every time he had a chance, he chickened out. He had no clue how to tell Raph what he wanted and, now that Leo was recovering, they'd soon be heading back to New York. They'd be taking on the Shredder, again, and this time they didn't intend to let the man live.

There was a chance they wouldn't live either. Mike was trying hard not to consider that, but he didn't want to die a virgin. It sounded cliché to his own mind, but it was the truth. So, he had to figure out a way to get Raph alone for awhile, since he had no idea how long the activity he wanted to do should take. He and Raph needed a signal for when they should meet up. Then he could give the signal and have Raph show up and that'd be one problem down.

He finally just set himself a picnic (so his family wouldn't wonder about the blanket he took) and found a way to slip a note to Raph. Being a ninja could be a very good thing. While he was a lot more careful about where he roamed in the woods, he didn't have to worry too much after the fiasco Finn caused. Mike found it hard to feel guilty about that at all. Once he found the spot he wanted, he went about setting up, wondering if Raph would come or if he was going to fail in getting laid before heading home. At least if he failed, he'd have something to live for.

It was nice out here. Mike hoped they'd get to come back sometime to just relax. He loved the city and racing rooftops (and his television shows. Case totally needed cable or satellite out here), but it was nice to relax out in the open without so many eyes to try to see them. Obviously he couldn't relax completely, but it was better than normal! Lying back on the blanket, he munched on an apple while waiting for Raph. It was difficult not to worry about all the things that could go wrong, from Raph not coming to Raph not wanting this, to him somehow messing the whole thing up. This was one of the times he hated his imagination.

He heard Raph before he saw him. Watching as Raph emerged from the trees and bushes around him had the nerves inside leaping. Gesturing for Raph to sit, Mike smiled and tried to banish all negative thoughts. "Glad you could make it."

Raph shrugged nonchalantly, "What's this all about, Mike? Yer plannin'something."

"Just thought we could spend some time together before heading home, you know?" Raph eyed him speculatively, totally not believing him. Mike sighed. "I did want to spend time with you." A raised eye was his answer. Stupid brother knowing him way too well...Mike sighed. "And I wanted to, um, try something a little different."

"Different?"

"Well, I mean, we've been having fun and stuff, and I thought..." Mike's brain froze on him. He'd never actually thought through explaining this to Raph. Getting the time alone together had seemed so much more important. Just saying "I want sex" didn't seem right. So what he was he supposed to do?

"Careful there, Mike. Yer brain's not used ta that much work."

"Har-har, Raph." Mike glared at his brother. Maybe this wasn't such a great plan after all.

Raph smiled. "Alright then, what's up. Why couldn't ya just ask me ta meet 'cha instead of slippin' me a note? Wanted us ta be alone?" That was true enough, so Mike nodded. Raph shifted, reaching out to grab Mike's bandana tails. He tugged, pulling Mike close for a kiss that Mike gladly lost himself in. Raph's tongue played over his lips and slipped into his mouth, distracting him from the nerves completely. Only when Mike had relaxed did Raph murmur softly, "So, what's this about?"

"I want to do more." The words slipped out before Mike could think, his hand gently brushing Raph's thigh. Raph hummed softly, tilting his head to mark a trail over Mike's neck. Mike trembled and tilted his head back on a moan.

"More what?" Raph nuzzled against him, shifting to where Mike could feel his body heat.

"More you..." Mike breathed, pressing against Raph, pushing him to the blanket. Raph made a surprised sound that was cut off by Mike's kiss. Hands skimmed over skin, igniting small fires in each of them. Their legs intertwined as they explored each other. It was familiar and different for Mike with knowledge that he and Raph might be...he shuddered at the thought, his hand trailing to Raph's hips.

"Mike?" Raph questioned, unsure of his brother's plan. Mike's hands pressed against his legs, urging them apart and settling between them. This wasn't the normal way for them, from the set up to the way Mike was acting. He didn't know what Mike was thinking, which wasn't exactly odd because no one really did, but he couldn't shake the feeling that this time he should.

"I want you, Raph," Mike's voice held a pleading note that weakened any resistance Raph may have had. One hand slipped between them, Mike's finger brushing over Raph's entrance. Raph's body tensed in surprise. "Please, Raph. I want you so badly..."

"Mike..." Raph couldn't breathe, could barely think. But he knew what Mike wanted. He'd considered it himself more than once, though he hadn't known how to pull it off. Mike seemed to. Did he trust Mike enough to allow...whatever Mike would do? "Yes."

A churr slipped out of Mike as he smiled. He kissed Raph deeply, slipping his tongue inside Raph's mouth to explore. His hand stayed between them, alternating between Raph's tail and entrance and slit until Raph was nothing but a mass of moaning, whimpering turtle beneath him. It was a power rush and a turn on at the same time to know he had the power to do this. The fact that Raph had often done the same to him didn't even occur to him. He'd be Raph's first, the only to know his brother in this way. He wanted that badly.

He grinned when Raph's cock slipped out, bumping against his wrist. At least Raph was enjoying this so far....Breaking the kiss, Mike reached into his picnic basket and pulled out a small bottle he'd been keeping in his belt. He didn't think Raph should know just how long he'd been planning this, after all. Was he rushing this? Likely, but he wanted to feel Raph already. Lubing a finger, he hesitated before brushing over Raph's entrance again. "This...this is gonna hurt some..." he admitted quietly. He felt Raph tremble before getting a nod to go ahead. Kissing Raph again, he drew on everything he knew to make sure Raph was as distracted as possible before slowly pushing inward.

Raph hissed under him and Mike's finger paused, barely inside. Breathing some soothing nonsense into Raph's ear, he let himself drift lower to nip and nuzzle at the soft skin. Only once he had relaxed again did Mike push in farther, hoping to keep discomfort to a minimum. But he was totally unprepared when Raph's hips thrust forward, taking in all of Mike's finger at once. Worried, he looked up at Raph, alarm spreading at the clenched eyes. "Raph?"

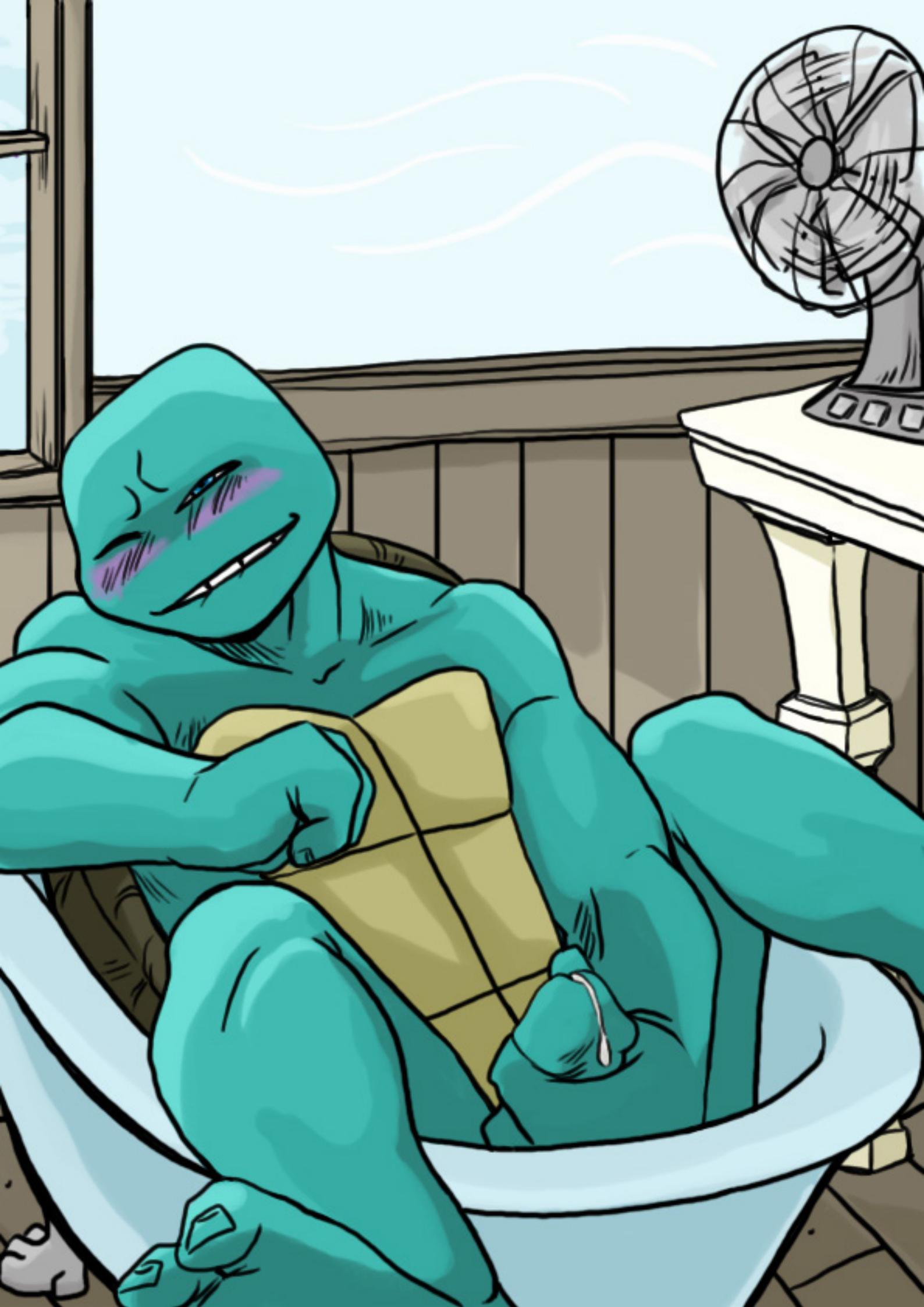
"I'm okay," the reassurance sounded a little strained to Mike's ear, but Raph was indeed relaxing again. "Less pain if ya do it fast, right?" Mike didn't respond. He honestly wasn't sure if that was true or not and was distracted by the warmth surrounding him. Cautiously, he pulled his finger out part-way before sliding back in. It didn't seem to hurt Raph as much this time. A slow rhythm started as his movements continued and Raph's hips started moving to meet the thrusts. Carefully he edged his finger in deeper, not sure just how much preparation he needed to do to make the next part safe.

Suddenly, Raph cried out, eyes closing again but this time in pleasure. Mike froze, staring at the amazing transformation of his hot headed brother. Raph blinked his eyes open and their gazes locked. Words seemed unnecessary as Mike slowly removed his finger and situated himself for something more. Things happened fast then, him sliding into the warmth and heat that was Raph, Raph meeting him and working with him. Mike climaxed too soon for his own tastes. It was small consolation Raph did the same.

Mike rested on top of Raph after, trying not to be ashamed. Shouldn't their first time have been...better? Longer, at least? He blinked in surprise when, after a few long minutes of silence, Raph tilted his head up for a kiss. They rolled together so Mike was pinned beneath Raph.

"My turn," Raph rasped against Mike's lips. Mike was only too eager to try again.

**Fin**





## Between decisions

"Get a grip Turtle Titan; you've done this a million times before!"

Mikey stared at the wooden door in front of him and trembled.

He stood in the shadows, eyes wide in anxiousness.

He waited for the right moment to strike, for the right shift in light, for a non-existent breeze to sweep past him even though they were currently deep underground.

Sweat ran down his forehead and neck and stained his costume, even as the summer heat turned oppressive and left no way to escape the furnace of the sewer system.

Something wasn't right...

There was no movement, no sound.

It was quiet, too quiet.

The absolute silence and stillness was unnatural; it was the calm before the storm. Michelangelo felt himself beginning to regret coming to this place before he'd even ventured forward.

His gut intuition told him that the heat wasn't right, that the mission he was on was going to end badly, that he couldn't do this.

He was taking deep gulps of air, yet it was so hot he was still left verging on breathlessness.

Summer was usually Michelangelo's favourite season.

At the moment he hated it.

Even though he couldn't actually see the sun he could almost feel it hanging over him. He felt permanently sticky, tendrils of the hot air slowly sapping the courage and energy out of him like long persistent fingers.

He twitched, suddenly regretting the vanilla-cake-nacho-cheese-pizza combo from earlier which was making his stomach twist uncomfortably.

Mikey loved summer because there was a lot of food around and it was warm enough to stay out all night.

Now he felt almost sick from a combination of the two.

He picked at the green shield he held in front of him; scratched imaginary bits of dirt

and blood off the shiny, polished surface.

His fingers were unable to keep still, they wanted to break up the tense atmosphere by scrabbling downwards towards his utility belt, making him panic slightly as though he had forgotten some important item.

He made sure his nunchucks were securely tucked away at his sides in case he needed them.

His fingers brushed over the spikes of shuriken, over the shuko spikes to climb walls, over the rope and grapple he used for swinging around the city and his shell cell which he kept just in case he got into trouble.

The comfort of feeling his weapons wasn't nearly as strong as he had imagined it would be.

Mikey swallowed thickly; his throat threatened to close up as the eerie calm lengthened. He adjusted his cape and twisted the black and green material clinging to his skin. The orange-masked ninja cringed.

Out of his three brothers he knew that he was the only one to really like summer. Now he totally understood why.

Donnie liked spring because it was the season of renewal which fascinated his scientific mind.

Leo liked winter because when the city was blanketed in snow it reminded Splinter strongly of his home in Japan.

Raph probably liked autumn because more desperate and homeless criminals came out at night, trying to steal and kill to get out of the looming winter.

Mikey shifted trying to shake his thought back to his current situation.

The thought of who and what he was about to confront in these kinds of conditions made the sweat worsen on his already moist skin.

Mikey mentally tensed as he prepared to do what he had to.

Once he had opened the door in front of him there was no going back, no running away or escaping.

He had to face this decision he'd made.

Michelangelo Hamato closed his eyes and bravely started to count.

...

*One...*

*Two.....*

***Three!***

He burst forwards and slammed open the door.

His target was sitting calmly on the floor amongst a sea of candles, seemingly undisturbed by his sudden entry.

The heat hit him like a wave, almost unbearable as he entered the room.

His victim seemed to be impervious to the stifling heat; he looked unperturbed at his sweltering surroundings.

This was not going to end well.

Mikey's shield slipped through his sweaty fingers, clattering on the ground noisily. He chose to ignore it as fat droplets of sweat beaded on his brow and stung as the salt got into his eyes.

"What is it, Mikey?"

And Mikey stopped, frozen solid as his face caught fire.

His trembling increased as his skin turned the brightest pink the green on his face would allow.

*Busted.*

It was had been critical that he made the first move, that he was the one to begin the inevitably short conversation.

But he had been thwarted already; his opponent was clever!

Now he had to compromise and work with both his words and actions.

Michelangelo took a deep breath before taking a fighting stance.

...

"I need help, Leo!" Mikey blurted, hands shaking so that his nervousness was obvious as his pose wavered, "I need your advice"

Leonardo blinked.

While winter was Leo's favourite season he somehow still seemed to blossom in the heat. His colours seemed perfectly natural in the orange tinted furnace of a room.

The blue-masked ninja raised an eye-ridge but nodded at him anyway letting out a calm breath, obviously expecting something much more significant from the dramatic entrance.

He blew out the candles surrounding him.

As the glow softened and the heat dimmed Mikey immediately felt a little better.

Each candle had been like a miniature sun burning his nerves away.

Now that they were gone he could recover some of the poise he was desperately lacking.

"What do you want to talk about, Mikey?" Leo asked, gaining the same wise trusting look on his face that Splinter wore as he gave advice.

Leonardo truly was their one-and-only leader.

Mikey grinned nervously and flew to the door, ducking his head out to check that the coast was clear as he slowly and suspiciously closed it to make sure that they had complete privacy.

The youngest then turned and started pacing back and forth inside of Leo's room.

He was unable to find the words to describe what was eating him up inside.

Finally, he turned to face his oldest brother squarely with a terrified yet determined look blazing in his masked eyes.

He pounced forward, pushing a stunned Leonardo to the ground.

Leo stared up at him, frozen.

It was easy for Mikey to push their beaks together and rapidly slid his large tongue into his brother's mouth.

He licked the roof of the blue-masked ninja's mouth, momentarily tangling their tongues wetly before pulling back and placing several small, wet follow up kisses on his elder brothers shocked lips, saliva oozing down Leo's chin.

Mikey pulled back slowly, cringing as his costume practically needed to be peeled off his brother's skin.

He turned to Leo whose eyes were the size of dinner plates.

"That's what I want to do to Don!" Mikey exclaimed waving his arms around in the air,

"but I don't know how to....you know, ride the train to Donnieville!"

...

Leo coughed as he abruptly snapped his mouth shut with a sharp click.

He quickly sat up and wiped his chin with the back of his hand, his cheeks colouring a deep pink.

...

"You want me to give you advice about how to....'*take the next step*' with Donatello?" Leo asked tentatively, looking as though the heat of the room had finally gotten to him.

Mikey grinned, nodding in relief as his big brother got his message.

The orange-masked ninja dropped his nervousness now; his hands steadied and the heat on his face faded to a low simmer as if the season could read his moods and adjust the temperature accordingly.

"I mean...uhhh nothing too graphic" Mike prompted, "...just, you know, how do you and Raph do it?"

Leo choked.

He floundered for a moment, opening and closing his mouth like a fish.

Finally, Leonardo closed his eyes breathing deeply for several moments.

When he opened his eyes again he had gotten over the shock of both the surprise kiss and the question and had settled on amusingly flustered with a determined spark in his eye.

Mikey was suddenly very grateful.

An advantage of Leo was that even in the most embarrassing or horrible circumstances the blue-masked ninja couldn't say no to helping his brothers in any way he could.

....Even when it came to talking about issues like this.

"... well...have you talked to Donatello about this?" Leo questioned tentatively as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

Mikey stared at him blankly.

The orange-masked ninja knew that Leo immediately understood his answer.

He scratched his head before looking up at his big bro.

"...Well....I kinda wanted it to be like a mind-blowing surprise...you know, something special"

Leo tilted his head in thought, though the blush remained on his beak.

Mikey noticed with some amusement that Leo was avoiding unnecessary eye-contact. Sometimes his big bro could be so cute without meaning to.

"I mean, how did you and Raph work it out?" Mikey asked with widened eyes, milking his innocent look for all it was worth; "Raphie-boy isn't usually one to think things through or talk about stuff"

...

Leo hesitated, eyes snapping up to meet his.

It occurred to Mikey that Leonardo was stuck between giving him the advice and emotional support he needed or keeping the dealings between himself and Raphael private, as he had done up until now.

Different expressions flickered over his elder brother's face as Leo looked at him.

Mikey softly wiped his gloved hand along the side of his face as a single drop of sweat slipped down, while he waited for his bro to collect his thoughts.

"...Alright" the blue-masked ninja finally said, his sense of responsibility for advising his little brother overcoming his desire for privacy, "But you have to promise that you won't let Raph know I told you anything about us."

Mikey nodded his head eagerly, bouncing up and down and making his cape flutter limply.

"Definitely bro, I won't say a word!"

Leo obviously decided to ignore the wicked grin that Mikey was directing at him.

Mikey crossed his legs and leaned forwards, awaiting the amazing words of wisdom his brother was sure to bestow upon the almighty Turtle Titan.

"Raph and I...it's hard to explain" Leo started off with a faraway look in his eyes, his embarrassment fading for the moment as he reminisced, "I guess we never really talked or planned it....*it just happened.*"

Mikey nodded enthusiastically.

Curiosity burned brightly in his stomach.

His brothers had never really told him or their family any of the details about their relationship.

A thought occurred to him.

"So you were just in the mood one night and went for it?" Mikey asked.

He felt a slight disappointment take over his body, knowing that it was never really going to happen like that with Donnie and him.

Leo smiled, tilting his head.

The elder's cheeks which had been returning to their normal hue began to stain darker again.

Mikey casually watched as a couple of drops of sweat slowly travelled down the side of his brother's face and collected at his collar bone.

"Not exactly how I would phrase it" Leo said with a slight grin, "It had been building up between Raph and myself for a while beforehand...you know how we are, how Raph is..."

Mikey grinned as he imagined the frustrated look that Raph sometimes got on his face when he didn't get what he wanted.

It was a face Mike had a speciality in coaxing out every time he stole one of Raph's sais

or ate the last of the cereal or...well the list went on...

"One night...."

Leo looked thoughtful now, resting his head on his fist with his elbow propped on his crossed legs.

Mikey unconsciously nodded.

He encouraged his brother with a permanent kind of smile lingering around his lips.

"One night it was like all the tension building between us just snapped.... I guess we both knew that we were ready then..."

Leo got this dreamy look in his eyes, one that Mikey had only ever seen on rare occasions between his elder brother and Raphael.

"How was it?" Mikey asked curiously leaning forwards.

He half-expected his brother not to answer or to reprimand him for being too nosey. Leo turned those eyes on him and Mikey was stuck on the spot, turning light-headed at the tone of his voice.

"Intense."

And Mikey wouldn't have expected anything else between his two elder brothers.

"Sounds hot." he said grinning, resisting the urge to slap his brother on the back in some kind of congratulation.

"It was." Leo said, smirking again.

The blue-masked ninja looked irresistibly smug before his look softened again as he glanced at his younger brother.

"...Mikey,"

Mikey nodded, feeling affection towards the turtle who was willing to trust him with such information.

"Follow your heart." Leo said with a knowing look, "You'll know when you're both ready. Donnie trusts you, and you trust him."

And Mikey slowly digested it, feeling kind of elated.

He smiled a genuine smile this time and stood up.

Mentally he winced at the sweat patches staining the green and orange material of his uniform.

"Thanks Leo!"

Mike's confidence returned as he skipped over and picked up his forgotten turtle shield.

Leo smiled moving back into his meditation position amongst the dripping candles, re-lighting them.

"Anytime, Mikey."

Mikey bounced towards the door, his cape flapping behind him.

"Oh...and Leo?"

He stopped and turned around to wink at his surprised brother.

"...you're a really good kisser dude!"

He ran out before he could see his brother flush and roll his eyes at Michelangelo's crazy antics.

808080

"'Sup?" Mikey heard Raph call as he knocked on his bedroom door.

If Leo gave him the emotional support he needed then Raph was definitely the advisor for the physical aspect of it; the aspect that kicked his shell into action!

Honestly, he needed both of his brothers advice equally.

Even if Raph wouldn't be as accommodating as Leo with his questions, he still wanted to get Raph's side of things.

Sometimes Raph wasn't as thick-headed as Mikey made him out to be; one thing Mikey knew was that Raph was totally serious about his relationship with Leo.

Whatever it was, it was obvious that they both had it *bad* for each other.

Mikey burst into Raphael's room just as he had done to Leo and took a heroic pose, still wearing his Turtle Titan costume.

Raph was swinging lightly on his hammock with one arm hanging lazily over the edge and the other casually working a small dumbbell up and down.

He frowned when Raph barely looked at him, continuing with his lazy, half-asleep swinging.

Why did all his brothers enjoy ignoring him so much??

"Raphhhh!"

The orange-masked ninja crossed his arms and frowned when his brother continued to take no notice of him.

"Come on dude, this is *serious!*" Mike whined, "I need your advice on something totally important!"

Finally Raph grunted and raised his head enough to look up at him.

"If ya need advice so badly why da hell are ya wearing that stupid thing?" He asked, gesturing at Mikey's super-awesome super-hero outfit.

The red-masked ninja casually rolled his shoulders, his muscles tensing before relaxing at the mini-workout.

"It's not *stupid!*" Michelangelo said, frowning as he tried to resist the urge to poke his tongue out at his brother.

Raph rolled his eyes as he hauled himself up to sit on the edge of his hammock.

The light in Raph's room was dimmer than in Leo's.

It was also cooler somehow, summer being held back by his brother's thick walls and impossibly grumpy mood.

"Yeah, whatever..." Raph yawned putting down his dumbbell and cracking his knuckles, "so what's up?"

Mikey crossed the room and sat down on the small leather bench designed for work-outs that Raph had gotten ever since he'd discovered his passion for his own muscles.

"Ok, this is gonna sound kinda weird dude..."

While Mikey was confident that Raph would do his best to help him-

He looked into his bro's slightly narrowed golden eyes.

-he wasn't sure that Raph would be as open about the topic as Leo was.

After all, he couldn't manipulate Raph's 'big brother' side as much as he could Leo's.... or guilt him as much if Raph ended up telling him to piss off and sort out his own issues by himself.

"Raph... how did you tell Leo that you wanted to ride the train to Leosville?"

....

Raph stared at him like he'd just grown a second head.

"...Mikey.....Did ya just ask what I *think* ya just asked?"

Mike shrugged, trying to look casual.

Raph shook his head, looking both incredulous and also slightly sick.

Secretly, the youngest turtle was bouncing up and down on the inside until Raph's answer came out as a slight growl.

"First off Mikey there is no way in hell that I'm gonna tell ya about me and Leo's private business, and secondly I don't wanna know about what Donnie and ya get up to!"

Mikey knew Raph was going to be more difficult than Leo.

"But that's the problem!" Mikey whined as his bro totally missed the point, "We're not 'getting up to' anything! I just want to get some advice before I go plunging in the deep end!"

Raph snorted, obviously not buying his excuse.

"Me and Leo got no advice," he pointed out, "why are Donnie-boy and you so special?"

Mikey snapped his fingers excitedly.

Another smart thought occurred to him, one that would mean Raph wouldn't have to explain anything to him!

"Maybe if I watch you and Leo in action...?"

Raph bared his teeth menacingly.

Mikey grimaced while he inched backwards with his hands up in a non-aggressive position.

"...Errr what I meant to say was; The Turtle Titan is in need of your wisdom, oh helpful citizen!"

The red-masked ninja groaned and shook his head.

The pissed off look on his face flickered as Mike verged on another 'Battle Nexus Champion' or 'Hero of the city' speech.

"Look Mikey," Raph said, cutting through his little brothers babbling as he stared at him until Mikey's confident grin died off his face; "you and Donnie gotta talk it over and work out your own issues."

"Oh! Like when you and Leo..." Mikey quipped.

Raph's eyes narrowed in warning.

"Hehe...I mean....."

"I got one piece of advice for ya bro and this is all I'm gonna say;" Raph said as he leaned back, getting the same kind of faraway look Leo had in his eyes when he was reminiscing.

"Don't think about it," his brother finished, gripping the sais on his belt, "just do what feels right".

...

Mikey slowly nodded.

It actually made sense; surprising since it came from Raph.

