

Rest and Digest

By Plokishmok3

“And, there we go, all set,” Donnie grunted as he shoved the final pillow into place at the foot of Raph’s bed. The red-banded turtle’s lower leg was encased in a thick cast and slightly elevated by a trio of medical-grade, ergonomic pillows that Donnie had been saving for such an occasion as this. “Is that comfortable?”

“Yeah, it feels alright I guess,” Raph grumbled.

“I need a yes or no, Raph,” Donnie said. “It’s very important that you keep your leg elevated for the next few weeks during this early phase of the healing process. If it’s not comfortable with the pillows, we can try the mounted sling...”

“No no, this is fine. Thanks, Don,” Raph said.

“A few weeks?” Leo asked, standing at the foot of the bed. “Is that how long it’s going to take for his leg to heal?”

“No, in total I estimate that it’ll take six months...” Donnie began to say.

“Six months?!” Raph cried.

“Well generally it takes around four months but given the fact you broke both your tibia and fibula in two places a piece, it’s going to take a little longer.”

“You should have been more careful,” Leo sighed.

“Oh just shut it