He suddenly jumped up (making a heroic pose before he left of course) and swung towards the door.

He felt like he had the confidence to face anything; and not just because he was wearing his superhero mask.

...

"Mikey?"

Mikey stopped and turned around.

"What da fuck's with the getup anyway?" Raph asked eyeing the green, black and orange spandex.

Mikey winked at him as Raph raised an eye-ridge.

"The Turtle Titan fears nothing and never fails a mission!" He said as he pressed a dramatic fist to his plastron; "And making sure I do this right with Donnie is the most important mission of all!"

Mikey walked out of his brother's bedroom with the grin he usually only wore when he'd eaten a particularly satisfying piece of cheesy pizza.

8080808

The sun was a shimmering orange globe on the horizon as the two mutant turtles jumped across the skyline of New York City.

They headed towards their usual spot, high up on the rooftops, concealed by water towers and slanting apartment roofs.

There was a satisfying crunch as the very tip of an ice-cream cone was finished by the smaller turtle who was about a half a step behind the larger.

Both the ninjas' fingers were sticky from the melting treats they had purchased to combat the summer heat.

The effort they had gone to to get the cones had been totally worth it once the coldness reached their tongues, soothing away the parching heat as the temperature remained high even with the elongating shadows.

The taller turtle paused as they reached their destination and walked over to the roof edge to sit and dangle his feet over.

The smaller slowly joined him, making a show as he licked his fingers clean before he sat down.

Donatello smiled affectionately as Michelangelo settled next to him.

...

The warm breeze unsettled the bands of Donnie's mask, fluttering them gently.

He looked a deeper and warmer colour than usual as the orange sunlight caught the usually bright purple of the smart ninja's mask.

Mikey swallowed and fidgeted as he caught himself staring at the alluring picture.

Donnie turned to him, his grey eyes looking very pale brown in the sunset.

Mikey couldn't turn away, frozen even when the look in his brother's eye caused his body to scream '*run!*'.

"What did you want to talk about, Mikey?" Donatello asked as he cocked his head to the side thoughtfully.

Mikey's eyes widened.

His brother had a creepy habit of reading his mind sometimes.

"How did you know I...?"

Don shook his head before shrugging as though he hadn't even given it a second thought.

"You've been fidgeting all evening Mikey. You're not being as affectionate and you're not talking about video games or pizza or food or pranks or even teasing Raph.... need I go on?"

Mikey sighed, swinging his legs back and forth as he vaguely contemplated how far above the ground they were sitting.

His brothers' voices floated in the back of his mind, whispering their wisdom and advice to him as he looked down at the tiny streets below them.

*Don't think about it... Raph had said; just do what feels right....*

*Follow your heart... was Leo's advice, you'll know when you're both ready...*

"Donnie, you know me," Mikey finally blurted out, unable to keep it in anymore. He needed his brother to know what he was feeling! "I'm a totally blunt turtle"

The orange-masked ninja took a deep breath.

"I want to ride the train to Donniesville!!"

Donatello blinked, a slight frowning marring his face as confusion passed fleetingly across his expression.

"Excuse me?"

"You know..." Mikey prompted leaning forwards with wide eyes, "I want to *ride* the train to *Donniesville*...."

His hand crept downwards, fingers skimmed along Donnie's muscled thigh before he settled his hand just above the knee pad they always wore.

Finally comprehension dawned in his smart brothers eyes.

"...oh.....Oh!"

They stared at each other.

The orange, shimmering summer sun made Mikey's bright blue eyes look green.

"...I think I'm ready, Donnie." Mikey said quietly, "I wanna do this with you, if you're cool with it. I..."

He hesitated and then went with it, following what came naturally to him and what was in his heart.

Mentally he vowed to somehow repay Raph and Leo later.

...

"I wanna spend the rest of my life with you. I totally want to be with you, for real... like Raph and Leo are..."

He stood up, leaving Donnie looking up at him with a faint blush and a slightly open mouth.

Mikey swallowed and offered his hand, leaving the decision to his brother.

The orange-masked ninja knew that he would never regret this now, whether Donatello took his hand or not.

And Donatello looked up at Michelangelo, framed in the dying summer sun with the faint outline of ice-cream still around his mouth, his orange mask brighter than usual and eyes determined yet sparkling.

Donatello made his decision.

**Fin**

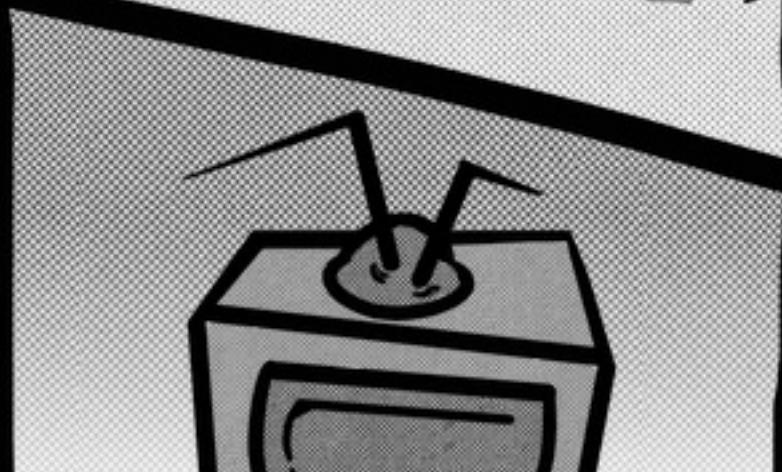
# HOT SUMMER DAYS

MIKEY

X  
POPSICLES  
- PRR

(YOU FIGURE IT OUT...)

DAMN, WHY IS IT SO HOT TODAY???







DAMNIT  
MIKEY, TURN  
THAT TV  
DOWN!

GODDAMNIT...

BLAH  
BLAH  
BLAH

HEY! LEMME PUT SOMETHING

IN YO'  
MOUTH!

FUCK OFF, ICE-CREAM BOY!

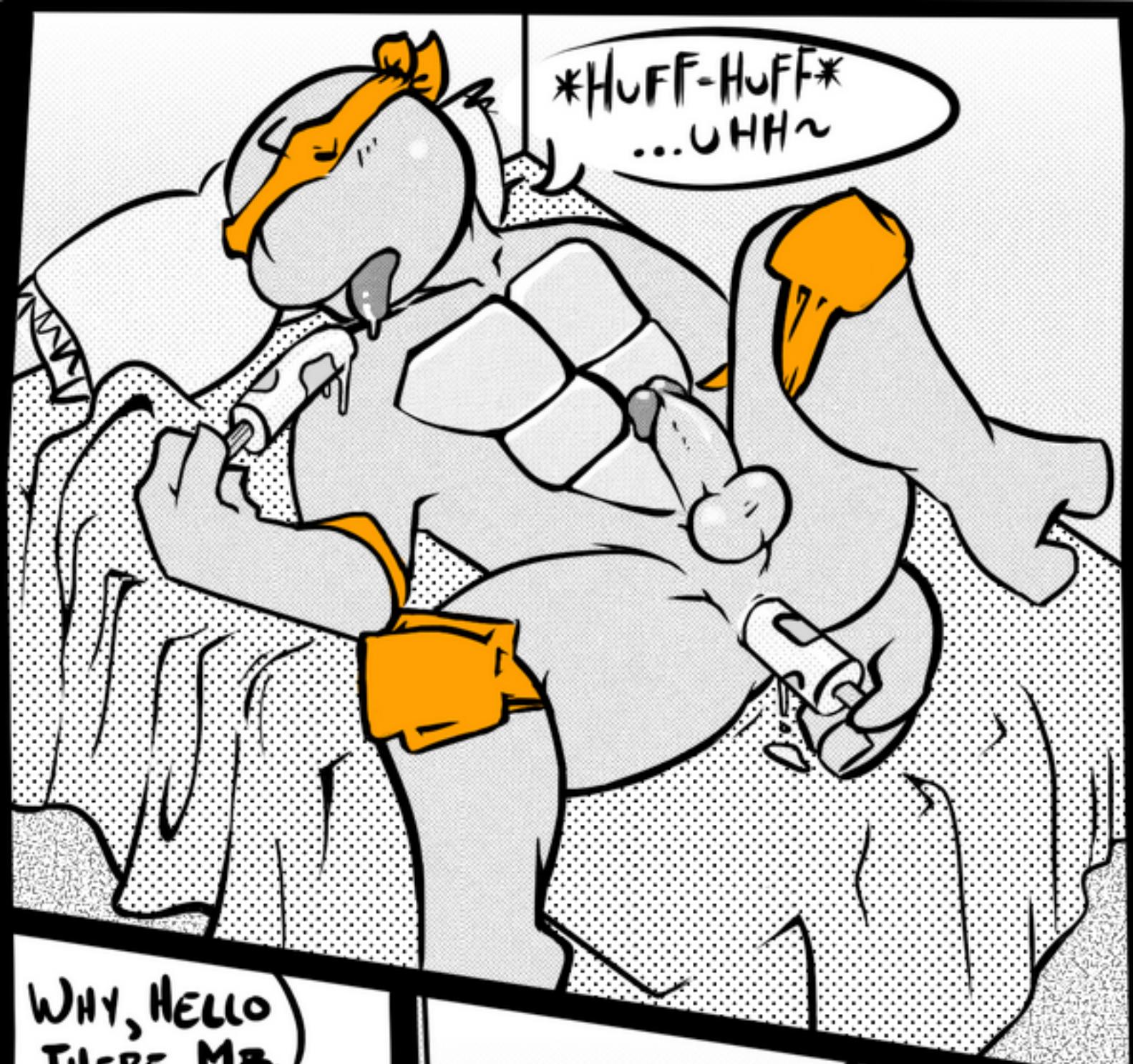
I...JUST...  
WANTED...TO...  
HELP...  
ARRGGG~...

MIKEY, THERE A  
REASON WHY YOU  
ALWAYS FORGET TO  
TURN SHIT OFF.

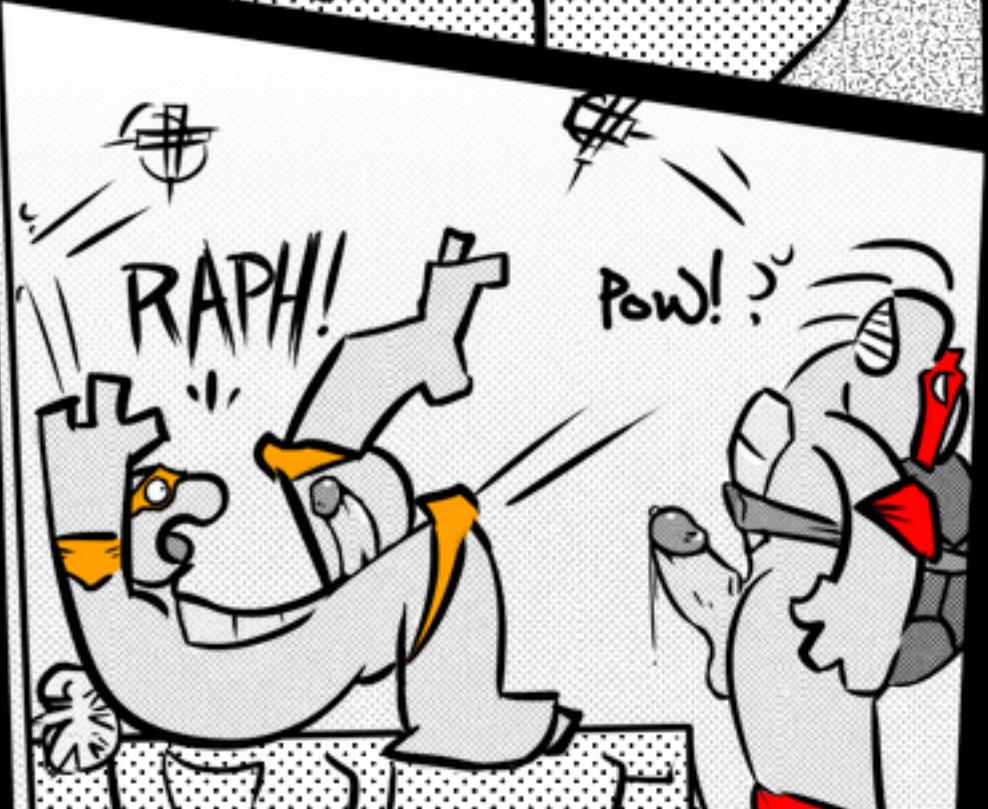
NOW... WHERE'S THAT  
IDIOT BROTHER  
OF MINE?

OHH...  
OH GODSS~





WHY, HELLO  
THERE, MR.  
PORN  
STAR...



SORRY  
BRAH...

TOOK OFF YOUR  
SHELL TOO, EH MIKEY?

YUP!

THIS IS TOTALLY COOLER  
THAN A POPSICLE...

PANT  
PANT

SLURP!

WANNA KNOW WHAT'S  
COOLER? :-)

FUCKIN' THIS  
TIGHTASS!

GAH!

RAPH!  
DON'T!  
YOU'RE  
Too  
BIG!

OH GOD! RAPH!

DON'T  
CARE

Pop!



I'M GONNA  
...I'M  
GONNA  
CUM!

UHHH!

HOP-

IT'S SHOWER  
TIME, LIL'  
BRO....

•REC

FIN?

SQUIRT!





## Get What You Need

The initial catalyst was a look. Well, it was less of a 'look' and more of a *Look*, the kind that began with a capital L and had its own special text effects in the pages of Silver Sentry. A *Look* that shot right across his field of vision, over Raph's head on a particularly warm rock, forming a direct line from Donnie to Leonardo. Not that Michelangelo was entirely sure he was seeing it, because it could have just been hot air messing around with his vision, in those funny little air-distorting lines that he'd only bother learning about if a certain someone explained them.

Of course, that certain someone was busy giving Leo blatant eye-sex, not to mention the fact that Leo was giving it right back, so he wouldn't be getting any explanations. At least, that's what was happening as far as he could tell. Maybe it was being at the farmhouse for something other than dire injuries that was making them so suddenly interested in each other. He didn't feel like asking either of them about anything after that, really.

It wasn't like he hadn't known what was going on- seeing as they were a family of ninjas, Leo had a sudden code of honesty being the best policy and he'd had to sneak past their snuggle fits at least twice so far. Mike probably could have interrupted with some kind of embarrassing comment or an inappropriate noise or something on each occasion, but it would have required feeling his way out of the hole that had opened up in the ground below him. And the ability to actually say anything. Not to mention getting rid of the invisible fist that had so kindly attempted to cause him severe internal bleeding.

Wasn't all that hard for him to figure it out, at the end of the day. And Don- Don was smarter than him, and that meant that he knew, too, right? He didn't know which idea was better for his psyche in the long run- that he'd known and still decided to go ahead with Leo or that he hadn't known and Mikey had missed his chance.

Though, upon reflection, being in love with his own brother didn't say much for his psyche as it was. Maybe he'd leave the thinking to the family members that did it for fun. So instead of thinking more, he watched Don watching Leo watching Don and let his eyes go back and forth like it was some kind of tennis match. The kind where the ball kept going out of bounds and smacking him in the proverbial face.

"Not gonna change anything, you know. All that staring."

He glanced over to Raph's location without much of a change in expression and found his brother's eyes located somewhere between his own and the sunlight reflecting off of their little pond. Sure. Wouldn't change anything, but there they both were, staring away. "Think I don't know that already?"

Raph just shrugged. There were a few minutes where he was allowed to go back into contemplating the benefits of wallowing in self-pity, before the relative silence got bro-

ken again. "You don't have to like me as much as you like Don, you know. You wouldn't have to fake anything."

"I know." And he did. Not that he would have faked it in any situation; he was driven by emotion but he didn't play around with those of others. He almost laughed, because he'd been about to say the same about Leo. And he didn't laugh because the thought was equally sobering.

Even in their own family, they'd managed to become the odd turtles out. That made it hurt just a little more powerfully. Because what were the odds, really, that they'd both be interested in what they could never have?

So they'd taken up considering what was left to be had. Raph had gotten to his conclusion a good while sooner than Mike, but he hadn't rubbed it in or anything. It wasn't the kind of thing that you bragged about, really. Michelangelo refused to call it settling, even if his brother didn't have much of a problem with the word. He was never very clear about who was the one really doing so, but Mikey had his guesses.

In his mind, he likened it to going to see a Picasso and finding a Van Gogh in its place. Or, he supposed, going to see a Donatello and finding the work of Raphael. Not what he'd wanted, really- and he'd always remember that it hadn't been- but there was still something worth seeing, wasn't there?

Sure, Raph was hotheaded and grouchy where Donnie had always been patient and quiet and just so good at listening. But he was loyal, too. And passionate. He was strong and warm and all those other good qualities that Mikey sometimes secretly wished Leo could've remembered years ago. Instead of noticing all the good stuff he'd been noticing about Don for years beforehand.

"Okay, so let's just say I agree to do this...whatever you wanna call it," he stated straightforwardly. "And then, like, we're doing our thing for a couple of years and then Don- or, uh, Leo too- walks up to...one of us and gets all *confession-y*. And we're still *us*. What would happen then?"

Raphael didn't bother playing around with wording. Stupid blunt asshat. "You could leave if you wanted to. Not like we're filling out a wedding license here."

"...but what if one of us didn't want to leave?"

The look Raph shot him was entirely different than the one that their other brothers had been immersed in. More annoyed than anything. Maybe just a tad hurt by whatever he thought Mike was implying now. "What, you think I'd attach myself to your leg or something if you wanted out? I'm not that much of a bastard, you know."

"Huh?" Well that was certainly an intelligent comeback. Mikey regained his composure. "No, I meant...you know, what if I was the one that didn't want out?"

"This isn't a game, Mike. You need to stop foolin' around like it is."

Mikey held his hands up in an attempt to be appeasing. "I'm serious! And that's the last question, I promise!"

Raph was quiet for a while, taking time to think of the right way to word things or

maybe just being difficult on purpose. In the end, his answer was simple. "I'd stay."

"...seriously?"

"Of course seriously, you idiot!"

"Well that isn't fair at all! If I want out I get to leave scott-free while you do the stupid right thing and waste away like a relationship martyr?"

"S'not the same."

"How come?"

"I won't wanna leave. You don't get it, but I don't blame you for it. Once you do, you'll figure out it's not a choice sometimes."

Michelangelo opened his mouth and then closed it a few times. For once, he couldn't for the life of him think of anything to say, because the way Raph had said what he'd just said made it sound awfully close to...But Raph didn't... After a few moments, he settled for just saying "fine" to their mutual agreement.

Van Gogh had more than just one painting, after all. He wasn't that bad.

Things were already looking better.

side cameras sending their images out, but they can't be sure if something had slipped out through an alternate electronic route. Fire would destroy any evidence left behind, but he'll have to cling to the shadows and avoid patches of light, even in empty rooms.

**Fin**



2009



## Irretrievable Things

The pigeon landed so close, he could feel the flutter of its wings against the palm of his hand, mere wisps of air tracing the lines of his hand. It was the closest thing he had felt to a breeze all day as he huddled in the shadows of this condemned basement, oppressed by the heat of summer, sweat running in narrow rivulets down his skin. He used the last of the saliva in his mouth to wet his lips, scarcely daring to breathe. The pigeon had come in through one of the high windows—a stroke of pure luck, the first he'd had in days.

With the trained speed of a ninja, Raphael crushed the bird with his hand.

There was little meat on it, but it was his first food in days. He ripped feathers off by the handful, discarding them carelessly until a mouth-sized patch of flesh was available. He bit into it, blood squirting between his teeth and dribbling down his chin. Tears sprang into his eyes, and he suddenly had a difficult time swallowing. What a sight he must have been, with a mouthful of blood like a beast.

All because, when he had been thirteen, he had been curious.

It hadn't even started as attraction, exactly. It had started when they had discovered ways to cope with strange, new sensations and hormones.

Hey Raph?

What's wrong?

I'm uh...

Hey, you okay?

Not really.

What's the matter?

I'm having...trouble.

What kind of trouble?

Uh...down there.

Um.

I can't get it to go away. Can you...

Michelangelo.

Raphael tore the bird from his mouth and rested his head back against the wall, the tears running down his face to wash away the blood.

His Michelangelo hadn't been his brother in a long time, and no one else knew it. Raphael remembered that first time, easing his brother's pain with his hands, watching Mike's face as it went from discomfort to rapture, and wondering if he would ever have the chance to make that beautiful face open with ecstasy again. Curiosity begot fascination, and the next day Michelangelo turned the tables on him, wanting to help him in return. Raph had writhed beneath his brother's hands and gasped and wondered at what on earth he had done to deserve something so perfect. After that, "helping" each other had become a tradition, a pastime, and eventually, Raph's fascination with the act had become fascination with Michelangelo.

Michelangelo lying beside him on the bed and talking aimlessly, clueless to the fact that Raph wasn't listening, only watching him through half-lidded eyes and drinking in everything that was his brother.

Michelangelo hanging upside-down from the ceiling pipes just because he could, and the wonder and rarity of a mind that used sort of reasoning.

Michelangelo ducking a blow with a glint in his eye, and Raphael willing to give anything to understand where that glint came from.

His brother was so special, so marvelous, so unique and mysterious in his own way that Raphael wondered at the injustice of a world that shut him out, that deprived itself of him. If he could, he would dive into that body and mind, exploring every corner until he understood it all, claimed it all, kept every part of it for himself. Michelangelo was too precious, too rare a spirit for a drop of him to get away. None would harm him, and no other would have him.

Somehow, the spirit that opened Raphael's eyes to wonder and put him at rest was the same that caused his downfall. One day, he had nearly put a wrench into Michelangelo's

head. That was when he had come to see who the greatest threat was to his brother.

That night, Michelangelo had slipped into his room, fervently covering him with kisses as though he was the one with something to apologize for.

What's the matter, Mike?

Nothin'.

Yeah, right. What's goin' on?

Just...sorry I was a brat.

You weren't.

Raph had wanted to wipe the irreverent from Mike's face, less because of the irreverence and more because something behind it seemed guilty, and guilt didn't become his Michelangelo. What did he have to feel guilty about?

Was he afraid of him now?

Their relationship had continued, growing ever more physically adventurous, but every time Michelangelo had suggested anything involving penetration, Raphael had refused.

I ain't comfortable with it.

C'mon, Raph, you don't even wanna try? You could talk me into being on the bottom.

That ain't happenin'.

Aw, come on! Why not?

Nothin'.

Please?

I don't wanna lose it and hurt you, okay?

Mike had mocked him lightly, but respected his wishes with longing sideways glances.

The greatest mystery of all was that such a mind could exist—that joy could come so easily to a person as it did to Michelangelo. Raphael didn't understand it, but that didn't keep him from trying, from attempting to possess that joy, to touch it as often as possible with the hope that he could absorb just a little of it, bathe in a single ray of its light. Every time he was with Michelangelo, he did.

It ended just a few nights ago, when lust had crowded out reason and Raph had given in to Mike's pleas to be taken.

Hot slick tight oh god oh god oh god

To be that close, that far inside the source of all joy was beyond physical ecstasy—it was a spiritual experience, for there to be nothing but Mike, Mike, Mike, all conscious thought unplugged, all his basest instincts taking over, three heartbeats when he did not need to be anything he had to try in order to be, stopped suddenly when Mike drew his knee up and kicked him in the chest.

Mike, what—

As Michelangelo drew himself up, Raph saw the bright red liquid trail following him, staining the sheets.

It's okay, Raph, I just—

Holy shit.

Don't freak out, I thought I could handle it.

No, no, no!

The next thing Raph remembered was running, his feet splashing in the water of the sewers, never to know his destination until he arrived there, in the condemned basement.

The remains of the dead bird lay on the concrete floor, a hieroglyph of Raphael's captivity.

"There you are."

Raph looked up and into the concerned eyes of Michelangelo, into the joy he had denied himself after his mistake. Before he could thaw, those warm, strong arms were wrapped around him, drawing him tightly against a hard chest. A clawed hand seized his heart, and he shoved his lover roughly away, shooting to his feet.

"FUCK this," he snarled, hackles rising. What was Mike's idea, coming after him while he was hurt?

Michelangelo's face darkened immediately. "Why the hell are you punishing me, Raph? I said I—"

"I ain't punishing you!"

"YES YOU ARE!"

"Then get the fuck over it!"

"Oh, yeah, three years in an incestuous relationship and I'm just supposed to get the fuck over it!"

"Oh, we're in a relationship now!"

"You bet your ass we are! What, you're gonna take everything back? Try to make us into brothers again? Or are you gonna try to disappear and expect us to suddenly forget about you because you're too wrapped up in your own beautiful suffering to realize we love you?"

"SHUT THE FUCK UP!"

"Why did you leave?"

"BECAUSE I HURT YOU!"

"Not until you left, you didn't!"

Suddenly Raph slumped back against the wall, sliding to the floor again, his exhaustion from the past few days draining the fight from him. The only thing he could think of to say was the single most potent argument he had. "Mike...you're a good person. Why the fuck should you want someone like me?"

Mike stood his ground, firm on his feet, reaching down to take hold of Raph's elbow and raise him back up. "You're not a bad person, Raph," he said in a no-nonsense voice unusual for him. "You just end up trying harder than the rest of us to be a good person, and that's something that's just amazing to me because you still try. It makes you a better person than me, even."

There he went again, seeing the good in everything. Raph leaned against the wall, allowing his fingertips to trail down Mike's arm. "Sometimes I think without you," he said quietly, "I wouldn't even try."

A wry smile cracked Mike's face. "Doesn't that mean we should stick together?"

What a difficult reasoning to reply to. "Mike, it's more than that. When I'm with you,

it's like..." Part of him broke down, and he gave in to a part of himself he had always considered to be too "mushy" and vulnerable. "I-I'm crazy about you, okay? And that makes me wanna be good enough for you, but it also makes me...it makes me wanna tear the throat out of anyone that looks at you. There's something in me I can't control, but you can, and if I ever get so out of it that I stop listening to you, I hurt you."

There was a beat of silence. "Would it help if we quit having sex?"

Raph looked at his brother sharply. The sex had been what started everything. The sex was extremely good, actually. His knee-jerk reaction was to scream "no," but he bit down on the reply. If there was no sex, he might not have to worry about hurting Mike like that, but was Mike really okay with that? "It might, but I don't think anything'll make you safe from me, Mike."

"That's a risk I'm willing to take," Mike said with a soft smile.

Raphael shook his head, though he found himself unable to extract himself from the magnetism of that familiar smile. He wanted, more than anything, to claim it just like he wanted to claim every other part of his brother, to seal it then and there with his lips, but he held back. "I don't know if I can do it," he whispered.

Michelangelo moved in and did what Raphael refused, brushing his lips over his brother's. "Listen," he whispered, "just...whatever it takes for you to come back, okay? I can't live without you." His voice caught on the last word.

"I don't think I can live without you, either." In fact, I know I can't.

"Then it's decided?" Michelangelo's breath moved over his brother's lips, gentle as the brush of an insect's wings.

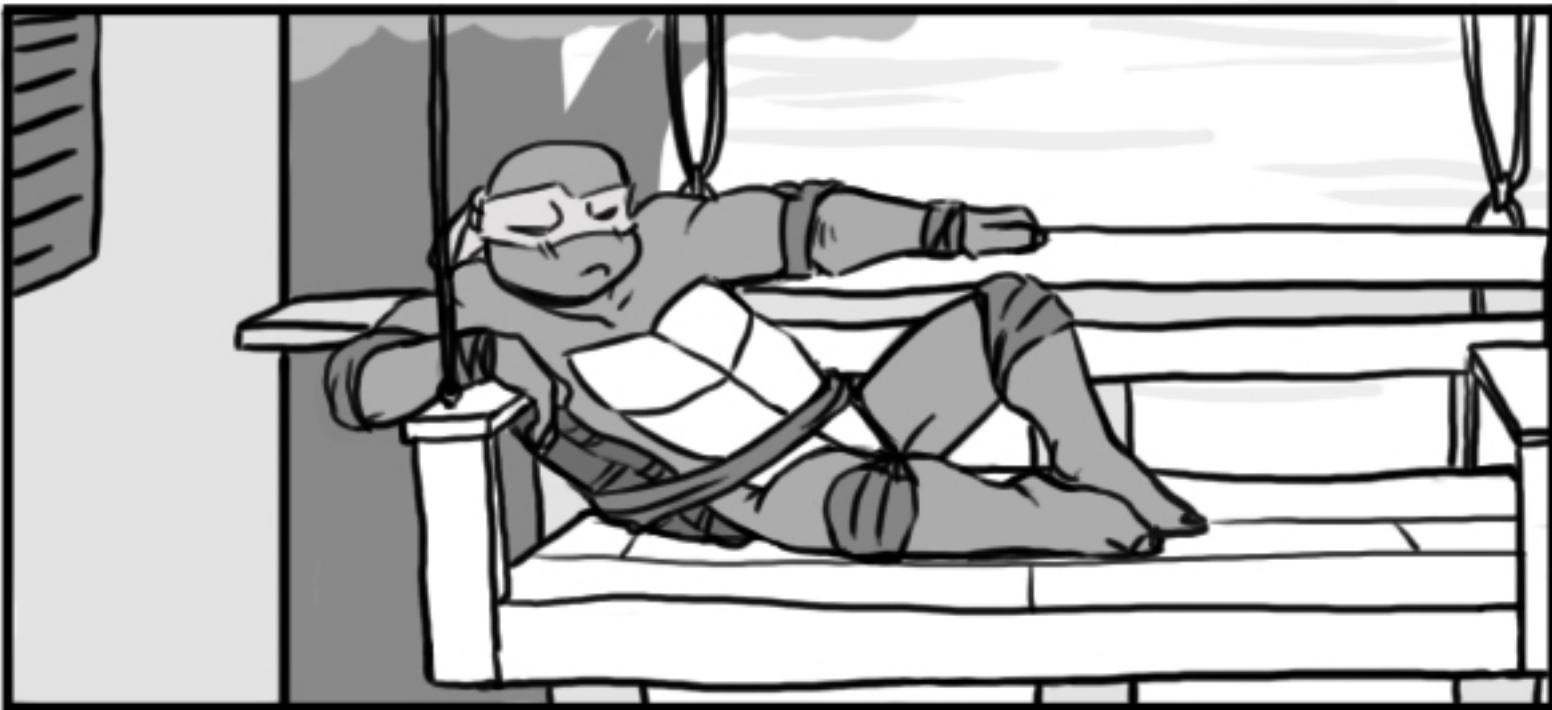
Unable to resist another moment, Raphael closed the distance between them and claimed his brother's mouth with a violent passion.

Raphael could spend the rest of his life deciphering the mystery that was Michelangelo, the marvel of his beloved spirit and the joy of a sweltering summer day—a day of learning he could mean as much to his brother as his brother meant to him.

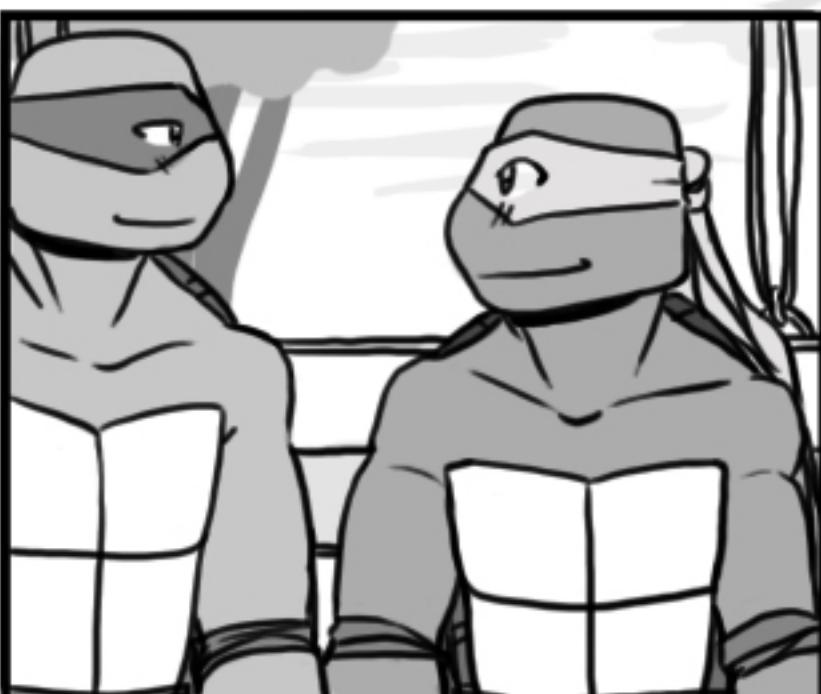
**Fin**















END



Summer ends

# RAPHAEL

BOOK4  
AUTUMN



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Turtle implied  
Paired with/rating  
**NC-17 | R | PG-13 | PG | G**

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It's a cold October night of patrolling in which Mikey is having trouble keeping warm. Luckily, his older brother, Raph, is there to help out!

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# Coming Full Circle

~~~~~\*~~~~~

## Chapter 4

~Raphael~  
Autumn's Promise

~~~~~\*~~~~~

He supposed autumn was his favorite time of the year. The colors, the smells, the way petty crime rose in desperation for not their own needs or desires, but because those scumbags were actually thinking of someone else for a change.

Raphael perched atop the roof like a gargoyle watching over his domain. The world below ran like clockwork with chaos in the hustle and bustle in the quickening steps. The crisp air felt wonderful to his skin and he inhaled deeper just to savor the brisk evening air. Why couldn't the world stay shifting into fall longer? It was entirely too short. He adored everything about the natural change in the world, but it was gone within a month. It was over so quickly and when winter took over, it was with an iron fist that was harsh and unrelenting.

It wasn't like he didn't like the other seasons, because he did; winter was fun in its own way, and summer nights were the most exhilarating of feelings as they ran across the rooftops. Spring was the awakening of life and he couldn't help but be fascinated that after such cold and freezing winters, plants that had been buried in biting ice and exposed to relentless winds could still just wake up and be healthy and green again. It was like watching a miracle every spring – but fall was the culmination of all those things. Autumn was the final chapter that still reminded everyone that the end does have to eventually be reached, and the harvest of those last vegetables and fruits were a gift that bid the summer farewell.

Autumn was the twilight of the earth's life. It was just a few heartbeats away from slipping into blissful sleep as death fell across the land, but it was like winter was no more than a reminder that even mother earth needed to sleep after all that work she had done during spring and summer.

He felt the steps more than heard them. Looking over his shoulder briefly, Raphael went back to watching the yellow and orange leaves fall and tumble through the air as the wind danced with them and sent them pirouetting across the pavement.

Donatello slipped his arms around Raphael's waist and placed his chin upon his shoulder. "You okay?" He asked quietly.

Smirking, Raph reached for his hands, his fingers weaving through his and rubbing at Donnie's wrist lovingly. "Yeah." He grunted – it was funny, he had forgotten about that

dumb fight. The world had made him no longer care about such a silly thing.

"Good." Don smiled, staring at the world in front of them, at the fall sun setting in the distance. "This time of year always reminds me of you." He stated suddenly.

Turning his head just enough to indicate his curiosity, Raphael waited and was rewarded with Donnie continuing to explain.

"I think it's the colors. They are so bright and vivid even as they fall from the trees. I know people think of Fall as a season right before the snows come, as a prelude to the death that winter brings – but really, it's like the world is giving us one last thing to remind us that even though winter will be here soon enough, it won't last forever. Like, the leaves are saying, 'we'll be back.'"

"You think them maples sound like Schwarzenegger?" Raphael smirked, lightly bumping his elbow against Don's belly.

Smiling and nudging him back, Don shook his head, "No... well... maybe. Anyway, that's not the point. Fall makes me think of you." He finished and turned his head, nudging his cheek gently.

"Hnn, I can live with that." He whispered back and leaned into Donnie, closing his eyes and enjoying him pressed so close to him. The moment was brilliant – just like the autumn leaves.

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"No way!" Donatello shouted, yanking the controller away from Mikey's grasp. "I totally won that! You cheated!" He then pounded furiously at the controller, trying to find the menu screen to see what Mikey had done.

"No! Don't look!" Michelangelo squealed, diving at him.

"Guys, come on. Aren't we a little old... to.... You were cheating!" Leonardo yelled, jumping the couch to grab the control from Donatello's hands just as Mikey tackled Donnie. "Damnit! That's why I couldn't beat you!"

"I knew it!" Don declared before getting a pillow in the face.

"That's not legal!" Leo glared, pointing at the screen.

"I'm just smart enough to add in my own codes." Mikey huffed, folding his arms and lifting his nose in the air. He promptly got a pillow in the face from Donatello in revenge.

"You mean you beat my high score with a cheat code?" Leo snarled and then began to pound at the control. "How do you delete this?"

"No! You can't delete my baby!" Michelangelo wailed, clawing at the air, trying to reach Leonardo, but the Donnie bracelet was holding him back.

"I will! Just watch me!"

Raphael smiled, watching his family. Everything was back to normal. Everyone was

back to themselves and there were no more dramas separating them, no more conflicts threatening to split them up. They were happy and he was happy to see them this way. This was how everything was supposed to be.

Tilting his head and watching Donatello fight tooth and nail to help Leo delete that damn score while Mikey wailed with fake tears bursting from his eyes and Leonardo looking like a maniac not knowing what the hell he was doing as he controlled the paddle – there was nothing that could ruin this for them. Not anymore.

"Maybe it's time." He whispered to himself, smiling warmly as Donatello finally took control of the situation and yanked the control back while Leo sat on Mikey and accomplished their goal – Michelangelo's high score was deleted, leaving Leo number one once again and Mikey crying out 'No!' overdramatically as he reached for the screen. Donatello smirked and puffed up, looking so proud of himself.

They had come full circle; there was going to be no more waiting. Raphael's heart was warm and everything felt perfect. Maybe it was the autumn air or maybe it was the scene of Donnie giving Leo a high-three for defeating the sinister Dr. Mikey – either way, the time had come. He could feel it in his bones. A wave of contentment washed over him and Raphael had no intentions of ruining this moment; his brothers fighting, celebrating, teasing each other and then getting back to business of trying to beat Michelangelo.

This was how life was supposed to be. He loved it.

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They pretended like it never happened. For months Raphael acted like he had never asked the question and Donnie pretended like he didn't notice the painful looks Raph gave him from time to time.

Raphael shook his head and perked himself up. That wasn't what he came here to do. It was just a dumb question. It was probably just because he had asked too soon. He knew Donnie; that Brainiac had to think things over till they were laying dead in the water. Who knew, maybe with his luck; after tonight; Donatello would ask him if they could go on that trip; away from it all, just the two of them. It brought a smile to his face.

Inhaling deeply and closing his eyes, Raphael forced his mind to stop replaying the incident last Spring, laying in the park, their bodies cooling, his scent fresh and curling around them, preserving the moment in a bubble of soft whispers and gentle kisses. That had been the first time they had touched each other like that. The first time he had braved the waters to ask if they dared to try something more intimate.

Pulling the lid off the box and revealing the item within that he had finally received in the mail, Raphael smirked down at the outfit, his mind jumping backwards in time again to when they were 12 years old. "Hopefully Donnie-Boy remembers that promise." He chuckled and slid the lid back into place.

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Raphael could see him from the doorway. He could hear his fingers typing and he watched his eyes moving as he read whatever it was he was doing. It was probably

something geek-like; like how to make a toaster into a bomb or something. Don was good at stuff like that. But now wasn't the time. He had plans. Reaching into the room while holding Donatello's remote control to his computer stereo in hand, Raph pressed the play button and stepped inside; slamming the door shut and flipping the lock closed as the first beats of music filled Donatello's room.

Surprise and even a little confusion colored Donnie's face and Raphael smirked from under his top hat. The moment Donatello turned around; taking in the sight of him; it was enough to make even him blush. Clearing his throat to break up his momentary embarrassment, Raphael smoothed the lapels of his tuxedo down over his chest and his smirk returned to his face.

"Raphie...?" Donatello whispered, his eyes widening. "Why..." Then his mouth formed into an 'o' and his face colored.

He moved then, slowly approaching Donatello, his modified white gloves reaching out to grab the back of Donatello's mask and pull it from his face. "I expect a nurse outfit next week." He whispered in his ear and stepped back. Raphael didn't strut or move in over exaggerated movements, he moved with a grace and regality that he rarely conveyed. From across the room he could see Donatello shivering slightly, his lips parted, his eyes locked on him and he could even see the blush darkening his face all the more.

Raphael couldn't exactly dance, but he moved with the music, employing masculine movements of the hips, his body stirring in a back and forth motion - then he stepped closer and he couldn't stop the grin from consuming his face. The closer he got the more Donatello's lips trembled and the wider his eyes became. It was beautiful really, seeing Donnie that enthralled with him. He moved closer again, standing in front of him, his hips thrusting slightly; and then he slide over Don's lap using that single motion. He straddled Donnie in his chair, golden eyes locked with darkening ebony in front of him.

He could feel the way Donatello's entire body trembled with him so close. He could feel Donnie leaning towards him, his hands rising to touch him – but he shook his head and moved his hips seductively, teasing him to focus on more than the end result.

Churring in his ear, Raphael swayed with the music, hovering above Donnie's hips before rolling away again. Right on cue he took a step back and slid his following foot backwards to meet the other, his head bowed and his hands out in a very classic jazz position with his heart pounding and his rings ringing. He needed to stay focused. After a little spin and pressing a hand to the rim of his hat, Raphael again caught Donnie's eyes and his nerves settled. Donatello was captivated. His heart fluttered, but it was encouraging, lustful, everything in between and he wanted to watch that expression for a moment longer.

Raphael did a tap and heel side step back towards Don's chair. He moved his hips and rolled his hat off his head, down his shoulder and into his hand where he placed his top hat atop Donnie's head and smirked, tilting his head to look into Donnie's face.

He looked away for a moment and wiggled in his chair.

Raphael smiled at the reaction, finding it both endearing and sexy. He reached out, taking Donatello's right hand. Pressing Donnie's fingers to his chest and tilting his head again, Raphael's swaying slowed, moving with the smoky music as he slowly eased himself down over the top of Don's knees, his legs wide and his hips rolling in front

of his face. Raph felt his face warm briefly, just as he felt the trembling in Don's hand while his fingers caressed their way down his clothed body. Donatello lifted his darkening eyes back to his. His smile was so gentle, so shy, and yet, Raphael could tell he was enjoying every minute of it.

Stepping back again, this time he played with his jacket. He teased him at first, pretending to pull it open only to pause and turn, closing it again, hiding his body with only a glimpse of the red detailed vest underneath. He did this several times, each time bringing his jacket closer and closer to fully sliding from his shoulders till it eventually had no choice but to fall away and be tossed to the side. Raphael's eyes never strayed from Donnie's. They were seducing him just as surely as he was enchanting Don.

He moved closer with a shuffling dance step, his fingers already beginning to undo his red tie - his heart pounded and Raphael felt his cheeks begin to swell with heat again. What if Donnie didn't approve of this next part? He personally thought it was amazingly hot. But they hadn't yet ventured into this area of bedroom play.

In the end, fear didn't stop him; once his tie was undone and he teasingly moved closer, Raphael draped the tie around the back of Don's neck and tugged him forward, churring and smiling down at him all the while he moved his hips against Donnie's chest. But judging by the way Donnie reached for him and tried to get a hold of him before he again slipped from his grasp and pulling the tie free from around Donnie's neck, Raph had a feeling the scientist wouldn't mind experimenting tonight.

Licking his lips suggestively and side stepping back towards him, Raphael straddled Donatello's lap and grasped his trembling hands. Pressing Don's wrists together, Raphael gazed directly at Donnie, looping his tie around his wrists and tying them together.

Don inhaled sharply, his breath picking up.

Raphael bent forward, taking a second out of his preplanned routine to kiss Donatello's knuckles, another churr rolling from his chest. Donnie truly did make a lovely sight.

He stood then, swaying just a bit at his side, watching him, his chest swelling with pride at seeing how eager Donatello looked, how anxious he looked after his wrists were tied, and how entranced he was. Sliding the buttons on his vest free, Raphael eagerly took it off and flung it away from him. This was the part he wanted; a gift to himself. He took those tied wrists and pressed them to his dress shirt, his lips brushing across Donnie's cheek as he whispered to him under the confines of the top hat. "Unbutton me."

Donatello had never responded so quickly to anything in his life. Raphael chuckled and continued to move against him, bumping his hips against his elbow, or his knee against his thigh, a small brush of his gloved fingertips across Donnie's skin as each button was undone with an ever growing tremble in Don's fingers.

He caught the hungry looks and he felt the teasing touch of fingers against his exposed plastron. Raphael reached up and took the material of one of his gloves in his mouth and pulled, slowly revealing his fingers and watching delight in Donnie's eyes darkened all the more, then his fingers paused for just a moment on the last few buttons of Raphael's shirt.

Churring again and brushing across his knuckles with a suddenly exposed thumb, it was like a spark jerked through Don and he fumbled with the buttons again, trying desper-

ately to get them undone - but Raphael pulled away at the last second and slowly undid the last button himself. He swayed, he side stepped, he flashed his skin from beneath the folds of the shirt, and turning sideways - Raphael staring at Donatello from over his shoulder the entire time - his shirt slowly slid from his body. Every muscle that appeared from beneath the white shirt could be seen on Don's face. It was like every smooth dip and every strong bulge reaching from his shoulders to his wrists were completely new and frightfully amazing to glimpse.

"Raph-" Don gasped, his tied wrists unable to do more than twitch his fingers in want and then press against his mouth as he panted.

Dropping the shirt where he stood, Raphael stalked towards him, golden eyes flaming and his heart pounding. He didn't touch him; not yet. He gripped the back of Donnie's chair and pushed back on it, forcing Donatello to lie backwards and stare up at him. "Unbutton me and see what happens." He churrred, the music pumping beat after hungry beat into the air around them. They were there again, in that bubble, locked away in their own little world with sultry music beating to their hearts and darkness that was only illuminated by the other.

Donatello never removed his eyes from him. His fingers shook as they reached for him, sliding across the waistband till he found the fly of Raphael's pants. His fingers were delicious and Raph fought to keep his face from coloring, from showing just how anxious he was as well. He felt the button pop open and he felt the hesitant touch of Donnie's fingers to the zipper - when he didn't reprimand him or pull away, Donnie fingered the zipper and Raphael could practically feel every tick of the zipper teeth grinding open, counting away the seconds before he was free. Fire and lightning mingled in his body and he watched Donatello rising towards him, own body ready and waiting.

The moment the zipper struck the bottom, Raphael grabbed Donatello by the back of the neck and crushed their mouths together. Donnie writhed under him, trying to grab at him but unable to do so with his wrists still tied. Raphael tugged at him and lifted him up, pressing Donatello close and grabbing at his thighs, urging them around his body. He poured everything into the kiss, teasing him, touching him, opening his lips up to duel with his tongue. Raphael pressed his fingers in places only cautiously explored in the past - and then they were inside. Donatello whimpered, clawed at his plastron, and panting against his mouth.

Breaking the kiss for just a moment, Raphael slipped his head under Donatello's arms before resuming the kiss. It was hot and desperate, that fire was building around them, the bubble filling with heat and somehow Raph found his way to Donnie's bed, pressing his lover into the old mattress and thrusting against him, his fingers urging him to drop down.

The moment Don filled his grasp; he pumped him. Fingers curling around Donnie's erection, touching him, claiming him, exploring a territory that was becoming familiar; he was so achingly delicious to the touch that it was hard to let it go. But he did; he released him. He wanted Donatello to cry out in protest and he wanted him to hang there on the edge of passion, dangling in his clutches. Reaching into his pants pocket, Raphael pulled a tube of lube free, his lips never leaving Donatello's. He slicked his own erection and moved forward, pressing himself against Donnie's opening, easing himself into him. The hiccupping gasps erupting between them as Donatello arched under him surprised and pleased him. Raphael watched Donnie's tied wrists tugging on his neck, clawing at his carapace and his legs opening wider when he pulled back, begging him

to come forward again. So he did.

He filled him, their lips connected and their moans mixing. He pulled back slightly only to push back in, listening to the intensity in Don's moans increase. It was far too slow and both knew that wasn't what they needed. Donatello couldn't even talk but Raphael could still make out his name whispered upon brushed lips; and Raph was thrusting into him. He rolled his hips and jerked forward; he grabbed at Don's thigh and bucked against him. He kissed him and wrapped his hands around Donatello's shoulders before he pounded into him. It was powerful and hard, each inch that filled him brought another cry from Donnie's lips; and with the friction Donatello's insides created, it forced Raphael to groan. Biting at Don's neck and claiming him, marking him, Raphael was unable to release the flesh between his teeth as he moved faster.

It was blinding, the passion that swept over them, drowning them in the sheer power they generated. Donnie rubbed his thighs against Raphael's sides and Raph could feel Don's tail wiggling, thumping between his legs as each thrust claimed his body, jabbing at that nub deep within and shooting jolt after jolt of pleasure throughout his body from his head to his toes. Tight heat surrounded him and it was magnificent, the most welcoming thing he had ever experienced.

Reaching for Donatello's neglected erection between them, Raphael churred loudly, quickly joined by Donnie as his fingers pumped over him. He soothed and caressed, rubbing his thumb over the head of Don's cock, spreading the precum that escaped and never relenting in his assault. With each jerk of his hand, his thrusts grew harder and deeper. Donnie's cries grew short and high, every gasp desperate for more. They were dangling just seconds away from falling - a kiss, a churr and one last thrust and they screamed, releasing everything in that one moment, spiraling high and falling back to the earth, clutching the other tight and feeling the other's warmth spread across and through them.

He didn't know if he had blacked out or if they had just simply basked in the aftermath of the moment, but Raphael again churred deep in his chest and finally opened his eyes, gazing down at a softly cooing Donatello. Eyes closed, his breath finally catching up to him and Don's arms rubbing against his shoulders - seeing as how his tied wrists still limited him from further affectionate touches.

Raphael kissed his jaw, his tongue flicking out to taste him, his hands rubbed across his sides and down his thighs, feeling him, claiming him - it was perfect. He pulled Don's wrists from his neck and bit at the knot pulling on it till it fell free and fluttered across Donnie's throat like a red silk, rising and falling with each breath he took. Dark eyes opened up, gazing at him, and moving without needing to be prompted, they silently pressed their brows together and nudged the other's beak. A soft churr that almost sounded like a purr filled the bubble they were in and Raphael joined him. He nuzzled into his neck, hugging him close, not willing to let that body go just yet; he loved the feel of Don so close to him, so completely unabashed and pressed against him in ways they never would show in front of others.

Donnie's fingers fluttered across his jaw, saying something that didn't need to be said. Raphael smiled, his hand reaching up to press against Don's neck and they sighed together, completely relaxing into the other.

Their voices were so quiet it didn't disrupt the peace around them. The words were softer than a whisper and bordered on a sigh, but they heard it and they remained in

the peaceful love they had created.

"Love ya."

"Mmm, love you."

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He smirked watching Donatello from the doorway - somehow that had become his habit, watching his brother work on his computer or on a project from the safety of Donnie's door. Raphael didn't know what it was exactly about the Brainiac that he loved, though he had to admit his wiggling ass and wagging tail definitely were perks.

It wasn't just that he was smart, it wasn't just that he was understanding, and it wasn't just because Donnie was the most comfortable to be around – and it definitely wasn't just because he was the only one who could take him head on and ground him into paste if he wanted too with just a few simple words and his 'angry face'. It was a combination of everything really. Don was... he was just Don and he liked that. He wasn't as open as himself about his emotions, but at the same time, he didn't hide who he was. Donatello was an open book for the reading so long as you took the time to read him.

And that's what he did, he read him one day and liked what he saw when he was only 12 years old, and again now that he was 23.

It was right about then that Donnie's head began bobbing a bit more and his ass began to sashay - in a very manly way of course. Raphael perked up and smirked, curious as to what was going on with the Brainiac. Donatello fumbled with a remote and suddenly the music coming from his computer was turned up and the music sang out louder. He saw Donnie's lips mumbling to the words, his toes tapping, and Raphael couldn't help but laugh as he recognized the music - Wheel in the Sky, sang by Journey. "Really?" He asked, folding his arms over his chest and leaning against the doorframe on his shoulder, a brow lifting.

Donatello blinked owlishly at him from behind his goggles and he lifted them up onto his head. A grin slowly crawled over his face as he nodded, eyes shining, "It's Journey. They're amazing."

Snorting, Raphael shook his head and stepped into the lab, slowly approaching Don with his arms still crossed as though challenging him. "That, I'd have to argue with."

Scowling at him, Donnie lifted a finger warily, "Don't you dare knock Journey."

"But they're... old... and all their songs sound the same to me. Come on, would it kill them to have had some variety?" Raphael asked as he reached him and leaned back against the table, completely taking over Donatello's attention without even trying.

"Oh? Like what? AC/DC was any better? Sure, they got some great stuff, but all that constant yelling in my head kills brain cells - might explain you, actually." Don's face shifted into thought, pondering that idea as though seriously considering the possibility.

"Dude! AC/DC is classic!"

"So is Journey!"

"No way. Then again your Kansas obsession is worse than Journey." Raph shook his head.

Donatello's jaw dropped and horror colored his face. "Don't talk that way about Kansas..." he hissed.

"They have like, one good song!" Raph shouted, his hands flying into the air with exasperation.

"Who'd you prefer me to listen too?" Donnie shot back, eyes narrowing, "No way I'm listening to that Ramones stuff you blare when working on your bike." He wiped his hands angrily on a rag he had tucked into his belt.

Raphael perked up, eyes on fire, "Hey! The Ramones are good!"

"So is Kansas! Lynard Skynard, Def Leppard, Metallica.... shell, Boston is better than that stuff." Donatello shot back, taking a threatening step towards him.

"Metallica I'll give ya, but Boston? Come on, Donnie, have more respect than that! The Scorpions are better than Boston." He had turned, hand planted on the table and leaning into Donatello, glaring right back at him as they slowly leaned further into each other the more heated their argument became.

"Ooooh, you didn't just say that. Now, the Scorpions have only one good song, Boston on the other hand has dozens! They are an everyman's band!"

"Like them Allman Brothers? Screw that, they are like... like hicks playing rock and roll songs with banjos!"

Donatello's glare could have shot down jet planes, but luckily for Raphael, his laser shield defensives had been strengthened in the last year since Donatello and he had begun to inch their way into this relationship. "At least they know how to use them." He snarled.

"Wow! That was low!" Raphael shouted, back pedaling away from his brother for that one. "Low blow! I could say the same about - about..." His mind went blank but right about that moment the song Bad Moon Rising rang through the room and he pointed, wild eyed and desperate, "Creedence Clearwater Revival! Come on, man! They're country rednecks who snuck onto the rock station radios!"

He didn't see it coming - Donatello hit him low and they fell to the ground in a tumbling mess of limbs and absolutely with no coordination for fighting - this was pure rage and Raphael knew he had lost the fight at this point.

Tumbling, struggling with each other's fists and growling savagely in each other's faces, they fell about Donatello's lab, bumping into tables, rolling over tools, destroying various things in their bickering but paying no attention to any of that. All they saw were was the other in front of them.

"Take that back!" Donatello shouted.

"Never!" Raphael bellowed right back.

It continued several more minutes till finally Raphael simply manhandled Donnie down and straddled his hips, locking his ankles over his knees to keep them in place and his hands holding tight to Don's wrists, forcing them down above his head. "Come away with me!" He snapped, glaring at him as he panted, trying to catch his breath.

Donatello's struggles stopped suddenly and he panted, staring up at Raphael, shaken and taken aback. They had gone through this once before but it had never been brought up since.

Raphael's belly jumped and his palms began to sweat. He had to hurry or risk having Donnie slip his grip and flip him. "Come on, Don. We're golden. We got all the damn time in the world. It's our turn." He didn't know if his heart could explode from fear, but he figured he was about to find out.

Don didn't move and Raph didn't know if he could stand the silence. Donnie just stared at him. He could see the cogs and the belts moving in his head; but what was he going to say? He didn't know if he could stand to hear him shoot him down again.

"Take it back." Donatello breathed out, gasping slightly and staring at him with just as much fear as Raph was feeling.

Confusion etched itself across his face and Donatello shifted, straining against his hold.

"Take back what you said about Journey, Kansas, Boston, and especially Creedence..." His voice trailed off.

Swallowing hard and feeling sick to his belly, Raphael eased his hold on Donnie and sat back, his hands releasing his wrists and sliding away down his arms. "Fine, I take it back... they're good. I don't mind listenin' ta Wheel in the Sky." He whispered.

Was this how it was always going to be? Was his one request going to constantly be ignored?

"Okay..." Don breathed, his hands shaking where they lay next to his head. He looked so scared. It almost hurt to look at Donnie like that. But he had to ask; something in his eyes ate at him, nettling its way into him and asking him to ask the question.

"Okay?" Raphael eyed him, slowly leaning back over him.

Nodding shakily and quickly with the pulse in his throat fluttering wildly – indicating to Raph that Donnie was beyond nervous – Donatello's throat bobbed and he nodded again, more calmly. "Where do you want to go?" He choked out.

And it was like whatever weight had been resting on his shoulders was gone. Whatever shield Donnie had left up between them had vanished in the lyrics of old rock and roll and a screeching guitar. Raphael could finally see Don perfectly.

He was more gorgeous than ever.

Raphael smiled and his heart's beating increased and he no longer worried about dying from fear, he now worried about dying from sheer joy and excitement. "Yeah?" He asked with his voice soft, desperate to hear him say it again.

Licking his lips, Donatello nodded and a smile of his own blossomed upon his face.  
"Yeah... I'm ready."

His face hurt from smiling, but he couldn't stop, and he didn't want too. He kissed him though. Somewhere between staring into his dark eyes and watching all uncertainty drain away, and watching his cheeks color while that smile of his alit with happiness; Raphael found himself pressing a kiss to Donnie's lips, unable to contain himself.

It was a long and deep kiss. One that led to Donatello's arm's wrapping about Raphael's neck. His churring grew louder from his chest and his thighs twitched, wanting to be free but still trapped by Raphael's bodyweight - not that that was an unpleasant thing in and of itself.

The irony wasn't lost on either of them and Raphael and Donnie snorted into the kiss, laughing the moment they realized that Boston had filled the room and Something About You sang through the speakers. It began soft, having lulled them deeper into the kiss, but then the music burst forth and the singer jerked them awake. Raphael laughed and shook his head, burying his face against Donatello's throat. "Fine! I give up! You win!"

Donatello laughed and hugged him, smiling against his shoulder. "I knew you'd eventually come to the dark side."

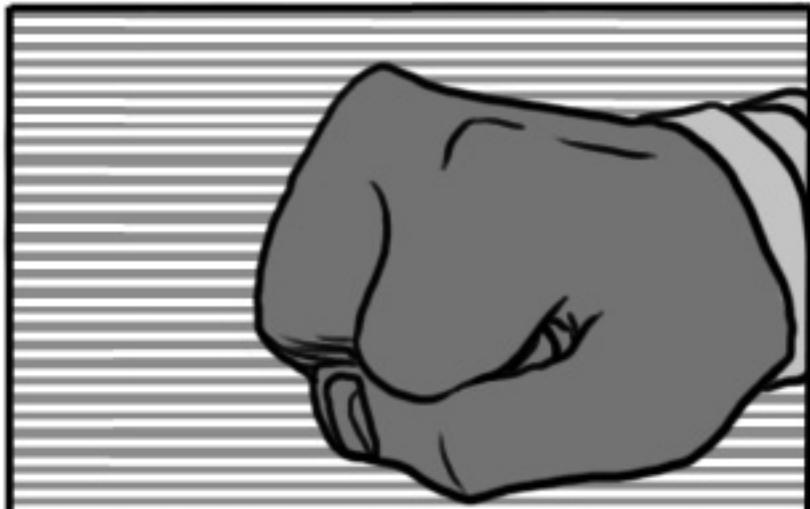
Kissing his neck and lifting up to smile down at him, Raphael touched his cheek and nodded. "Guess so. For you though, 'guess I just gotta have you'." He winked mirroring the words in the song.

Somehow, just the fact he was acknowledging that his music wasn't horrendous, Donnie's face brightened like Christmas and he practically jumped him, dragging him back down for another kiss and they both churred loudly the moment Donnie's fingers began to roam.

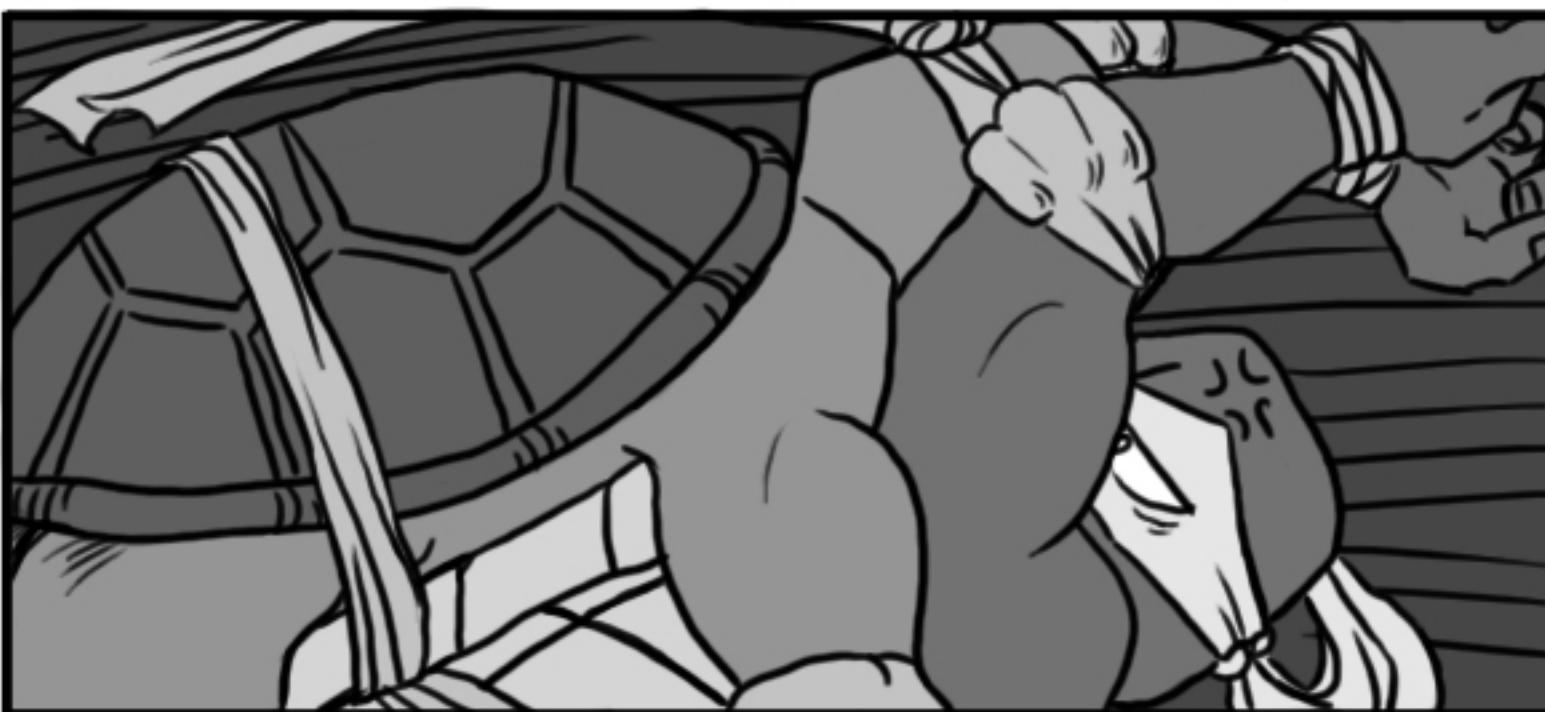
He'd have to keep that in mind - compliment Don's music more. That, or just learn a few lines and seduce his shell off. Either way, he was fairly certain he was gettin' some tonight.

**Fin**







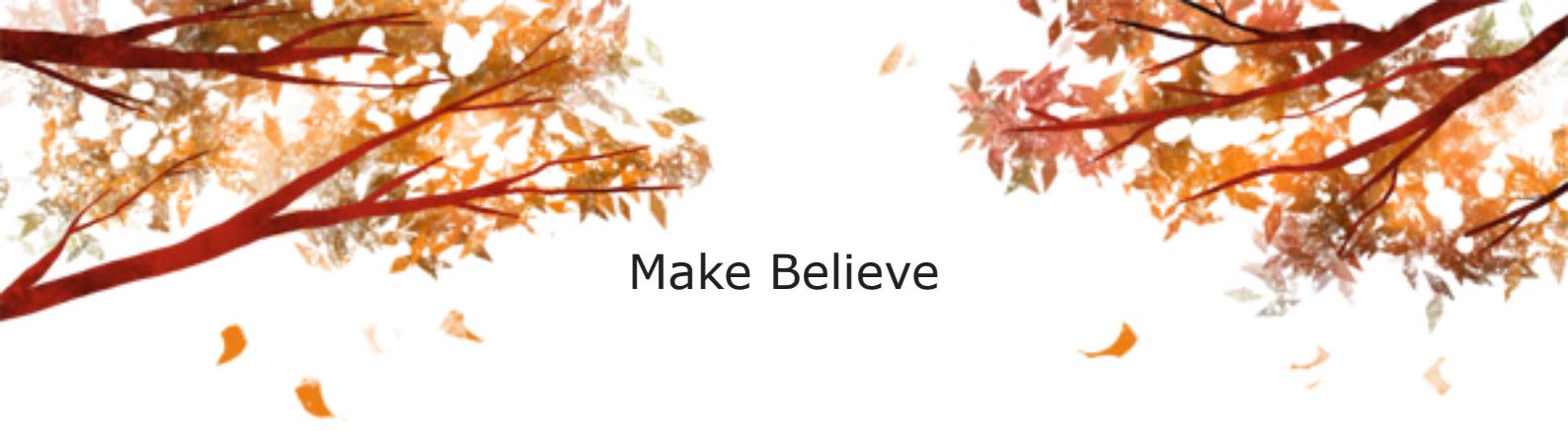








END



## Make Believe

Raphael knew that he would never have a girlfriend. No way, no how; not with his life and his looks. Sure, he would consider himself particularly fine looking, but he didn't know too many girls that liked the bald, green skin, and shell look. Plus, he only knew a handful of girls in total. April was always either dating Casey or trying to get over him since they were on and off like lightswitches, and even Angel had gotten a boyfriend that Raph would have to meet one day to make sure the punk had good intentions. All the other girls he knew came and went and usually hung out with a stranger gang than he did. And that was saying something.

But he was fine with all of that. He decided he didn't really need a girlfriend. Still, he would have liked one, for the experience, at least. Which was exactly why he made up Mona.

Whenever he would jerk off in the shower or in his hammock, on nice nights when there was no battle with the Foot, he would picture long, auburn hair, a slim body, and a nice, green, long tail. He figured if he was going to make up a girlfriend, he might as well make her a salamander or a newt or something lizard like. It was cooler than a female turtle, he decided, and it was his idea so he could make her have brown hair and big boobs too.

He liked having a name for her too; that way he had something to moan under his breath when he pictured her slender body pressed against his, her tail brushing up against his muscled thighs, and 'her' hands bringing him to climax.

Having a fake girlfriend was awesome and better than Mikey's idea of just looking at pictures and stuff. After all, you couldn't have one of those chicks in the magazine all to yourself since a million other lonely guys had the same magazine. Then there was the obvious; magazines got ruined in the shower.

The greatest thing about having a fake girlfriend, after seeing how Casey groveled around April sometimes, was that he got to decide what she said and what she did. He never lost his dignity and never had to give back rubs or go out on cheesy dates to try and get some action from her. Sure, the action he received was as fake as her dialogue but he liked the thought of Mona bending over his bike willingly after helping him fix it.

One morning, after training, he was a bit louder than usual, it seemed. "Who's Mona?" Mikey asked as Raph stepped out of the bathroom, steam following in his wake.

Raph froze for a moment as he tried to think of some way to explain things to his kid brother. What could he possibly say that would make Mikey understand and also make him never bring the subject up again?

"Your mom," Raph replied and headed to his bedroom. Crisis averted.

Mikey shrugged his shoulders and never brought it up again.

Two weeks later, Raph started to realize something about Mona was different, which really confused him since Mona was all in his mind. But her sweet, confident voice had turned low and shy, instead of her slim figure, she was a bit bulkier, and her light brown eyes were now covered by a purple mask. In fact, Mona had made a complete transformation into Donatello.

Raph's own thoughts startled him and caused him to slip and fall out of the shower with a THUMP-THWACK. He hoped no one heard the loud slap of his shell hitting the floor since he didn't know how to explain it. He'd think of something if he had to though.

For a few seconds, he sat on the cold tiles of the bathroom and just stared at his erection like a blushing, virgin girl. His eyes were wide with disbelief when he realized that he was turned on by Donnie instead of his made up girlfriend. Did that mean he had to break up with Mona? At least, he figured, he wouldn't have to worry about her crying or anything.

A loud knock on the door informed him that others had heard him fall. "Raph." Speak of the, well actually, more like think of the devil because he really hoped he hadn't said Don's name aloud. Anyway, it was Donatello himself on the other side of the wooden door. "Are you okay in there?" He sounded a bit worried.

"I'm fine," Raph called out as he tried to think of a good excuse. He almost wanted to say 'your mom' but bit back on it. It wouldn't work on Don like it did Mikey. "Just slipped on the soap."

"We have the liquid kind of soap." Don stated after a second.

"Yeah, well, I slipped on it." Raph insisted. "People don't just slip on the bars, ya know? All soap is slippery when wet, Donnie. Geeze, I thought ya was a genius, bro."

"Right, okay then." Raph waited until he heard his brother walk away then he stood up and stepped back into the shower. He changed the temperature to cold and decided to make Mona a blond with even bigger boobs. Like hell he was going to become one of those guys who were attracted to their brother.

He was one of those guys who were attracted to their brother. No matter what he did to try and make Mona more appealing—luckily she was fake or else the poor girl would be nothing but plastic with all the surgery Raphael gave her—he still found his mind switching to think of Donnie's sweet smile and magical hands just when he was about to bring himself to orgasm. He couldn't stop it and there was no way in hell that he was going to stop jerking off. He'd be even more prone to fights if he stopped releasing all his tension that way.

After a month of his troubled thoughts and of Mona being renamed to Donna, Raph decided he was going to do the only thing he thought would get his mind away from Donatello; absolute avoidance. If he stayed away from Donnie then he wouldn't think of him. Emotions changed, thankfully, so it wasn't like he was permanently going to have a crush on him. Eventually, he'd get over his little phase and then he'd start hanging out more with Don to make sure everything was still cool between him and his bro.

It was a perfect plan, except for the fact that he was stuck underground with only three other people besides Donnie to hang out with all day. Not to mention that fate, or Splinter, seemed to have it out for him the next morning at training.

"Partner exercises today," Splinter explained. "Donatello and Raphael, Michelangelo and Leonardo; I want you to focus on takedowns and getting your opponent pinned as fast as you can. Practice together for the first half hour and then we shall see how well you and your partner can do faced against others."

Raph gulped and looked over at Don. Don caught his gaze and smiled sweetly back, forcing Raph to instantly smile as well. Don's smile quirked down into a look of confusion and Raph grimaced slightly as he realized he had just given his brother a soft, mushy smile instead of his usual cocky one that he always wore before battles.

"Ready fer a tail whooping, Don?" Raph asked, quickly trying to make up for the off expression.

Don chuckled and grinned. "Don't expect to take me down so easily, Raph. I actually got a good night's rest; I am on my game this morning." He forced his mind to stay focus on the task ahead and not wander away to picturing Don snugly in his bed.

The two went to one side of the room. Across from one another, they bowed and then stepped back into ready positions. Raph dashed out first and tried to sweep Don's foot out from under him. Don side stepped the attack and blocked the punch Raph aimed at him. Don took the chance to attack Raph's open side and Raph smoothly back flipped out of the way.

Don stared after him and Raph used the momentum of his landing to press off against the floor and tackle Don to the ground. "Yo, genius, don't let me catch ya day-dreamin' again." Raph smirked down at his pinned brother. "Ya can think of all that computery junk on yer own time."

Don licked his beak and Raph's eyes instantly were drawn to the turtle's mouth. He felt his face heat up and quickly stood, offering a hand to Don. "Sorry, Raph, but that last move was rather impressive. Your back flips have gotten extremely good; have you been working on them with Mikey?"

Raph couldn't focus on Don's words as he felt his brother's hand against his own. Don had soft skin except for the hard calluses from using his bo-staff. The heel of Don's palm was rough as were the mounds on his fingers, but between them the palm was smooth and cool. He didn't have nicks on his palm like Raph had from mishandling his weapons.

"Um, we should get back to training, Raph; Master Splinter's looking over here." Don hissed and brought Raph back to reality. Raph blinked and quickly nodded. He took a step back and bowed again. Then he quickly shot out at Don with a high kick.

Don avoided Raph's blow by sinking into a split then rolling away under him. Raph turned and couldn't help but just stare as Don got back into a fighting position. Damn, Raph licked his lips. At least he had chosen the best of his brothers to have a crush on, he figured, but perhaps he was a little biased in his decision.

To confirm his thoughts, Raph looked over at Leo and Mikey fighting and he grimaced at the thought of being attracted to Mikey. The loon was flipping backwards flamboyantly with a silly grin on his face, taunting Leo, until the eldest landed a good kick on his plastron and he collided with the wall.

"Pay attention, Mikey, you left yourself open three other times before I finally decided to take advantage of it." Leo scolded.

Raph knew that he'd be more likely to kill Leo than love him. Besides, he couldn't have too much fun with Leo, what with that thorny stick being lodged up his ass and all.

He turned back to his own fight just in time to see the fist colliding with his face. Raph landed on the ground with a slight groan and gripped his aching jaw. "I caught you daydreaming," Don smirked as he offered Raph a hand up, opting not to pin his brother.

Raph couldn't help but smile back, even though it made his jaw hurt a bit more, as he grabbed Don's hand and was hauled up onto his feet. "Yeah, yeah, okay, ya got me back. But now I'm all business; no more Mr. Nice Turtle." Raph grinned and bowed once more before he sprung into action.

After their training had ended for the day, Raph had instantly headed for the shower, cutting off Mikey's path and ignoring the cries of protest coming from the youngest. He felt like a pervert as he shed his gear and stepped under the water, his erection dropping down instantly for him to take it into hand.

He had been sneaking touches all during practice and each time he pinned Donnie, he couldn't help but just slowly take his time getting off of him. Sweet Donnie who looked so good pinned beneath him, panting heavily, and offering Raph a gentle smile for each victory.

"Fuckin' pervert," Raph growled at himself as he tightened his grip on himself. The pain didn't decrease his pleasure in the least, and he didn't bother to go easy. He deserved it rough anyway; how could he just let his hands wander on Don's skin during

practice like that? But Don's skin felt so nice when he gripped his brother's wrist and shoulder and brought him over his own shoulder to land on his shell. Did he mention how good Don looked under him? Did Raph think that already? Oh well, he'd think it again and again and again and--

Raph bit down on his lip as he came, squirting all over his hand for the water to quickly clean up, rinsing him clean as his orgasm went down the drain. Raph placed one hand shakily on the tile wall and stared up at the water rushing down from the shower head. Could it really wash him clean?

He spent the rest of the day locked in his room. At dinner, he ate quickly and even washed off his plate before he retreated to his room again. If he didn't look up even once during the meal, no one commented on it; why would they? Don sat beside him so he didn't even have to lift his head to really see him. Raph only had to look to his left and there Don was, right beside him. It would have been so easy to just stretch his leg out a little bit more and touch his ankle against Don's own, just to feel that smooth skin once more.

But he hadn't. Raph had controlled himself. His plan was working already. Avoiding Don seemed to be curing him of his sick fancies. Maybe he should test it one more time to make sure he could really control himself around his brother. Raph decided that was a safe idea. Besides, he had run out of things to do in his bedroom two hours ago.

He rushed out of his room and then slowed his pace as he reached the stairs. Raph barely acknowledged Mikey's presence and headed straight for the lab only to be met with an empty room. "Where's Donnie?" He asked as he leaned against the back of the couch, trying to appear nonchalant.

Mikey hummed to himself as he thought for a moment. "He's at the junkyard."

Raph nodded, even though Mikey couldn't see it since his attention was back on the television. "I'm gonna go hang with Casey." He quickly stated as he left the lair to head straight for the junkyard.

Don shouldn't be out by himself at night, he figured. What if the Foot snuck up on him? Raph knew that the junkyard to Don was like a shoe store for Mona. Before he had replaced Mona, he had taken her to an imaginary shoe store and lost a lot of money, just for the experience. Even just remembering the fake experience reminded Raph why Don was such a better choice than a girl; he was much more relaxed and laid back.

But what if Don was ambushed and seriously hurt? Raph would never be able to live with himself if Don got hurt. Raph decided, as he found Don and stayed hidden behind him, watching his shell for him, that he would only see Don from then on when the genius needed to go to the dump. But he would keep his distance because Don didn't need to see him, after all, to still be protected. It would be like he was Don's personal, secret, bodyguard.

He wasn't doing it because of any creepy, perverted reason or something like that. Really. Raph just wanted to be a caring brother and watch out for his sibling's health. Also, he was just a tad over protective. But what Don didn't know wouldn't hurt him. The fact that Don's tail wiggled excitedly when he found something good just might hurt Raph's plan of trying to climb out of love with Don though.

Raph stood patiently outside of the bathroom. He didn't have to go or anything but he knew that Don had been in there ever since he returned from the junkyard. He was a little worried that Don might have cut himself on something and was trying to rinse it out.

"What were you doing in there, Don?" Raph asked as Don finally emerged from the bathroom, toolbox in his hand.

"I just installed a sort of shelf in the shower." Don grinned proudly. Raph's brow

creased as he frowned and looked at the new shelf. It was close to the ground, stood about a foot off of the shower's walls in the corner, and was rather wide.

"It don't look much like a shelf. 'Sides, why do we even need a shelf? We don't shave or have any shampoo. We've only got our soap." Raph pointed out.

"True," Don shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I suppose the shelf could also work as a seat of sorts, in case one of us injures our legs and wants to sit down to shower."

"Isn't that why we've got the bath in Master Splinter's bathroom?" Raph questioned.

"Then I guess we can sit there so we just don't 'slip on soap' while doing other things in the shower, huh, Raph?" Raph's eyes went wide and his mouth suddenly felt dry. "Relax, we're all teenage boys." And then Don winked at Raph and left him standing in the bathroom doorway, feeling a little more in love than he had been before.

Honestly, it was starting to kill him. Raph would look at Don and Donnie would just smile at him. That was all it took now. Raph found it to be the sweetest thing and had to fight the urge of allowing his expression to turn into one of those gushy faces. It was just getting ridiculous and Raph was getting too close to revealing his odd secret. The words rose to the tip of his tongue with every smile he received.

He forced himself to stay away from Don. But Don would sometimes walk past him to grab a glass of water while he was on the couch with Mikey and Raph always looked at him, which made Don smile in greeting. And that, of course, made things even worse. Raph began to stay away from the main room altogether.

He was constantly out, without Casey most times, because he felt too angry to chill with his bud, or he locked himself in his room. He just had to stay away from Don for a month, he convinced himself, then he would be over him. Out of sight, out of mind and all that.

He skipped a few meals but that was fine. Raph just snuck down later, wary of the light leaking out from the bottom of the lab's door, to make himself something. He knew the importance of keeping healthy eating habits.

But there was no way Raph could get out of practice with Don. No way, no how. Instead, when paired with or against Don, he was rather hands off, opting for defense instead of offence and claiming that he was trying to better himself in all fields of battle when questioned about it.

However, it didn't work because his family, nosy ninjas that they were, noticed that Raph was acting off. Usually, when something bothered the resident Hot-head, Raph would find his way to Donnie for help. For Splinter and the remaining brothers, it was odd that he'd not done so already, they didn't know the nature of his problem, after all. But Splinter wisely knew they couldn't force him to seek help. Instead, they sent Don to him.

Raph could only stare in horror as Don stood in his doorway. Don placed his skeleton key back into a pocket on his belt and frowned at Raph. "I did knock." Don amended his invasion of Raph's privacy. Raph nodded his agreement and sat up in his hammock.

"Raph, what's bothering you?" Don asked bluntly. He knew to be straight forward with Raph. Don frowned as he sat down in the hammock beside him. Raph tried to shift away from Don's thigh pressing against his own but he only slid back down. "Come on, you know you can tell me anything. You've always been able to talk to me before."

Raph sighed and started to swing his bed back and forth, moving his foot from his toes to his heels as he swung slightly, focusing on that and not the heat from Don's skin pressed to his own. "I know, but I can't talk ta ya now, Donnie. Not 'bout this," he glanced at his brother from the corner of his eye. "Just, ya gotta trust me when I say I'm just goin' through something. I'll get over it soon." He offered a small smile.

"I trust you, Raphie, we all do. We've just been worried about you. Lately you've been so distant and, well, honestly you've seemed sad. But you're sure it's nothing I can help you with?" Don asked, concern obvious on his face. Don had never known a problem that he couldn't help fix.

"I'm sure. I've gotta take care of this on my own." Raph stated softly.

Don nodded but continued to sit with him even though Raph knew he was overloaded with a bunch of different experiments and new designs. Instead of leaving Raph to deal with his own problems, Don decided to sit next to his unreasonable brother and waste his time to just be there for him. Shell, did Don have to be so selfless and perfect?

"Can I ask ya fer one favor though, Donnie?" Raph asked, his voice sounding small. He really wanted this request and he knew Don would oblige, but it was so out of character for him that he knew he'd really start to worry Don after. Still, he was selfish enough to let Don worry if it ment just a moment of indulgence.

"Of course, Raph." Don smiled softly and even patted Raph's knee in a reassuring gesture. It made Raph's heart ache in his chest.

"Can," Raph licked his beak and looked again to the floor, watching his feet's slight movement as he continued to rock on his bed with his brother. "Can I have a hug?"

The room was silent for a moment and Raph really felt like hitting himself. This was a dumb idea! That had to be the worst thing to say. Everyone probably thought he was suicidal or something equally drastic and ridiculous and now he was asking for a hug, like he needed to be reassured that he was loved and had some reason to live or something else stupid like that. He bet a million thoughts were running through Don's mind at that moment.

Slowly though, two arms wrapped around Raph from the side and he relaxed, releasing the breath he had subconsciously been holding. Don smelled good, like an enticing mix of coffee and the lilac soap that Mikey insisted on buying, and his skin was barely warm to the touch.

Raph brought up his hands and held Don's arm harder against his plastron as he ducked his head. "Thanks," he whispered, wanting time to freeze so he could keep the warm feeling he was experiencing.

"Anytime, Raphie." Don assured as he rested his head on Raph's shoulder. "You know I'm always here for you." He reemphasized as he nuzzled against him.

That was the thing about Donnie, Raph realized, that drew him to his gentler brother in the first place. When he pushed all the others away, Donnie was the only one that grabbed his hands and drew him close instead, passively refusing to be shoved aside.

Raph closed his eyes, unable to fight back the urge to spill his heart any longer. It was time to take the plunge and put his heart out on the table for Don to decide what to do with it. Don pulled away from the hug but patted Raph's shoulder gently.

"I," Raph took a deep breath and slowly let it out. "I love ya, Donnie." He stared at Don, waiting for whatever would happen.

Don smiled, his head tilting to the side a little. "I love you too, Raph."

Raph's heart stopped for a second then started up again, beating faster than he could have imagined. "You," he swallowed his disbelief. "You do?" He dared to ask. Something in the back of his head was prodding him with a sharp sword of reason but Raph pushed that aside, his heart grabbing onto the words and the first meaning of them.

"Of course, didn't you know that?" Don asked and frowned a little. Raph acted quickly and grabbed at Don's face, pulling him in for a kiss. How did he miss that Don loved him too? All the time they had wasted. Raph moaned into the feel of Don's beak against his own and allowed his hands to release Don's head in favor of moving down to cupping the back of his neck and lying on his shoulder.

He pulled away for a moment to breath, and to make sure Don's frown was gone, but his brother's expression made him freeze before he went to kiss him again.

"Oh," Don finally managed to say as he licked at his beak and then grimaced. "I didn't realize you meant," he trailed off a bit and Raph's hands dropped back to his sides. "I mean, I suppose that makes sense now, why you were trying to distant yourself from me and everything."

"When ya said it, ya didn't mean," Raph frowned as he came to an understanding. Mentally, he apologized for ignoring his logical prodding. He couldn't believe how stupid he had been.

"I meant platonic love," Don nodded slowly. "Because I love you like a brother, Raph, and I always will, no matter what."

"Right, 'course," Raph nodded as well and stood. "I'm gonna go ta Casey's place. Is there any way ya can forget that this happened?" He asked hopefully.

"Raph, wait, don't leave yet. I really don't think you distancing yourself from the rest of us is a healthy solution for what you're feeling towards me." Don reached out and grabbed his arm.

"Do ya have a different solution for me?" Raph questioned, looking at the ground.

"Honestly, there's no cure for such a thing." Raph physically winced at Don's choice of words and Don slid his hand down to Raph's own hand and squeezed it reassuringly. "Not that you need a cure," he quickly tried to amend. "Because you're not sick, Raph, no matter what you've been thinking for the past week that you've locked yourself up. You don't have some incurable, horrendous disease that the rest of the family can catch. Your feelings can never be wrong and what you feel for me is, well, honestly it's to be expected and one hundred percent natural."

"What?" Raph narrowed his eyes.

"Think about it, we're four teenage boys, the only of our kind, stuck with seeing each other every single day. And for the first sixteen years of our lives, all we really had was each other. It was bound to happen that one of us would be sexually attracted to the other. So don't beat yourself up over it. I'm flattered, actually, that you find me appealing. I had always thought that you or Leo would be the ones to fall for one another, what with all of your fighting being the perfect cover-up for overwhelming emotions. That could be easily mistaken for sexual frustration." Don rambled, all the while continuing to hold Raph's hand.

"Donnie, you're making it worse." Raph growled as he gently tried to tug his hand out of Don's grip.

"How?" Don asked.

"Because yer being so fuckin' understanding," He tore his hand away from Don's. "I mean, you should hate me! I'm a goddamn dumbass and a pervert, liking my brother like this."

"We're not really related by blood." Don commented.

"Stop making it fuckin' worse!" Raph shouted. "Ya should be furious at me fer thinkin' of ya in such ways, fer wantin' ta do the stuff I want ta do with ya. Ya shouldn't be justifying my perverted thoughts."

Don frowned. "Raph, it really is--"

"Shut up!" Raph growled and stormed out of the room. Don sighed but followed after him. He caught Raph's hand again on the stairs.

Don grabbed onto the railing and refused to budge when Raph continued to try and run. "Raph, please, you shouldn't think of yourself in such a negative--"

"Damn it, Don, go back to yer lab and fucking stay there, will ya? Just, just leave me alone." Raph shook Don's grip off and continued down the stairs.

"Why? So you can continue hating yourself for something no one else hates you for?" Don protested, running to stand in front of him and cut off his path to the door.

Raph stopped in his tracks and looked around, he noticed that Leo and Mikey were both staring at them from the couch and he gulped. He normally didn't mind his brothers watching his confrontations but they normally weren't about something so personal.

"You don't know how everyone else might feel," He whispered, pointedly looking towards the couch to get his meaning across.

"They're not going to hate you either, Raph." Don assured him.

"They should," Raph insisted.

"Why? Would it make you feel better, Raph, if everyone hated you? Would you stop hating yourself then? Fine, I hate you, so stop hating yourself because that's my job now, okay?" Don smiled softly and pulled Raph into another hug. Raph was caught off guard by the embrace. He had imagined that Don would never want to touch him ever again after knowing his secret. But there he was, treating Raph like he wasn't any different from before he knew about his feelings. Raph squeezed his eyes shut against the feeling of relief running through him.

After a moment, Raph rested his head against Don's shoulder and wrapped his arms around Don's shell. "Yer doin' a shitty job hatin' me."

"I guess I've never been good at hating my brothers." Don nuzzled Raph's neck. "Come to the lab and continue to talk with me, please? I've missed hanging out with you for the past few weeks."

Don released Raph and smiled as Raph nodded. The two went to Don's lab and talked about everything but Raph's feelings. Raph was grateful for that and he had to agree with Don, he had missed hanging out with him too.

A week slowly passed as they tended to do. Nothing significant happened to the turtles; no giant battles, no random visits from Renet to hurl them into some battle they had no part in, and no alien invasions threatening life as they knew it. For the mutant turtles, it was a regular week consisting of bashing the skulls of the usual mugger or two.

Raph stopped locking himself away in his room and ran up to the surface less. He was around to pick fights with Leo, wrestle Mikey to the ground for control of the remote, and was always willing to go to the dump with Don. The only thing that had seemed to change was that Raph and Don had started to hang out more. But that was insignificant.

Leo and Mikey chalked it up to Don finally being able to get Raph out of his slump. That was the only explanation that Don gave them when they bothered to ask, at least. Besides, they didn't have any reason to think differently.

Once again, Don and Raph found themselves at the dump. The autumn wind blew the scarves they had thrown on, reminding them that they didn't have too many weeks left to wander around in the dump. Don had needed a few more pieces of scrap metal for some new project that involved a lot of welding. Raph was more than happy to lend the extra muscle. Besides, he did enjoy being around Don, even though he knew the feeling wasn't exactly mutual.

Don had been getting closer to Raph but neither of them had brought up Raph's feelings again. Raph was fine with that. He didn't want to talk about them anyway.

"Hey, Raph, can you help me pull this piece out?" Don asked, waving Raph over to a pile of junk. "It's lodged under some other stuff and I just can't manage to get it."

"Here comes Mr. Muscle." Raph smirked as he placed the items he was holding on the ground. He gripped what looked to be an old hubcap and grunted as he tugged it from side to side before he finally wiggled it free. "There ya go." He grinned triumphantly, kneeling next to Don.

"Thanks, Raphie." Don smiled. He seemed to hesitate for a moment and then leaned forward, pressing a chaste kiss to the corner of Raph's smile.

Raph's eyes grew wide and he blinked. "Donnie, ya shouldn't, I mean, don't feel

like ya have ta do this 'cause of me, 'kay?"

"I'm not doing this for you, Raph," Don smiled. "I'm doing it for me." He leaned forward and brushed his beak against Raph's, more assured of himself. "Do you really think you were the only open minded turtle around here to adapt to confusing feelings?" He wrapped his arms around Raph's neck and pressed their foreheads together.

"But," Raph frowned and shook his head, dropping the hubcap to grab Don's hands. He pulled them away from his neck. "Ya say ya love me, because ya think ya do. Ya don't though, not really. I know ya don't and I'm fine with that. Ya didn't last week, why would you now?"

"Raph, emotions are hard to explain but trust me, I do love you and I want to be with you. This doesn't have anything to do with pity or whatever else you might think." Don insisted, moving his restrained hands until he could lace his fingers with Raph's.

"I just can't believe it." Raph narrowed his eyes and looked away.

Don moved one hand to cup Raph's cheek, dragging his gaze back to him. "A week ago you told me you loved me and ever since, the idea of being with you has run through my head. I had to think it over a bit. But it's an idea that I liked, a lot." Don admitted. "And like any idea I like, I have to try it out and see if it's just as good as I thought. So, will you give me a chance?"

Raph smiled understandingly. Don was a scientist, and just like any scientist, he always had to think about things before he dove right into them. He took a deep breath and leaned forward to press his beak to Don's. Raph deepened the kiss as he moved his hand up to the back of Don's head to make sure he wouldn't run away as he pulled back to breath. "Is it as good as ya thought it would be?"

"No," Don smiled. "It was better." He pressed in for another kiss and wrapped his arms around Raph's neck as they gently explored one another's mouths. They pulled away with a wet noise and shared a grin. They finished collecting Don's necessary supplies and headed back to the lair, hand in hand.

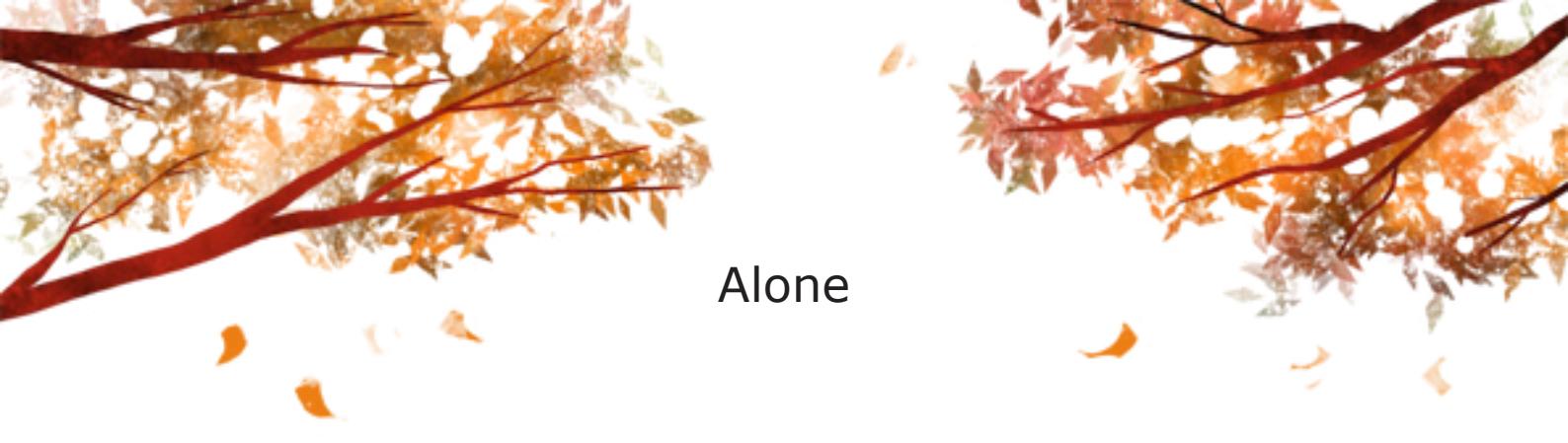
Raph couldn't help but smile the entire trip. "This is so much better than being with Mona." He commented aloud, letting his thoughts get the better of him.

"What?" Don asked looking at Raph curiously.

"Nothin', Donnie." Raph reassured, squeezing Don's hand and continuing to smile.

**Fin**





## Alone

Raphael liked his time by himself on the rooftops. It was the only time he could get away, to sit around and think without having any of his brothers bothering him. Not that they did anyway, except for occasionally one of them-- and that was to tell him to drag his sorry ass back down to the sewers, that it wasn't safe up here.

Which was why he was so surprised the night that his brother Donatello showed up on the same rooftop as him. Something was up... Don never came up here.

'What's he up to?' Raphael stuck to the shadows at first, watched Don from a distance. Watched as Don shivered slightly in the cool autumn air and then sighed, going to sit at the edge of the rooftop. He sat there for a while, looking down the four stories to the ground below.

Raph knew what was down there. Homeless gathered in the corners of the alleys and down the street, adding to the stink of human misery. When Don didn't move and enough time had past, he quietly left his hiding place. He sat down next to Don, looking down where his brother's eyes were trained.

Don was silent for several seconds more before he spoke. "All the brains and resources in the world," he said in an almost faraway voice. "And they still don't know how to feed and shelter their poor."

Raph considered that, then shrugged. "That's people for ya," he replied. "Ain't ever going to change."

Don looked up, his eyes slightly narrowed as he inspected his brother. "Why do you come up here, Raph?" he asked finally.

Raph was taken aback. He considered for a moment, then shrugged again. "Dunno," he said finally. "To be free, I guess. Get away. You know. It's stifling to be down there all the time."

Don frowned and returned to looking down at the people below. He was silent and Raph shifted uncomfortably, wondering if he should just go when Don spoke up again.

"I could make them all go away you know," he said. When Raph turned to stare at him he saw there was a faraway look in Don's eyes. He came back to the present with a sad little smile. "Figured it out years ago. Modified plague. I could even manufacture it here. New York city would be ground zero..." his voice trailed off again.

Raph felt a chill go through him that he had never felt around this particular brother before. It troubled him. "I thought I was supposed to be the dark depressing one," he joked, then fell serious again at the look on Don's face. He looked so damn sad....

Don shook his head slowly. "I couldn't do it," he said finally. "I couldn't cause that much suffering." He got up and turned away from the street. Raph got up too, reached out and put his hand on Don's shoulder.

"Hey," he began, unsure of what to say. He was worried, to put it lightly.

Tired eyes met Raph's again. "Because of me, you'll never be free to do what you want." Don said quietly. "None of us will."

Raph opened his mouth, then shut it again. He knew all this, they all did. It was a fact of their lives... their existence. He also knew Don. They depended on Don for so much, and the brainy brother took it hard if he couldn't fix something for them. But this kinda fix...

It made him sad to know that Don might have considered this, just because it would make their lives easier. He felt he should say something. "Hey, Don..." he began. "Look, no one asked you to... you know..." he trailed off awkwardly.

"I know, Raph." A faint smile and Don pulled away from him, looked away at the same time. "I'd better go back," he said quietly.

He acted without thinking, reached out, and grabbed Don's shoulders, turned him back around. "Don," he began and then stopped as Don stared up at him. "You always..." he stopped, fumbled, and felt embarrassed. Why did he have to be cursed with being unable to explain himself well? "... You always got me, okay?" he went to shove Don away again so he could be embarrassed without being stared at, when the expression on Don's face changed. It softened.

"Raph," he said, then Don sighed and stepped forwards, close, too close and finally stopped. He leaned against him, resting his head on his shoulder.

It felt... good. Raph slowly hugged him back and just stared past him and out into the city lights.

-

During the next couple days Raph mulled over what Don had said on the roof. He turned it over and over. Considered it. He found he was fine with Don's confession, but he kept on coming back to the last part of the conversation. And the hug. And how that made him feel.

He wondered if he'd have a chance to talk to Don again. He doubted that. Don had gone right back into reclusive mode when they got back... burying himself in his work. He didn't think he'd have a chance right now with Don so focused...

Which is why he was surprised when he poked his head into Don's work space to say hi, and got something other than a distant "hey" in return. Don looked up from the mechanical whatsit he had in his hand and offered him a rare smile. "Hi Raph," he said.

Raph shuffled into the lab, trying not to bump anything over. "Hey," he returned. He fidgeted. "How'er you."

"Tired," Don replied. He breathed in deeply, then sighed and placed what he was hold-

ing down on the table, moving over a slight bit to make room for Raph. Raph hesitated for a moment, then plunked down beside him.

"Still trying to think of ways to eradicate the human race?" he asked, then instantly regretted it when a shocked look crossed Don's face. Why oh why was he cursed with an inability to talk right and know what to say? Real great Raph...

The shocked look quickly faded. "No," Don said with a small smile, then sighed. He leaned against Raph, which startled him. He didn't move though as Don placed his head on his shoulder. "Just thinking," he added.

"Yer always thinking," Raph replied.

Another chuckle. "Yes," Don agreed.

When Raph glanced down at him, Don's eyes were closed, a content look on his face. Not really asleep... but some place close to it. Raph didn't move and smiled slightly. It felt... nice.

-

He was getting addicted to touch. That was all there was too it. More and more often he stopped by Dons lab, or caught his brother on the surface looking over the city, or on the couch, and more and more often he found himself being leaned on or curled up against. It was weird... granted he was used to seeing Mike and Don lay against each other but he never ever let his brothers touch him. Now he wondered why he hadn't.

Sometimes it was a bit uncomfortable, at least at first, but ever since his little talk with Don on the rooftop, he didn't have it in him to shove Don away. So there he was, with a tired out, over worked, never paid, Don snoozing against his shoulder, droolin' a bit. When Leo or Splinter walked by with raised eyebrows he would give them the finger or make a shh face, depending on which one it was. And when Mikey walked by and went "AWW" loudly, Don would wake up, mumble that he was sorry and make off for his lab again, leaving Raph with no shoulder buddy. Raph wanted to kick Mikey's ass after that one.

He wasn't quite sure when his thoughts moved from someplace brotherly to someplace not. It probably was somewhere between Columbus Day and Halloween, but he couldn't say for sure. Maybe it was when Don gave him one of those enduring smiles, not the "I'm busy" or "I'm humoring you" smiles and Raph's stomach did a little flip flop.

It took him another couple weeks to make the leap and stop by Don's bedroom in the middle of the night. He had just gotten back from hanging out with Casey. Don was fast asleep, so he thought he was okay coming in like some damn creepy vampire or something and watching him sleep.

Then Don went and woke up. Before he could think of any possible reason why he was there Don sat up and blinked at him. "Raph?" he asked. "Is everything alright?"

"Uh, yeah, fine," he replied and tried to back peddle out of Don's room. He still didn't know how he was going to explain this one...

Don looked concerned. "Did you have a nightmare?" he asked, sitting up and patting the bed beside him. At Raph's incredulous look he became embarrassed and slid back under his covers. "Ah, Mikey sometimes has nightmares," he explained.

Raph realized quickly with a pang of loss that that was the first time since before the rooftop he had rejected Don's overtures and offerings of closeness. "Wait," he lied. "I did. Or something," he added.

Don sat up again and gave him a skeptical look, which faded quickly into that enduring smile he liked so much. "Here," he said, flipping up the blankets.

Raph's stomach flip flopped again. He hesitated for just a moment, then quietly walked up to him and slowly climbed in beside him. He laid there stiffly, wondering what the hell he was going to do then when Don curled up against his side. After a jaw cracking yawn the genius was fast asleep again, leaving Raph to lay there awake and stare at the ceiling.

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He found himself making excuses to sleep in the same bed as Don, usually after dark and when he knew the rest of the family was asleep. He'd sneak into Don's room and Don would let him crawl into bed with him and promptly fall back to sleep.

Except one night about two weeks later. Amusement played in Don's voice as he spoke. "You're visiting me more than Mike does," he said.

Raph stared at the ceiling. "Yeah well. Mikey probably doesn't feel the same way aboutcha as I do..."

The moment the words left his mouth Raph regretted it. Damn it! Why did he always do that? Speak without thinking.... .

"Sorry," he mumbled quickly and made to get off the bed, to get the hell out of Don's room, and hopefully as much out of his life as possible too.

A hand caught his arm before he could extract himself from the mattress. "Raph," Don said.

Raph froze.

"It's okay to get lonely," there was an ache in Don's voice.

Raph felt like he was hot and cold at the same time. "You're my brother," he said finally, a bit desperately. He didn't add the rest of it... you're the brother I ignored for 16 years, or you're the brother I least understand, especially now... what the fuck is wrong with you and why aren't you freaking out?

Don sounded tired when he spoke again. "Who else do we have?" he asked simply.

Raph looked, really looked, at his brother. Don looked sad... the ache deep and overwhelming.

He smiled, which didn't quite reach his eyes. "Sometimes," Don said quietly. "We get

lonely too."

And then Raph got it. It clicked. Oh.

OH.

And... really?

Don reached out. His fingers traced the side of his face, mouth, and then Don leaned forwards.

Raph knew for sure then.

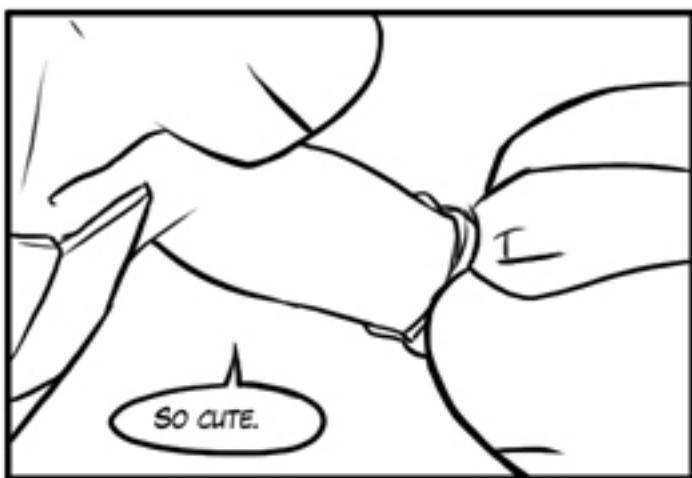
Yes. Really.

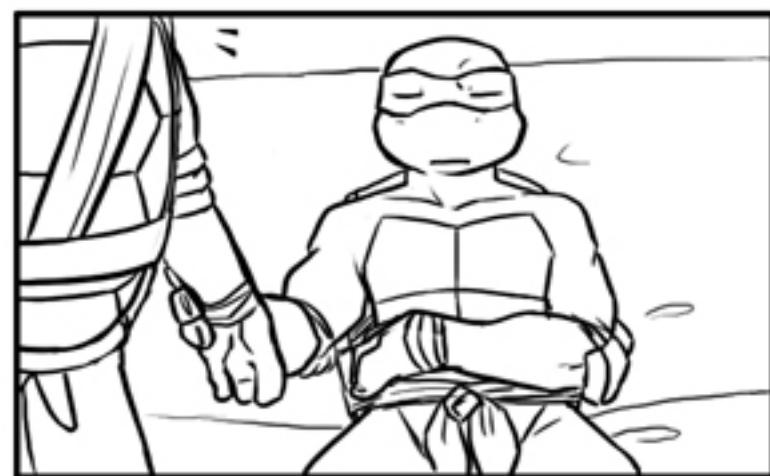
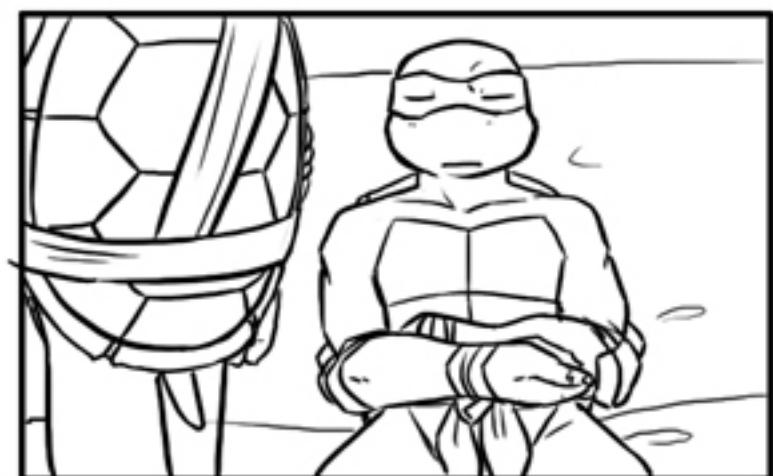
**Fin**



# HAVE I TOLD YOU LATELY

By Sneefee





SORRY, I DIDN'T MEAN  
TO WAKE YOU UP.



\*SQUEEZE\*



HEY...

WHAT'S  
WRONG?

WHAT?

WINTER'S COMIN'...

S'GONNA BE  
WINTER SOON.

O...KAY?



DON'T WANNA  
BE COLD...

\*SQUEEZE\*

HATE BEIN'  
COLD...



YOU'RE NOT  
MAKING ANY SENSE.



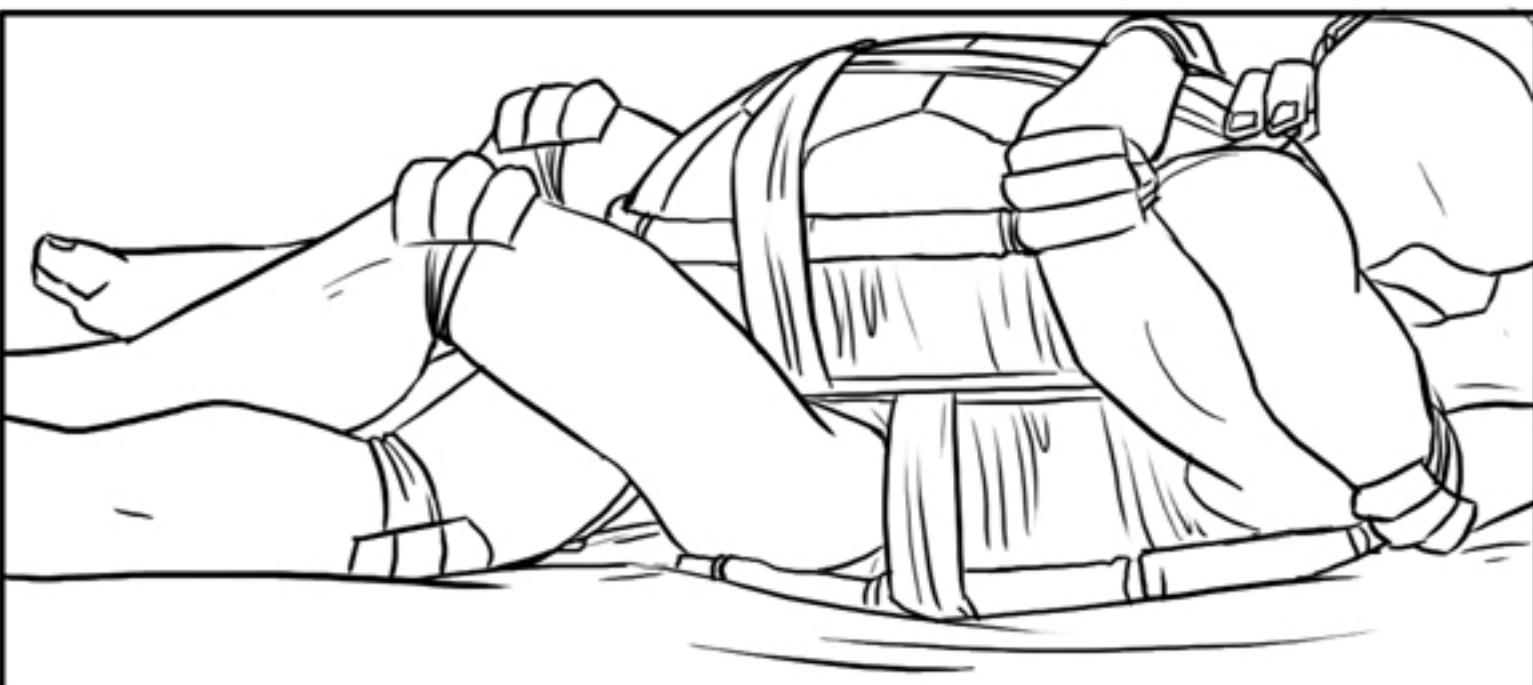
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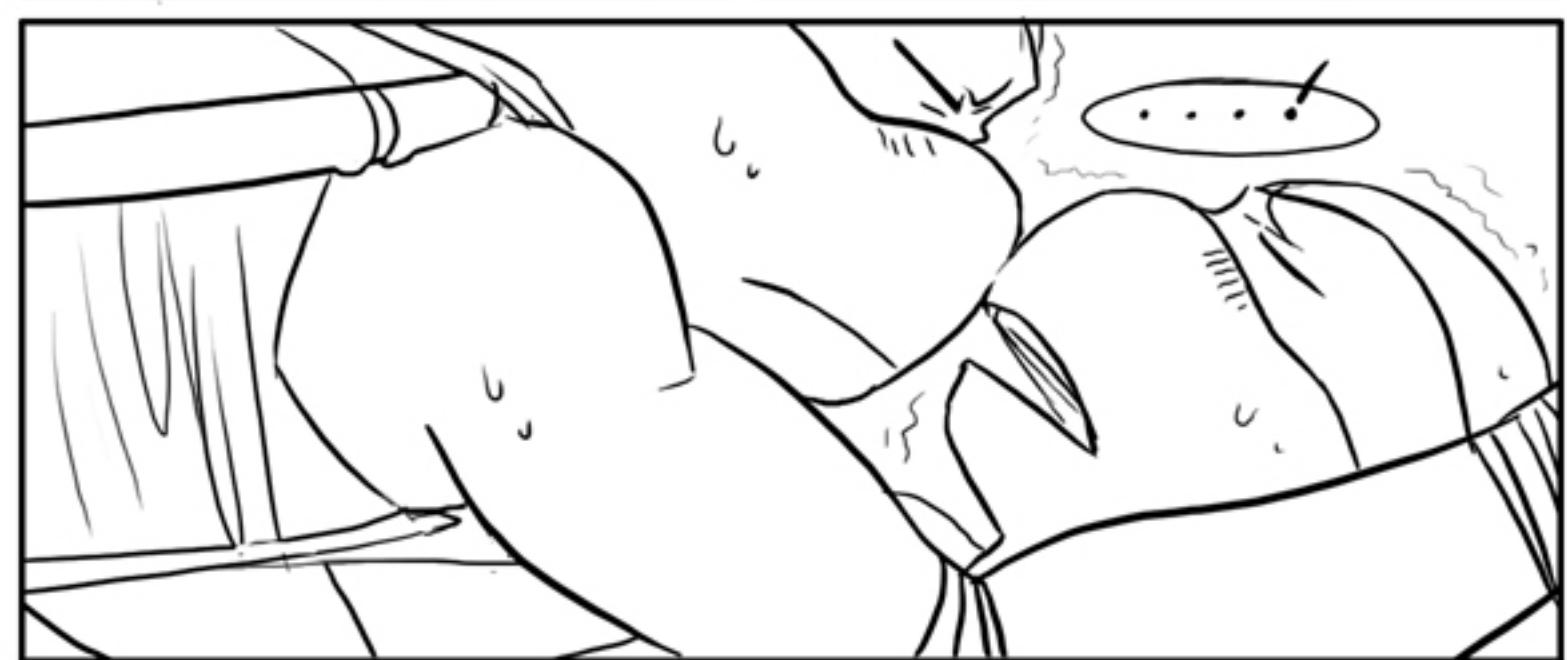


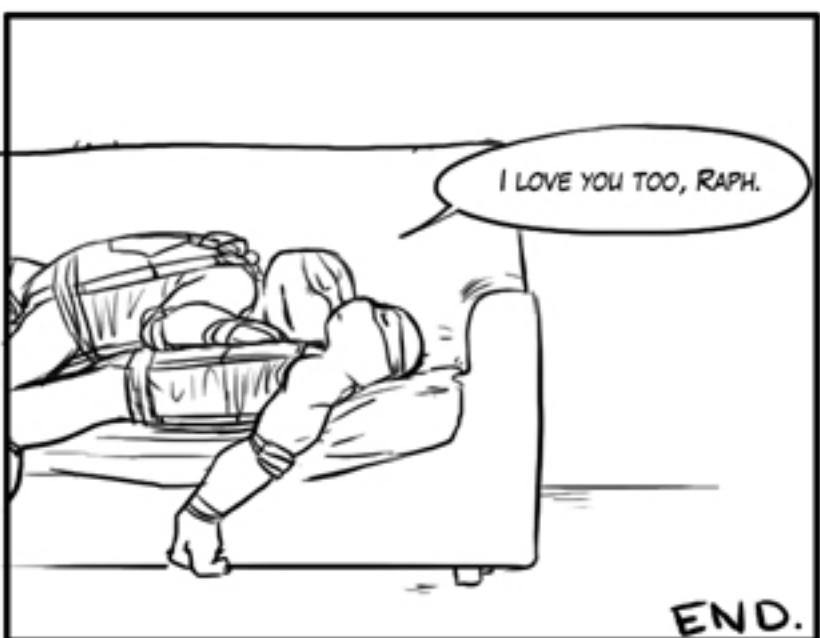
RAPH?



RAPHAEL?  
YOU'RE... STILL ASLEEP?









## Waiting For Leo

You got no idea how long I been waiting for this. Christ, you oughta see how sweet and harmless and totally supportive I been lately... (hahaha, right? Fuck you too). And I actually mean it, that's the kicker. But at the same time I can't completely ignore the fact that there is this hard-coded, deeply ingrained reptile, this psycho sexual predator just kicking back on a rock in the back of my brain, biding his time.

It's been building between us all week, and I've been unable to stop myself from obsessively thinking about it. On the one hand, feels like I been waiting for Leo for so long that it's hard not to flip out at the thought of going back to it. But it's always been one step forward and three steps back with him since the very beginning. I don't know why I can't chill out and expect it. I guess that's what I've been trying to do. This downtime is never going to last, I keep telling myself. Not now that we've finally gone there.

God, it was good. It was real good for both of us. And we know damned well it was, even when we're pretending not to. I was able to pull out, just like I said I would. Nobody went crazy on each other. Nobody got hurt.

There's no denying that we've finally gone and broke Don's one big rule, though. Yeah, that one fact still does scare me. There are times I'm scared half to death for both of us. But it's better now than it was. Way better. And what did I have before I had him? A whole lot of nothing. A whole lot of feeling completely alone in the world, a freak among the freaks, right? God, I used to drive myself nuts, telling myself, 'It's so sick, what are you thinking? What kind of twisted fuck dreams about his own brother?' I used to beat myself up over it on a pretty regular basis. At thirteen I was so messed up over it all that I could hardly stand to be around him.

Anyway, I mean it when I say that things got way better since those days. Master Splinter had a lot to do with that. Not that he can ever know the whole truth about us, but he still taught me not to hate myself – not ever, for any reason. It sunk in somehow, and I'm more grateful for that than I can say. It really was a decent enough upbringing that he gave us, considering the shitty cards we all got dealt.

But all this issues-from-my-childhood bullshit aside...? I think that also maybe I'm just... getting used to it, you know? Ain't it bound to happen? He and I been screwing around pretty steadily for a couple years now. We're not even sticking to the Season anymore. Right up until It Happened, we've been teasing the ever-living shit out of each other pretty much every chance we can get.

The silence between starts to feel intense. He's got a death grip on my hand and he's hauling us both forward. I'm still kind of stunned by this, but I don't argue. I just keep up.

For the first half of the trip I've got nothing to do but plod after him through the muck and darkness and pass the time thinking about shit. I kept wondering when the real

fight was going to start. I'm thinking, okay? What about now? I mean, we're definitely far enough away that we could duke it out without disrupting poor Donnie while he's trying to do his homework.

We'd just got done training, and I'd been paired up with Mike for most of it while Leo went through a bunch of tricky balance exercises with Splinter. And I wasn't really watching or anything, cuz Mike and I were busy clowning around like usual. Maybe a little more than usual, cuz we were both hearing things from the other side of the room that tells us Leo is not having his best session ever. Splinter is pulling out words like "Find your center!" and "Concentrate!" and these aren't words he's had to say to the Great Leonardo for some time. If anything, I'd say we were being goofy mostly as a courtesy, so we could play it off like we didn't notice. But our screwing around still must have ticked him off somehow.

He kept a lid on it until we were officially dismissed, but after that he starts throwing words around. I knew he was getting under my skin on purpose, but that never makes him any easier to ignore. Don had skipped training, which he's allowed to do whenever he pleases apparently, since he's some kind of Utrom exchange student these days. He actually pokes his head out of the cubby hole where he's been studying mumbo jumbo for days and gives us both the evil eye, and says if we have to be so loud and obnoxious can we at least take ourselves somewhere else and not disrupt him?

Now the thing to understand about Leo is that, unless it's Splinter or someone who actually has authority, he really don't like being told what to do. And right now he especially don't want to hear it from Don, who's been acting like he's some kind of marooned alien himself these days, and too damned good for any of us. Actually those are probably more my words than Leo's, but still. If you asked him (and actually got a straight answer, which is the tricky part) he'd probably say that Don already feels estranged from all of us and doesn't act like he wants to be part of the team anymore, and that scares the ever-living piss out of him. But he can't act scared about anything in front of the others, and he's already pissed. So when Don says this, Leo whirls to give him a blazing, scary look and I can tell right away that he's seeing red.

But Don's right, like he usually is (which is the most annoying thing about any time Don decides to get uppity, hands-down). What can Leo do without looking like an asshole? There's nothing either of us can do except shut up and leave.

Generally I agree with all the frustration he is feeling lately regarding Don. But at the same time, I can't help watching this exchange and groaning inside, because now Leo looks more grim and ticked off than ever. I know that the moment we're both outta earshot he's liable to explode and take it all out on me.

So that's what I thought we were doing. It seemed like we were just taking our pent up testosterone outside or something, where it wasn't going to bother anybody. But now, I just don't know what's going on anymore. Somehow it's swung the other direction. I can sense his glance every time it slides towards me but I can't tell from his face what it means.

Of course my natural response to it is to start feeling impatient as hell. I want to beat back my early suspicions that picking a fight with me is no longer the first thing on Leo's mind. I try to think up nice and harmless ways of confirming the hopeful notions that have leaked into my brain. Hi, uh, sorry to interrupt when you're busy being broody and mysterious, but were you planning on telling me where the fuck we're going? You

gonna beat on me or jump me or what? Nothing I'm coming up with to say sounds too nice or harmless when I play it back for myself. If we are about to do something besides fight, saying something that Leo can interpret as me being an asshole is the best way to screw things up for sure.

This is why thinking before you talk sucks. Mostly I wind up saying nothing at all.

After awhile, the idea is so firmly planted in my brain that I give up trying not to hope for anything. I let my chest fill up with a crazy hopeful thrill. I'm just driving myself crazy, anyway. We'd already be fighting by now if that's what he planned for us to do. So that means Something Else is probably what's happening, and the best plan is to shut up and roll with it. Once I decide this, it gets a little easier. I've got no reservations. God, I been waiting for him for so long.

It doesn't take long after that to work out where we're headed. There's this ancient, abandoned utility closet we been sneaking off to lately. I'm the one who found the place. I sort of fixed it up for him... you know, for us. So I got it into my head to clean it up and turned it into a sort of – I don't know. A surprise for him, I guess. He's been so stressed out lately. About us, I'm pretty sure. But we can't seem to talk about it, not even when I get the balls to actually sit him down and try to force it. Maybe it's just that I'm retarded when it comes to picking up on other people's subtle emotional shit. Or maybe he's giving me zero clues to work with here. Actually, I figure it's both.

I know a lot of it is just Leo being paranoid and self-hating and batshit crazy... I know that! But if what's driving him crazy has to do with us, I can't just assume it's all on him. It stands to reason that a part of what's messed up about us right now has to do with me. So of course I wanna fix it! I start feeling desperate to do SOMETHING that might fix it, even though I don't completely understand.

Lately I've got to be careful not let my frustration turn into being pissed at him. Because the truth is, I'm not pissed at him. I feel kind of sorry for him. He doesn't mean to be a nutcase. Sometimes I get the feeling that's exactly what he hates more than anything: how crazy it makes him. He'd rather be cool and collected and on top of everything all the time. It's like he can't find his happy Zen place anymore, and it's all because of me, and I can't stand the thought. He tries so hard not to blame me, but maybe he should, because I just can't let him go.

I guess it's just one more way that I'm stuck in limbo waiting for Leo. There's nothing else I can do. I can't give him up, so there's nothing to do but just keep on forgiving him for all these times he can't just trust me, or relax a little, or be straight up with me. Whatever... this is what I'll do, then. I'll wait for him. I'll be there for him. I will wait, and I will wait, and probably wait some more, until finally – maybe someday - he will work out all of his bullshit and we can just fucking be happy for once in our lives.

God, I must be mentally challenged, considering how long I wracked my brain for some way to help with what he's feeling neurotic about. Fixing up this stupid room was the best I could come up with.

It's not close. Feels like it's a million miles away from the lair. You might think that would make it a hassle, but that's actually part of its charm. I tried my best to make it nice. The mattress is mostly clean. It's got sheets. Threw up some curtains to cover up the ugly concrete walls. It's even got lights and heat and music, thanks to an old portable power supply that I was able to rig up to some pre-existing wiring. Makes the

place downright cozy. From his reaction the first time he saw it, I'm pretty sure I did something right when I made this place. He seemed impressed. The battery pack only needs to be hauled back to the lair to be recharged every once in awhile, and I can do all that from the garage, which makes it easy to do without raising any suspicion.

Christ, it's a long walk. Which is great mostly, but there's not much left of autumn and I can't shut up the voice in the back of my head that is starting to worry if I'll be able to – y'know, perform – once the chill in the air really starts to sink into my skin. I'm afraid it might have its usual effect on me.

I got a strong ulterior motive for being so diligent about keeping that battery pack charged. I only want to use this trick sparingly. More than anything I don't want to start relying on it to get where I need to be. But, man... what a difference it makes. He don't know any of this, but I've rigged the whole place with sun lamps. Confiscated a *real* nice setup from this scumbag dealer I took down with no trouble about five months back. He'd been growing in one of the walk-in closets of this fancy condo and supplying his crop to two nearby public high schools on the lower east side. So it was kind of for *the good of society*, along with my sex life, ok? Not to mention what is probably my last scrap of machismo and dignity, or whatever I got to fucking pass for it these days.

I just can't -- I *can't* bring myself to tell him about that.

The most fucked up part is, I realize it's not even a long-term solution, me not telling him. I mean, Leo is one sharp cookie. He's gonna put two and two together eventually. It's only a matter of time. I realize I'm being a coward. Guess that's what burns me up about it worse than anything else. It never fails to make me feel like shit for all the times I've had to point it out whenever I caught Leo being not-so-Fearless about our admittedly fucked up relationship.

I'm not saying he isn't still a coward about it ever, because he is. Most of the time he is, about anything that has to do with us. Look, I'm just being honest. You should see what I've had to put up with. Still, I ain't through putting up with his bullshit yet. Not even close. And I finally got it through the rocks in my skull that bringing up this fact point-blank never does either of us a damned bit of good.

You gotta understand me enough to see through all my macho street warrior bullshit posturing. There weren't no coming of age story for me, before this. I'm not saying I never made alliances with humans during my legendary topside adventures, cuz everybody knows by now that there were. But it wasn't ever... about that. Mostly it was just some people I knew I could count on not to blow their tops when they saw me. Some restaurants I could eat at if I stuck to the booths in the back. Some bars that would serve me if I was careful to keep out of the light. A few safe houses, some informants, that sort of thing. Nobody from the surface world ever desired me – not so far as I know, anyway – and it probably would have meant the end of our acquaintance if they had. These weren't friendships so much as conveniences, and there was almost always violence at the center of it. Back in those days I was all about chasing a different kind of rush: confrontation, adrenaline, and all the rest of that dark shit I was addicted to for years.

In all that time, there was never a reason to feel anything like this weird tenderness Leo wakes up in me lately... The littlest things he does can turn me stupidly happy. I love that we got no chance of sneaking up on each other these days. It's like somehow we've become supernaturally aware of each other's presence. I have to check my instinctive

glances towards him all the time, because my attention will just get sucked towards him before I even know he's there.

Yeah, uh... can you not repeat any of that? And not just cuz I would sound like the biggest fag if people knew I went around thinking sappy cornball shit like that... actually, there's that too. But I don't hate myself just for thinking it. Not anymore... I don't know or even care at this point whether I'm actually gay, or bi, or straight and bi-curious. Straight with even less options than a lonely dude in the navy or in prison, right? Any-way, fuck all those human labels. What's the difference, really? Call me whatever the hell you want. Tell people I'm a goddamned *dendrophiliac* for all that I care. (According to Don, there is actually a word for people who wanna fuck trees.)

Course, Leo's never understood or shared my apathy about the whole sexual orientation thing. I'm tempted to say I just matured, put things in perspective finally. Worrying about how gay I was, it started to feel like sweating the small stuff. I mean, I'm already doomed to stay in the closet for life about being an entirely different species than 99 point a billion more nines percent of the whole freakin' universe, right? Come on, I keep telling him, we got way better reasons than that to have low self esteem! But fat chance of getting him to see it that way.

God, we're getting close to our place. My heart starts beating faster. It's getting hard to think about anything besides how good Leo looks, still all sweaty from our practice together and the fast pace he's been setting.

There's this lull in the forward motion as we're stuck waiting for an underground train to pass in front of us. His hand dragging on mine goes slack and I come to a stop beside him. We can only stand there and wait for it, holding hands in the darkness. I can feel his attention sliding my way, sneaking glances, and once I notice I can't seem to help glancing back. With the subway lights flashing over his pale shiny skin, it almost seems like we're underwater together. Everything looks surreal. That's when it hits me again, and I don't know what comes over me. I'm usually so bad about compliments, but he looks so good that I come right out and tell him so.

Let me tell you, complementing Leo will get you places. I really should try it more often.

Yeah, suddenly he's all sweet, sly smiles. I can feel his breathing picking up, and that's the only warning I get before he reaches for me. His foot hooks against my ankle and topples us both to the ground. It's a commercial subway, thank god. The last thing we need is a bunch of dipshit passengers with nothing to do but stare out the window and gawk at the two turtle creatures groping each other in the darkness.

Fuck it, I remember thinking. Who needs the damned sun lamps! If I'd had my way, I'd coulda taken him right then and there. But once the train has passed us, the moment we were having mostly goes too. He tries to pull me up to my feet. I protest - grab onto him and grumble something unintelligible. But Leo's not hearing any of it. "Come on," he says. "We're almost there. We've come all this way!"

I don't follow his logic, but whatever. Doesn't matter. Sometimes the best thing to do (if you want to get laid) is to go along with whatever Leo's saying. He's talking like this has become the official mission, suddenly. Lord forbid we deviate from The Plan when doing it in our little maintenance room was the original goal.

He's right, though – it ain't far away at all from where we're at. I tell myself to stop

being horny and ornery and haul myself up to my feet. We start walking again, and there's not much to think about except how annoying Leo can be, and how much I still wanna jump him, and how those two things could pretty much sum up our whole relationship.

Before I know it, we're heading into the last tunnel. It's a small, crappy tunnel, the kind with a really low-ceiling, so you have to walk through it hunched over the whole way. Normally I hate these small, crappy tunnels, but this one's okay (mostly because our place is just at the other end of it). Leo's leading the way, because he can't help himself, so it puts me at a great angle to mess with him. I'm still worked up and the temptation is too great for awhile. I reach out and slide my fingers up under his tail, copping a feel. He reaches back and bats my hand away sharply. It's too dark to really see the death look I know full well is being throwing my way. But I don't want to cheese him off completely. It would be an awful lonely walk all the way back to the lair without him, so I don't try it again.

We've cleared the tunnel. My heart slams in my chest with new anticipation. I couldn't tuck my tail up right now, even if I had a good reason to try.

I wrap my arms around him as soon as we've crossed into our secret little fuckpad. I'm all over him before we even make it onto the bed. He doesn't protest or try to throw me off him this time. His arm stretches forward, reaching for the switch that will turn on the lights.

"You don't have to," I tell him, a strained growl. Like always, I'm having a hell of a time pinning him in place.

"But we're always hiding, aren't we? Always skulking in the dark... And anyway, you're beautiful," he goes on to explain smoothly, sweeping a hand behind my head. "So I'd rather see you."

I tuck my chin, brightly embarrassed. Nobody's ever called me that before, and I don't know what to say.

His bone plates under my palms feel cool and smooth, cooler than anything else in the room suddenly. I can feel them rising and falling beneath my spread hands as he starts to breath faster. He reaches one hand back and his dry fingertips drift up and down the back of my neck where he knows my skin is the most sensitive. Up and down, up and down. God, it's making me want him so bad.

I growl again and force myself to drag my face up off his shoulder. I twist away from the intoxicating scent of him and try and get control of my spinning head, but it doesn't help. This is a cramped and poorly ventilated concrete box we've decided to cuddle up in, and the air has become a thick cloud of our sexually charged hormones. His fingers wrap around my bandanna tails just below the knot, tugging insistently. Already the heat from the lamps is soaking into the walls. It's an oven in here suddenly. Every one of my senses is blazing. They were working their magic, stirring up my dormant hormones. Soon I am groaning against his shell, my big arms wrapped tight around him from behind. The effect is disorienting. Suddenly time is moving too quickly to keep track of things. I'm not sure how we even got like this. I don't remember getting him flipped around. But now we're on the ground together, and I'm on top of him, and it's pretty clear that we're not making it onto the bed.

Maybe this whole thing I been waiting for was a bad idea from the start. For the first time it occurs to me that maybe fucking him under the sun lamps is something we should *work up* to. But these last minute flutters of panic beating a warning against the inside of my plastron are not enough to actually pull me off of him. Like always, I am completely owned by the forward momentum of my crazy overwhelming feelings. Wrapping my knuckles in a tight grip on the edge of his shell, I make a sound like a snarl and push against the ground with both legs. My tail is stiff and swollen, it's a mild and delicious shock when the wet and hyper-sensitive skin hits the air. I can't help it, and push it out the rest of the way, and start to prod him with it. It feels so good to follow these instincts and drive it against the backs of his legs and his lean, muscular ass. I am humming and groaning as I smear and stab him with it.

"Ohh. Oh, Raph..." Leo chokes raggedly, pushing back against me. I'm muttering too -- praising him I think -- but I can't for the life of me give an accurate report of what I was actually saying. I'm too far gone to wait anymore. I would say anything to further this.

It takes me longer than it should to figure it out, but finally I deduce something important from his gentle bucking beneath me and the way his eyes are closed, and the rhythmic way his legs and shoulder muscles are bunching -- Leo's cock is out too! More than that, I realize. He is hastily beating off, in that way we do, using the muscles in his tail to saw it between his clenched thighs. It's another mild shock, one that kicks up my excitement. This is a good sign. Oh, yeah... This is a **VERY** good sign.

See, there's no way I can penetrate him if he's hard. There's just no where for me to GO until he's been taken care of, so to speak. So I'm excited, but at the same time, it strikes me that this is a self-sacrificing thing for him to do. By the urgent pace of his pumping, I can tell he's trying to make himself come quickly. And the amazing thing is, he must be doing this for my sake.

My heart is hammering. God...! I really, really want to now. My mouth has gone wet and more than anything I want him to get off so I can mount him and fuck his tail raw. It only takes a second or two after that to realize... god damnit all. I am the world's most selfish asshole. I can't just let him take care of both of us. It ain't right.

I gnash my teeth against the effort that it takes me to stop dry humping his legs. I gotta do something about this, pronto! I spit into my hand, as much spit as I can manage while still being quiet and discreet about it. Loogie hocking noises do not really do it for him, see.

Now, spit sounds may be unsexy – but sloppy wet hand jobs are a whole 'nother story apparently. I'm not going to lie. I don't really get a whole lot out of this sexually, tugging on his dick for him. The only reason I'm even remotely good at it -- or giving blowjobs, for that matter -- is because some of my early attempts at sweet loving sessions with Leo quickly turned into *training* sessions because I was sucking so bad (yeah, worst pun ever).

By now I've had time to get over most of my awkwardness. I've been waiting for him so long that we're finally past all that. There's just no need for it. And somehow, it don't even matter if the sex act itself ain't especially doin' anything for me. There's this whole other level where it still feels real good to do it for him, like I'm pulling my weight for once instead of just letting him take care of both of us. That's what Leo does: he steps up. It's just in his nature to do more than his fair share, without say-

ing a word or resenting a soul for it.

But not this time -- not for a moment like this one. For some reason, I just can't stand to let him.

The reach-around works like a charm. Leo glances back at me, surprised – and maybe a little embarrassed, too -- but I can see he's happy with me. Yeah, he pretty much melts after that. Gets real clumsy and loud, and this ripe, lusty smell starts pouring off of him, and all of this tells me that I am doing my job. The lesson has been mastered, and I am doing just fine.

Historically I have not had a whole lotta' talent for stopping myself from acting like a moron without outside assistance. This time I'm gonna share some of that blame with the damned heat lamps.

This should be my moment of triumph, right? He's about to give me exactly what I thought I wanted. There was even a point as we were walking here where I had it out with myself over this very thing. And the decision I quickly came to was not bring it up at all. There was no good reason to! Especially not now, with Leo underneath me and egging me on, pretty much. He's play fighting with me, churring openly, and doing a real number on his fists by dragging them on the concrete in front of him.

All of these things are signs that I am in the clear. This is my green light. So OF COURSE it's time for me to open my dumb mouth and say the one thing I'd decided wasn't a good idea to say!

I can see him getting distracted from cumming because now he's noticed the struggle starting to show on my face. I pump my hand even harder over his cock in retaliation, trying to fend off the questioning look he's starting to give me. He's always been better than me at stare downs. Apparently he's better even when I have the supposed advantage of my hand wrapped around his junk. I veer my head away and the words spill out of me. "Leo," I say in a strangled voice. All the while I'm thinking, SHUT UP, SHUT UP! "Why are you even...? You know you don't have to, right? I mean, we just wound up like this. And I want to. But I also wanna do – uh, whatever you – wellidunreallyknow. But. it's just that." This reminder coming out of my mouth has quickly become horrifying. Terrifying. But there's no turning back from it now. "Leo, You know it ain't my *turn*!" There! I'd said it. Now I would surely be defeated by my own stupid, overblown sense of fairness.

He only has a few seconds to realize what I'm talking about but it's enough time to start giving me cocky, incredulous grin. That's when his orgasm hits, and the force of it wipes the scoffing amusement right off his face. He's curling in on himself and for a time he can't do much of anything except shudder and yelp with pleasure as his cum sprays all over the hot concrete underneath us. The potent smell of it mixes up with our pheromones and turns all my thoughts carnal. My head becomes a tangled mess of wants. It's all I can do just to focus on the duty before me and keep on milking his slick black mace until he finishes and his twisted features finally begin to relax. It was good enough to get him off, but he never did get his prongs out so it's not a long wait. I watch him the whole time, because there's some deep mystery in seeing such a tightly wound figure come undone, but soon I could feel his dick going soft and pulling back into his tail. It wasn't firing anymore, but jizz still welled up at the tip and hung like clear honey off the nubs, and oozing down the sides... and between my fingers... and all down the his legs, probably... yep. Jesus. Slime is everywhere.

At another time I might have been put off by this, but the timing was good I guess. In that moment it all felt very serene and natural, and also I might have been distracted by feeling pretty desperate to fuck him now. My strokes had become very gentle, knowing he was probably very sensitive already and soon he would have to push my hand away. But instead he endured it for even longer and turned his head back enough to study me with hooded, bliss-drunk eyes. I got the distinct feeling he was enjoying how patient and sweet I was behaving in spite of how worked up I was.

"Forget about *taking turns*, will you?" he finally demands. Somehow the hushed voice he is using still manages to sound no-nonsense. "Forget all of that, and come here."

"Nngh..." This awful creaking sound is the only response I can summon. I hesitate only as long as it takes for his words to fully register. Then I snap towards him like a starving dog let off its chain and seize him, roughly reasserting my place above him.

I waste no time in rubbing the swollen mace head along the underside of his tail, where the scales were small and felt like softly studded leather. I suspect humans have it easier, and probably real turtles do too... or maybe that's just wishful thinking. The truth is, I don't know whether to blame the way our freakish mutant bodies are put together, or the angle I'm coming at him, or sheer lack experience. Either way, just like the time before, I find I have to reach down guide myself into place. The ego blow is quickly soothed by the indescribable awesome that is my piece sinking into him. Instinct drives me to push with my legs and I shove myself in deeper. It all happens much faster and more violent than I would have if I'd had enough sense left for courtesy. The noise Leo makes is approving, even though it seems to come from him with effort and through a white row of teeth that were bared and gnashing together in what looked to me like obvious pain.

"Hhaah... huh..." I could hear him panting.

"Ya' okay?" It sounded like good panting, but I still felt compelled to be sure.

"Y-yeah," he gasped. "Raph! Please. I-I'm ready! Nnhh... Fuck me! Please, fuck me!"

I think what finally drove me insane was hearing him talk like that. You gotta realize, normally the guy *never* swears! (Never did buy that a-hundred percent, mind ya'. Alone in the dojo, training at some ungodly hour so we don't see him screwing up his new flip-kicks or whatever, bet he lands flat on his ass and swears up a storm. Tell me you can't see him!)

In retrospect, maybe I should have been concerned by this un-Leo-like behavior. Or maybe I'm just an evil sunuvabitch when I'm just about to fuck someone. But whatever it was, hearin' him talk like that, it had a mighty effect on me. Almost like it was some kind of sick personal triumph on my part. Something finally clicks in my head, something that seems so impossible, but at the same time so obvious that I can't believe I'm only seeing now it for the first time. Leo is way more gay than me! This is the reason why he has had such a harder time accepting himself. And way more importantly (by my thinking) what it ALSO means is that maybe the real reason Leo so okay with not taking turns anymore is because... LEO LOVES MY COCK! That's *it!* Holy shit. This mystery is solved. Leo loves the cock. Worships MY cock. His shit cannot wait to get railed by me.

No, I can feel nothing but totally stoked for having worked him up so good that he

completely forgets himself. Instead it was like the best proof of my own prowess that I had ever experienced. And after thinking about all of that... well, whatever else that went through my head from that point on -- I wouldn't exactly call it 'thinking'. Hearing him beg for my shit like a gutter-mouthed whore was all the encouragement I needed to frenzy.

I'm ashamed to admit that I had zero control of myself from this point on. I begin to slam him so hard that even though we'd only done it once before, it became the most familiar feeling in the world -- the only thing I could remember how do. It probably sounds like the worst sort of cop-out, but I swear it was like I stopped understanding everything else -- I couldn't tell you where I ended and he began, or that we were separate things at all. We were just... one thing... somehow. We were just one thing with one ancient purpose.

Okay, shut up. At least I didn't call it a 'primordial dance'. I'm not trying to be flowery, here. I just got no clear way to describe it in every-day words.

When you're in that state... cumming through your prongs... Christ, there's just nothing like it. It just goes on and on forever, and every second feels *so fucking good*. You probably can't even wrap your monkey brain around how good it feels. You can go ask Don about it if you want to hear a bunch of disturbing crap about our bodies being tricked into thinking we're fertilizing a bunch of eggs or whatever. All it really means to me is... six or seven minutes. That's *average*, okay? Most of you would count your lucky stars to cum for six or seven seconds. Think about it.

Or go ask the crack-heads in Harlem. They might actually have an idea.

So that was it. On the one hand, it was like some kind of earth moving spiritual experience. But once it was all said and done, I can't even describe to you what happened any better than "it felt really fucking good". It doesn't excuse the fact that I lost my goddamn mind. And for all that I felt so connected to Leo while I was getting to that sweet place... afterwards, I ultimately realize that I went there alone.

The moment I can swim up from it and actually string two thoughts together, it's like I have to grab onto this rocky edge of my sanity and hold on tight. Maybe that's a shitty metaphor, because what was looming under me was not pain and fear and death. It's the opposite. There is an ocean of bliss was right beneath me, still lapping at my toes, and it would be the easiest thing to let go, just spread my limbs and float some more on that feeling. My determination to stay sane is almost -- I don't want to call it human, but let's just say it is not exactly natural behavior on my part. That level of bliss, it's not like it gets old, not even after six or seven minutes. Shit. You've had orgasms before right? Wouldn't you ride it forever if you could?

But I can't let myself. And regardless of whether or not I'll ever feel right about saying it, maybe this is all the proof I need. I must really love this guy. Jesus.

Plan B is what we call it. 'Trust your partner to fight you off', that's the long and the short of it. In those first cold gasps of sanity, I realize that's exactly what this has become. Plan B must have went into effect big-time! My stomach wrings sour with fear as I realize that I have NO CLUE how much time has passed.

I drag my hands up to look at them slowly. My world has slowed into a lurching horror show. I'm still seeing through a confused haze. I'm checking my hands for blood and

and it takes a long time to separate the awful possibilities from what I'm really seeing. I've learned to be wary of that sluggish feeling of contentedness that always follows this. Everything seems so right with the world, until it's not -- it's really not! It's not like this hasn't ever happened before.

But tonight we weren't sticking to Don's strict notions of "safe sex". This is really not the time to screw up like this! Some punishment-seeking part of me thinks that waking up to a scene of gore and devastation would be my just desserts. But my hands seem to be clean. Finally, it sinks in that they ARE clean. They're clean, thank God!

I'm draped on his side and our legs are sticky and tangled together. I crane my neck to look down at what I can see of our tumbled bodies. The sight that greets my roaming eyes continues to comfort me. We are greens and yellows and browns, all the colors we should be. Well, we are also sort of purple in few places, particularly where I must have bruised my thighs against his shell when I was mindlessly plowing him. But the important thing is, nothing is red!

I start to look over the rest of him, just to be sure. He's stroking my head now. I can hear Leo saying my name, and something else, talking sweet to me. But I can't really understand any of it yet. I'm just so glad that every part of him I check seems to be whole. No blood was drawn at all, far as I can tell (except for those knuckles, which he did to himself).

I start to relax then, and allow myself to sink back into the aftershocks of what has happened. It's still kind of confusing – always is. We're never in the position I expect us to be in. I'm also drenched in sweat. We both are. The soft hum of his words drifting over my head start making sense eventually. Leo's whispering that he's fine, and not to worry. Everything's fine, we're fine, just enjoy it. By the time I can understand all of this, I am already turning into a heap of turtle shaped Jello and no longer need to hear it.

Just when I've let down the last of my defenses – just when I am lounging in what's left of my bliss, my heavy eyelids drift upwards and find the one place he might be hurt. Wouldn't you know it? The one place I forgot to check! Tears are streaming down his face. And we're not talking 'tears of joy' or any of that shiny Hollywood bullshit. No. What I mean is, Leo has seriously started to cry!

Shit. Shit-shit-shit! Dread is filling up my insides. Something did happen after all, I'm thinking. I did something, said something, treated him like a piece of meat. He didn't seem hurt, not on the outside, but somehow I must have tore him up just the same.

My first thought is that I've shown him some scary, monstrous side of me. I can't even say how this thought kills me. Maybe he can't look at me the same anymore after tonight. He's seen something in me that he'll never be able to forget. Maybe...

"Leo... what?" That's all I can manage to say. Actually it comes out more coherent than I'm expecting myself to sound. Scrunching my brow with pain and confusion, touching his face. I'm trying to get him to look at me head on, but he won't. He won't look at me. I don't understand anything anymore. A sharp and horrible sadness overwhelms me, raking through my guts and making mince meat of them. All these awful thoughts and blind guesses are making me want to die.

"It's not you," I can hear him muttering, "It has nothing to do with you." But it seems

like such an obvious lie. I mean, he's used this very same lie with me a bunch of times before!

"How can - what?" It sounds like more of the same old shit, one step forward and three steps back. I can't help but recoil from his words. "No! I - we - *god damnit*, Leo! You gotta - you gotta tell me! You gotta stop doing this to me. I can't take it!"

"I don't have to tell you anything!" This defensive and mortified tone of his means he wasn't even planning on BRINGING UP whatever awful thing it was that I did to make him cry. That's so like Leo: he would rather suffer, rather deal with whatever-it-is without me, like his psycho state of denial is supposed to protect me from feeling hurt and conflicted. Probably he was hoping I'd was too out of it to notice. Thought he'd have plenty of time to get his game face on.

But Leo's game face is NOT on. His voice has gone all creaky and strange, like he needs to clear his throat, as he goes on to say, "I swear it, Raph! P-please, just - look, I had fun. I did. This is... something else. It's got noth— well, it's got hardly anything to do with you!"

"BULLSHIT!" Christ. I think by this point I'm actually shaking him. When I'm sad and scared shitless, it can turn into anger quicker than you can say 'what the flying fuck is your problem, Leo'. "I WILL NOT PLAY THIS GAME WITH YOU, LEO! We've come too far! It ain't fair to leave me in the dark like this! You think it's for my own good, but believe me! Watching you suffer all these unspoken burdens... you are NOT doin' me any favors!"

Nothing gets that game face on quicker than me throwing a temper tantrum. Leo is giving me an icy and vaguely superior look now. "Just what do you think this is about, mm?" he asks me, so flat that it's barely a question.

"When I! When we were just!" I'm spluttering now. He has an uncanny talent for making me feel dense. Whether I'm actually right doesn't matter. He's that good. "HOW SHOULD I KNOW?" I finally howl at him. "How the FUCK am I supposed to get any of this if you can't even trust me, huh? That's my point!" I ball my fists and pound him once on the plastron, a bit harder than I mean to, but it doesn't even phase him. "It ain't FAIR just to let me wonder!"

"For the last time," he says again, cold as ice. "You have nothing to worry about. It has nothing. To do. With you."

I hate when he pulls his leader voice on me in the bedroom, and I almost tell him so then and there. But it's the wrong time for it. Looking into his calm, glassy eyes, I'm starting to re-process what he's been saying to me. "Leo... I swear to God. Look, maybe you've talked yourself into some skewed view of -- okay, I still have no idea what even happened. But if you--"

"We had sex! We had really great sex, okay?" Leo looks up and away like he's getting annoyed with me. "We both got off. I tossed you off in plenty of time. Yes, it was kind of... rough. But you know that's how I like it. And no one got hurt, which is also great. In fact, I hope we do it again soon. Okay?"

"Yeah, but -- how can you say that I'm 'hardly involved' when I was the one who was fucking you? Look, Leo. I'm not trying to fight about this! All I'm sayin' is – okay, it

felt good. Like, physically. But still! If we're doing things that – I don't know! That you still aren't a hundred percent okay with...?" I'm clueless, grasping at straws now. And it definitely shows.

Leo clears his throat derisively. "Please. I'd like to think I've progressed beyond *that*, at least."

"FINE!" I explode, throwing up my hands in a 'to-hell-with-being-nice-to-you' gesture. "You're doing great, Leo! You're great, we're great. Everything's swell! But just to satisfy my healthy sense of curiosity... can you PLEASE tell me what it was about this really awesome sex we just had that made you start to cry? Can you do that for me?"

Another stare-down follows, but I'm determined to win this time. Sure enough, after a long hard stare Leo's tough-guy act starts to fall apart before my eyes. "You'll think -- it's stupid," he says, looking away. His voice is pleading with me now. "It IS stupid! You'll think it's the dumbest thing you ever heard if I tell you. But I swear that I did have fun, Raph. So...please, can't we just rack it up to more of Leo's lame issues? Can't you just let it go?"

His whiny speech is giving me such a fucking headache that for a moment I'm actually tempted. Instead I just shake my head and groan loudly, "Leo!" The rest of my words get muffled. I have planted my face directly into his lap to plead the rest of my case into his sticky thighs. "Leo, Leo, no. Okay? Forget it. And whatever the fuck it is, it's bothering you, so -- so it ain't stupid. Or, maybe it is stupid. But if it is, I won't say it is. It's not gonna destroy me or make me think less of you. I probably won't think it's worth caring about, one way or the other. So please -- please just spit it out before I kill you, Leo!"

Silence. I don't take my face out of his lap. I suspect that seeing me plead in this ridiculous position is actually making it easier for him.

"It's not..." Crap. I know this water-logged, too dignified to sniffle breathing he's doing-- Leo's crying again. I definitely don't want to look up now. It's just the weirdest thing in the world to see. I force myself to be patient and give him time to pull himself together again. I know he'd rather not speak until he can do it without his voice cracking. Real soft, he finally says, "It's just that... I'd kept that oath for a *really long time*."

It takes me a few confounded seconds to realize that Leo was crying because he'd finally broke that oath we all swore when we were ten about not saying cuss words.

Okay. I make a HUGE struggle to keep my natural expression off my face. Mostly this is a big fail on my part, because moments later he is poking his finger into my cheek, pointing out where he can see me starting to smile. "There, you see? You see?!"

"I... no! I ain't!" Wow, that IS a stupid reason. That's all I can think at first. But of course, now he has suckered me into making this promise! My mouth is flapping open and shut like a fish. "I would never! It's perfectly..." I can't bring myself to say it's understandable. "It's fine!" I gasp. It's the stupidest reason in the world to start crying, but I can't say a goddamned thing.

I'm glad I managed not to laugh outright. My amusement doesn't last much longer. He looks past us, into the distance, and says something really sad. "You know, used

to come so naturally. But I can't seem to keep any of the promises I make to myself lately. I don't know when that changed..."

"Aww, geez, Leo," I say, because what else do you say to that? I sit up and wrap him in a fierce bear hug, hoping it will help make him feel better and also stalling for time. He buries his face into my shoulder and slumps against me. Shit. If I don't say something to say quick, he might cry on me. "Cut it out, will ya? You need to put that shit out of your head. That oath... I'm not saying it's stupid, but it don't mean a thing, Leo! Never did."

Yeah, so much for that idea I had about Leo all by himself in the dojo, cussing up a storm cuz he fell on his ass. My whole beautiful theory gets pitched right out the window. It was sweet while it lasted, but I know he wouldn't be upset like this if he'd broken the stupid oath before. "All I'm saying is... you've sworn way better oaths, Leo." I try running my hand over his skull. "You've defended us... We've always been able to count on you. The one about cussing, it was *nothing* next to those. Even Splinter will tell ya that it's not the words you use so much as how you use em'."

"Yeah," Leo agrees quietly into my shoulder. "I have heard him say that."

"And when you were using those words on ME back there? Hot damn, Leo. Any time, y'hear me? You can use that potty mouth on me ANY time."

I'm hoping this flattery will make him perk up and just be happy about what just happened. But there's something wrong with my tactics. This isn't the right kind of flattery at all, because Leo is looking off into the darkness. He looks more distant than ever. My words are pushing him away.

Hot as it was to hear, maybe it's just not how Leonardo wants to be. It's not how he wants to picture himself. "You know... forget it," I say, quietly back-peddling. "Hell, *I'll* forget it. Already have! Didn't hear a thing, okay? You can just go on like nothing ever..."

"It doesn't work that way, Raph," he says severely. "That's not how oaths work."

"Fine, then." I suck the inside of my cheek once, making a sympathetic click. "I guess you blew it."

"Guess so," he agrees flatly.

"There's no going back." I pause for the sake of drama before adding casually, "Not with *me*, anyway."

"That's right. There's... huh?" He looks over at me, sort of suspicious. "What do you mean?"

"You swore that oath before all of us, right? You been holding yourself to it with all of us."

"Yeah," he says with a scrunched up brow. He is prompting me to go on more than agreeing with me.

"Well – so, you just broke your oath to *me*. The others, you still ain't never cussed in

front of them. So you don't have to backslide completely. You can still... be whatever you want to be with them. You can be that good example. And when you're with me..."

"Right, right." He tries to turn away, mumbling bitterly, "You just love my potty-mouth." This strikes me as slightly annoying. What I'm trying to say here has nothing to do with sex.

"You can *relax*," I correct him sternly, putting my hands on his shoulders. I feel them tense, bracing against any attempt I might make to spin him back around, but I'm not about to try. I rub them instead, kneading my thumbs into the bunched muscles. "You can be whoever you are when it's too much bein' that perfect guy all the time."

He makes a rueful sound, a huff of air pushed through his teeth.

"You can be... flawed," I insist quietly. "We can be flawed together. I like to think we have that, lately."

"We do," he agrees, sounding surprised to admit it. "You're right. That's how it's been." I can feel the tension in his shoulders finally starting to let go. Encouraged, I get up on my knees to do a proper job of it. "Lately I'm shocked at the things you let me get away with," he adds. Even though I can't see his face, I'm pretty sure that he's starting to smile.

"Well, I ain't trying to be an insecure teen-age dickhead for life. And you don't need me cutting you down all the time."

"Just some of the time," he says, lolling his head back to look at me upside-down.

"Right," I agree, grinning down at him. "Sometimes you're askin' for it."

"Hai," he agrees, eyes glittering, his face very close to mine. In this moment, he is so adorable that every annoying thing he's ever done is ancient history and fully forgiven. Then he straightens up and looks forward again in a purposeful way. I take this to mean I am supposed to keep massaging his shoulders.

It seems strange to me how natural this feels, considering our history. Maybe it's just that lovey-dovey just-had-sex feeling people talk about. Some inner glow has taken over my brain, turned me into a sap.

Maybe I'm just getting used to this. To us.

My hands continue to work, and neither of us speaks for awhile. It's an easy silence, full of companionship and calm. What he just said goes both ways, I guess. Showing him this open affection is like something he is letting me get away with. I never expected to have this with anyone; I wrote off the whole idea a long time ago. The more I think about it, the more huge and important it seems. We are changing, and I am behind it one-hundred percent. I am not afraid. I want him to acknowledge to me and to himself that we are not brothers anymore. We are partners. He is crazy and he is strict and a real pain in the ass at times, but I accept all that. Next to this, the sex is has no consequence. This is what I've really been waiting for.

Someday the others will leave us. It will probably happen sometime after Splinter isn't around and holding us all together anymore. Hell, maybe Don won't even be

able to wait that long. Sometimes I think that mentally he's already packed his bags. With Mike, it's almost sadder because I don't think he even knows it. But the world above has been calling to him for awhile, and I think someday he will have to answer. Leo shares these dark suspicions. If we're not careful, it can depress the hell out of both of us.

As for me, I have decided to stay. I wish for some way to let him know without coming out and saying it. I try to wad all my thoughts into a tight crackling ball and push them out through the palms of my hands. *You won't have to worry about me.* I try to think the words as hard as I can, all the big important promises I can't ever seem to say. *I am not going anywhere. You can't be rid of me, even if you tried. As long as I am breathing, I am on your team for life.*

It works too well. He had been starting to lean into my hands but now he goes very still. He's too good at what he does lately, too damned sensitive to everything we're thinking. I don't think he means to be. Technically he's not allowed to hear what's going on in our heads, not unless we specifically show it to him.

*Raph*, he says, but I don't think he's really saying it out loud. There is no direction to the words; they come from all around and no where. *Raph, Raph, I believe you, okay?* He turns around and if there was any doubt before, it's gone now. His mouth doesn't move at all, but I hear him in my head just the same. *I don't always believe in myself, lately. But I believe in you.*

He wants to kiss me, I can tell, but he respects how I feel about that. So instead he is burrowing against my neck, pressing his mouth to it. I don't mind and even nuzzle back some. He gets more ferocious about it, and I wind up knocked onto my back with how bad he wants to climb on me and fake kiss me.

This is better, I think. This is a whole lot closer to what I wanted. Is it so much to ask for, that we just be happy together? Finally, I think. Finally.

"Remember when I said I wouldn't mind doing it again sometime soon?" he murmurs, once his teeth let go from biting me. "I hope now wouldn't be too soon...?"

"Heh," I murmur, starting to grin. I'm secretly grateful for the heat lamps, though, because otherwise I might not be so confident when I murmur, "You won't hear me complaining."

"And what was it you were trying to say earlier," he murmurs slyly, "something about it being my turn?"

I go very still beneath him.

"Raph...?" He pulls away to give me a penetrating look. No pun intended, asshole. But that's what he's doing. His look is digging into me and I can't squirm out from under it. I have to crane my head far off to the side, and even then I can't quite avoid it.

"Right," I manage, but any fool can see through me. I can't even look at him.

"Raph?" He says my name with kindness, all the cleverness gone from his voice. "It's okay, Raph. We can be flawed together, remember?"

"Flawed, right," I choke, trying and failing laugh about it. But he's right. I can't play this off like a tough guy. Not after I've asked him to trust me with everything. It has to go both ways, right? "I... I ain't ready. There. Okay? I'm a coward." I close my eyes tightly. "Christ."

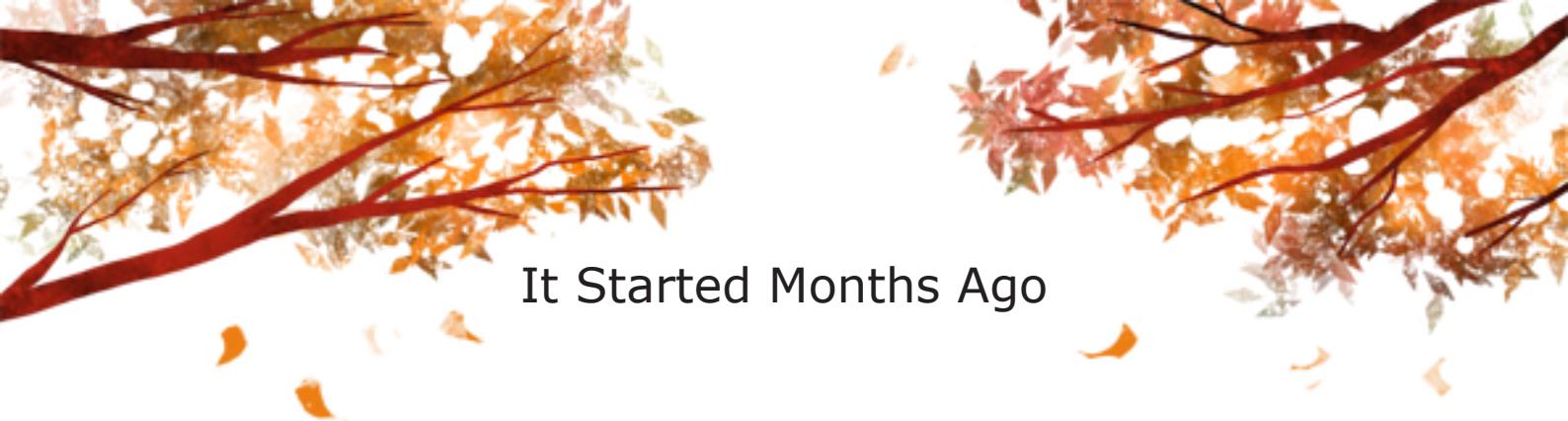
"That's fine," he says sagely.

"No, it ain't," I counter, sullen and ashamed.

"Yes, it is," he insists, putting on his tone that wouldn't allow any talk-back. Then he settles into a drape over me and cocks his head. "Listen, Raph. I won't act like it isn't something I'll continue to hope for... but, you know what?" I peek up and find him smiling. "Take all the time you need. I owe you that much, don't I?" He touches his beak to mine gently and says, "I'm willing to wait."

**Fin**





## It Started Months Ago

It started months ago for him, as it always did. The glances at the calendar telling him that time was counting down were spaced out at first. Raph wasn't sure why he'd even started the tradition, but he couldn't stop now. He felt like the day was special if for no other reason than he figured out the difference between his crush on Casey and the way he felt for his brothers. How that one day managed to imbed itself in his memory, to stand out year after year as something he should respect and honor, was a mystery. There was no way he'd forget though. This year was different from any other. Mike had been his since before he'd realized the truth. After waiting so long, Donnie had come to them months ago. So Raph had two brothers to "gift" this year.

The idea made him excited and nervous at the same time. After all, Mike knew things were different between them on this one day. It would be routine if Raph hadn't been careful to change things up according to time and activities. Don didn't know anything about it and Raph wasn't about to explain. He never had told Mike why this one day was different, and he'd rather keep it that way. It was embarrassing enough to know the reason himself!

His plans were made now though. All he had to do was wait until morning.

-----\*\*\*\*\*-----

Raph managed to stay behind when Don said he wanted to do a test on some of the outer defenses. Though it wasn't that long ago they almost lost Don to that mutation thanks to Bishop's alien outbreak and Raph was still worried about his brother, he needed the time alone with Mike. Leo had volunteered to help Don, anyway, and Don was past annoyed at them for trying to make sure he did nothing too taxing. If Raph had tagged along, he'd have been subjected to nothing but nagging and griping from two brothers. The thought didn't bear consideration.

Mike had volunteered to do dishes in order to get out of what was sure to be boring work in the sewers and that was fine with Raph. He watched as Mike set to the dishes reluctantly, obviously distracted since Raph was able to sneak behind and gently tug on his tail without Mike suspecting. Raph whirled him around and pressed a demanding kiss against his lips. Mike's moan filled the small area.

"Shhhh...Dun wan' Master Splinter ta hear," Raph murmured, ducking his head to play at Mike's neck. His hands skimmed over Mike's body. Mike stifled a not so pleased moan. He tended to be as vocal in sex as he was in everyday life. It just meant Raph loved making him be quiet. A hand on Mike's tail earned a stifled cry and a press against Raph's teasing fingers. So far, nothing beyond a fairly normal coupling for them. It wasn't until Mike was desperate enough to use the fact his body was trapped between Raph and the counter to wrap his legs around Raph's waist and press in close that Raph felt safe to shift the mood.

The kiss lost none of its passion, but became gentler. Raph's fingers stopped pulling and stroking and became a soft, barely there presence sliding over Mike's tail. This was what Raph planned out over all those months. He was normal rougher and it took all of the self control he had to give Mike this one time a year where it was soft and gentle. His reward was the way Mike struggled to stay quiet, burying his face in Raph's neck to muffle sounds he couldn't stop. Their climax wasn't the thrill and rush it normally was, the careful handling making even that surge a soft float over the peak of pleasure. Mike stayed pressed close to Raph for as long as he could as if holding onto the last few precious moments. Finally, Raph tugged him away, cleaned him off, and let him rest at the kitchen table before moving to finish the dishes.

Mike certainly couldn't stand up long enough to do them himself.

-----\*\*\*\*-----

Raph carried a tray as he stepped into Don's lab, shutting the door behind him. Don had come in here shortly after returning home and, consequently, missed lunch. Delivering the stew and coffee was just the excuse Raph had been looking for.

"Thanks, Raph," Don said, actually looking up from his typing to smile at simple meal. Raph just nodded and leaned back, starting a conversation about some ideas he had for a new workout dummy. It wasn't anything that technically required Don's input, but it distracted Don enough that he ate the sandwich while they chatted. When the computer beeped, Don turned and stared typing in the next string of commands. By the time he was finished, Raph was behind him, one dark green hand rubbing his neck. Don tipped his head forward slightly as he groaned.

"Can ya let that go for a bit?" Raph's voice was low in an attempt to slip though Don's defenses as his other hand joined in the easy massage. Don's agreement was more of a moan than a word. Smirking, Raph's hands worked deep into the olive toned muscles, sliding down arms and neck. It was interesting, watching Don relax so completely. Even better was the long, drawn out moan when the massage moved to those creative hands. The soft churr coming from Don's chest excited him. He loved the feel of Don's skin, loved knowing he was the one doing this to his brother.

Satisfied that he'd worked all tension from Don's hands, Raph spun the chair to give the same massage to Don's legs. He made a mental note to tell Mike how much Don enjoyed this. It held excellent potential for activities. Turning his attention back to Don, Raph began kissing his way up the spread thighs. The massage continued as the kisses trailed higher and higher, alternating legs as Raph went. All it took was one soft lick over Don's slit to have the thick cock appearing. He quickly covered it with his mouth, smirking at the choked off cry the action earned. Don moved in the chair, too relaxed to thrash about as normal. In almost no time, Raph's mouth was filled with his brother's essence. He swallowed it down, humming softly. Don had gone totally lax in his chair by the time Raph glanced up at him.

Licking him clean and chuckling, Raph lifted Don and moved them both on the bed. His hands resumed the massage while Don rested and enjoyed. This, he could get used to.

-----\*\*\*\*\*-----

The day was over and Raph felt it had been well spent. His time with Don and Mike had been exactly what he'd wanted it to be. Vaguely, he let his mind consider ideas for next year, but he wasn't worried about it yet. He'd plan it as he always had, in the weeks before.

Mike's plan drifted through his mind. Maybe he'd have all three brothers before next year. That, he could definitely live with.  
with his brothers as fairly as possible.

**Fin**

# UNCONTROLLED...

THE KEY IS IN CLEARING YOUR MIND AND RELAXING YOUR BODY.

... THIS WAY YOU'LL TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR BODY AND YOUR ACTIONS...

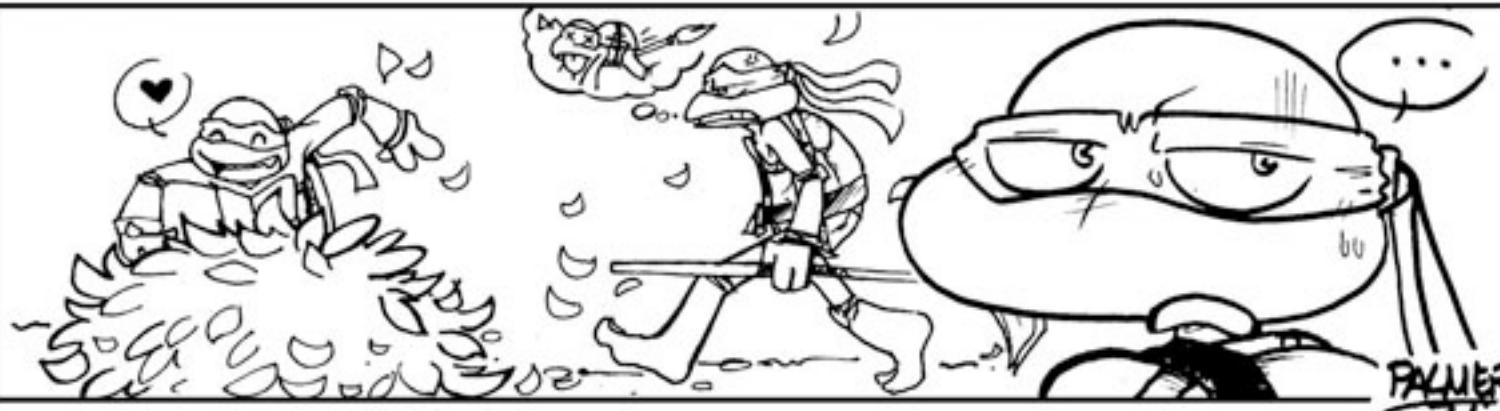
HEY! CLOSE YOUR EYES! WE AREN'T GETTING ANYWHERE LIKE THIS!

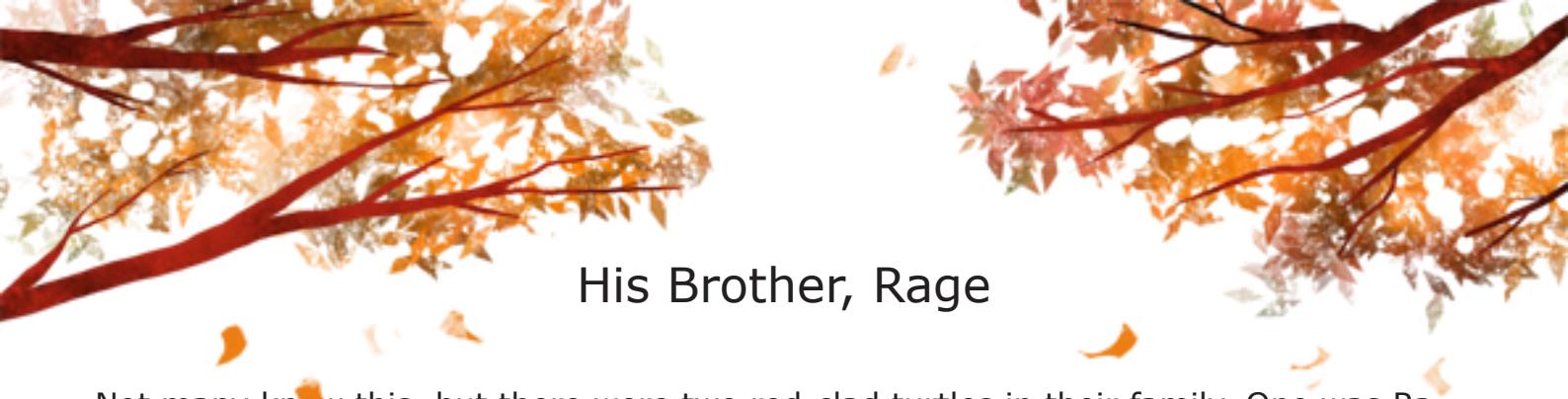


NO, RAPH! YOU MUST RESIST OR EVERYTHING WE'VE DONE WOULD'VE BEEN IN VAIN!

GRRR!

I DON'T CARE!  
I CAN'T HOLD BACK ANY LONGER,  
I MUST DO IT OR I'LL EXPLODE...





## His Brother, Rage

Not many knew this, but there were two red-clad turtles in their family. One was Raphael – he had golden irises and emerald-green skin. The other had black eyes, and his skin was always flecked with blood.

Not many knew about the latter. Raphael was basically the only one who knew about him. And it was only because the other lived in his head.

Raphael called him Rage – the monster that lurked beneath his skin.

\*~\*

It first started when he was five. He would start having dreams about another him, grinning at him in a way that made him wake up and cry for his father.

The black-eyed him in his head scared him.

As the time passed, their relationship evolved. In his (or was it theirs?) dreams, the other him would speak to him (*Don't you want to hurt them? Hurt them all?*), or urge him to play (*Smash it on his head! It'll be fun!*).

But then one day, his 'brother' started speaking to him during the daytime too.

*Stick the spoon into Splinter's eye. Wonder what his reaction would be?*

It scared him greatly, even more than the dreams. Dreaming bad things was normal – it happened to everyone. Noone else could hear voices in their heads. Even an eight-year-old knew that.

So he never told anyone.

\*~\*

They were twelve and a half when it happened. During their daily training, Leo had gotten an upper-hand on him, knocking him into a wall. He hit his head hard, been dazed for a long while.

Despite that, he had heard himself roar through the rush of blood in his ears, could feel his body flip over and charge at his oldest brother.

*I'll smash his head into the wall!! See how he likes it!!*

Sensei had barely managed to drag him off. After that, he had had to attend three months of extra one-on-one meditation sessions with Master Splinter. To help with his anger issues, he said.

And the black-eyed him had gotten a name – Rage.

\*~\*

Years passed again and again. Nothing would stop their passage, and nothing could stop Rage. Sure, Raphael could ignore most of the stuff constantly whispered/sneered into his ear, but he couldn't stop Rage's actions. Not all of them.

*...a lead pipe in his hand, Mikey laying on the ground, staring at him in horror...*

*Why'd you stop? We were just getting to the good part.*

No, Raphael couldn't stop Rage. As they got older, it was more and more difficult to ignore him. Raphael would suddenly find himself snarling at his brothers or father, saying cruel things to his friends just to hurt them, punching the walls in his room till his knuckles bled.

Rage was influencing his actions more and more every day. It scared him.

Raphael would do anything for his family. But Rage would do anything to them. He couldn't allow that.

So he drew away from his family, spending more and more time up on the rooftops, alone.

No, not alone.

*Why don't we stab someone with our sais? Uh, that lady looks like she has nice guts.*

He was never alone. Not with a monster in his head.

*I'm living in your head, Raphie. That means you're a monster too.*

He wasn't one. He wasn't the one who wanted to hurt everyone around just for fun.

*Ah, but you're not stopping me, are you? That makes you just as bad.*

No, I'm not stopping you because I can't.

*Cliche time! – can't or won't?*

Golden eyes closed tightly, an image of his sneering face, covered in blood, black eyes shining in delight, appearing behind his lids.

*Can't run from me, Raphie. I'm inside you.*

A shudder wracked his body, and Raphael stood up, turning around and heading home.

He needed help. Before Rage did something horrible.

\*~\*

Raphael sat in front of the TV, smiling softly at the show, watching the colours through half-lidded eyes. He reveled at the peace and quiet, both in the Lair and in his head.

Rage had been silent for months now.

It had been glorious. No more bad dreams making it impossible to sleep, no more whispers urging him to make something bleed, no more violent episodes endangering his family.

He didn't have to be alone anymore either. He could go sit with Leo, or Mikey, or Donny, or Master Splinter and not worry that he'd attack either of them.

It was safe again.

Though they did act weirdly around him. Leo was barely able to look him in the eye, and Mikey had these weird spells when he would just look at him with this sad look in his eyes. Master Splinter acted more or less the same, though he did sometimes just sit next to him, and pet his head, telling him in a soft voice how proud he was of him for seeking help, that he loved him, that they would help him through this.

Raphael knew it was stupid, but he would grin goofily at the praise and reassurance. If Rage had been there whispering his own opinion, he probably wouldn't have believed his father.

The only one not acting any different was Donny. He would still talk to him using words he would probably never understand, was still patient and understanding with him, still patched up his scrapes and bruises.

Sure, it was slightly different – the words he would never understand concerned his condition, the patience came when he was frustrated with himself over it, the scrapes and bruises came from tripping over his own feet.

The situations changed, not the behaviour. Raphael cherished that.

A tap on his shoulder brought his attention from the TV to the side. He blinked a few times to focus his sight, then smiled up as he recognised his immediate older brother.

Donny smiled back softly, and pressed a glass of water into one emerald hand, steady-ing it before the fingers closed over the cool surface. It took a few moments for Raph to hold it steady enough not to drop it, then opened his mouth, welcoming the two pills landing on his tongue.

He swallowed some water to wash them down, then handed the glass back, staring at his brother.

Donny nodded at him. "I'll come get you in an hour, okay? I need to run some more tests." he said slowly, pronouncing the words clearly.

Raphael blinked sluggishly at him, processing the words, then smiled. "Okay."

"Okay." With another smile, Don turned and left towards his lab.

Raphael watched him go, then turned his attention back to the TV, waiting till his brain could focus on the show again.

The pills made him slower, but it was okay. They muddled his brain enough that it im-

enough that it impossible for Rage to break through.

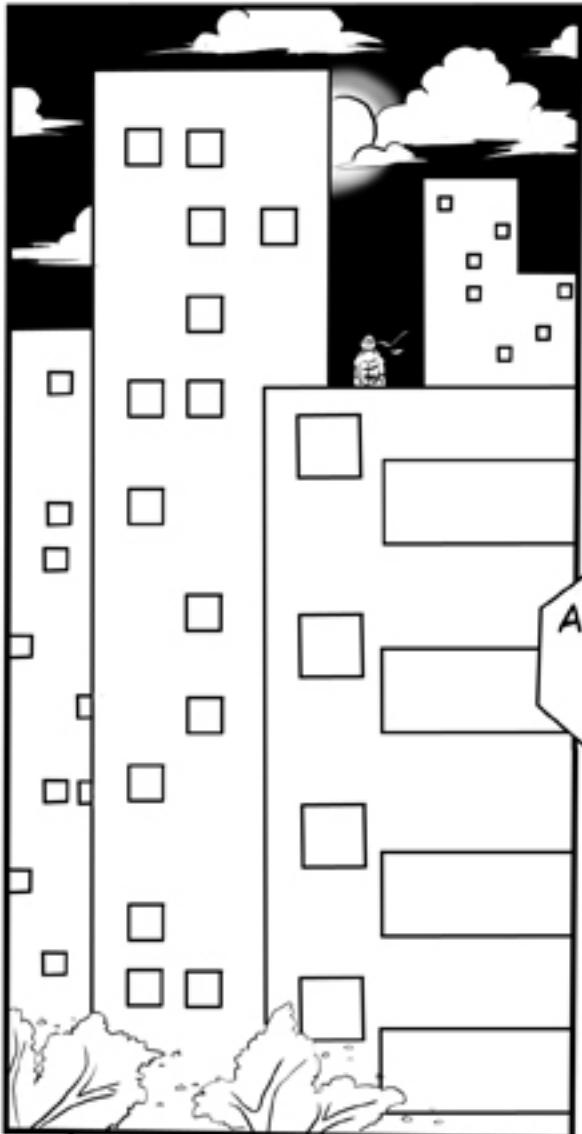
And that made it okay. He was alone in his head now, and he would wait in this drug-induced haze till Donny found a more workable solution.

He didn't mind. Not at all. After all, he was safe to be around now.

**Fin**

# WARMING UP

BY ROCKGAARA



AS EXPECTED:  
NOTHING!

ANOTHER USELESS  
NIGHT OF  
PATROLLING...



DULLLLLUUUD...!  
THIS SUCKS SO  
MUCH!!

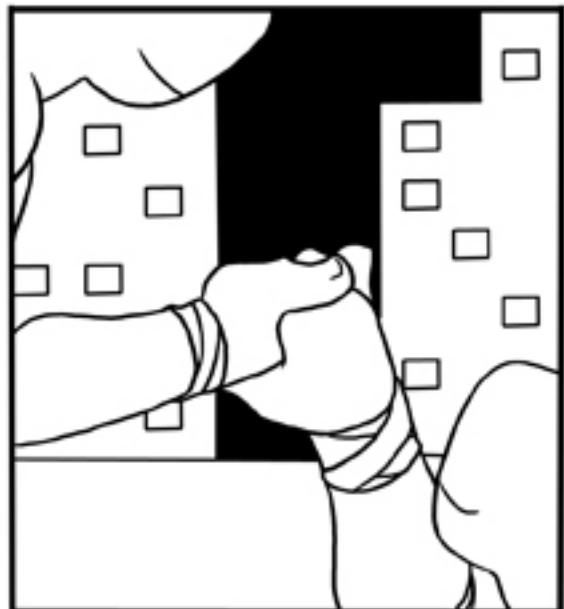
NOT ONLY IS IT  
BORING NIGHT WITH  
NO ACTION, IT'S A FRIGGIN'  
COLD WINTER'S NIGHT WITH  
NO ACTION!

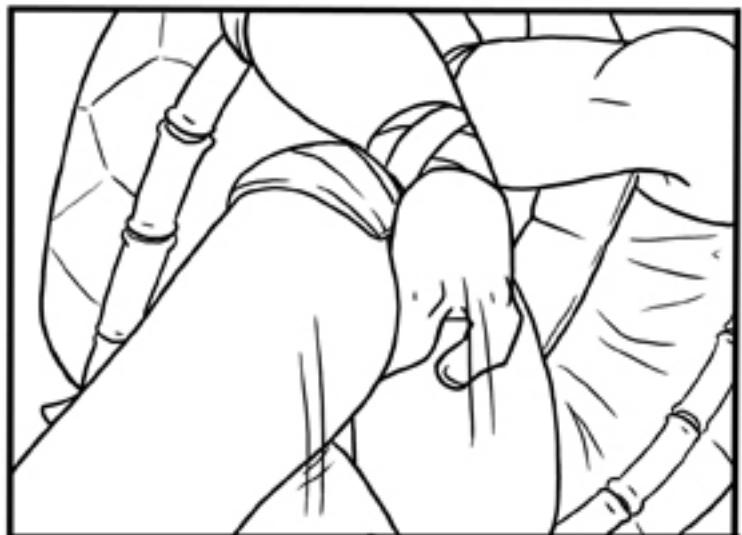
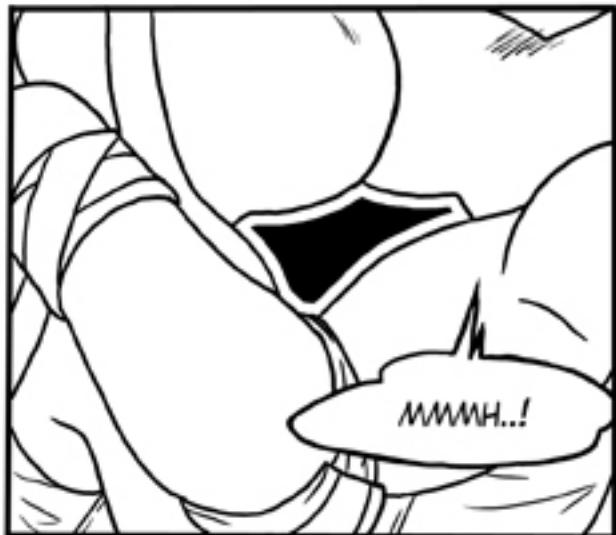


MIKEY... YER A CRYBABY!  
COLD!? WE'RE IN THE  
MIDDLE OF OCTOBER, FAR  
FROM IT BEING WINTER.

WHATEVER,  
IT'S FRIGGIN' COLD,  
AND THE WIND IS CHILLIN'  
ME TO THE BONE.









THE END



Autumn ends

Fin



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I can't thank all of you enough for your participation; we managed to make another great compilation of art and fanfiction for us fans.

Thank you so, so much!

And please, readers, take some time to send your comments to the authors and artists or your favorite entries!

-Snee



# Butterflies and Blizzards

End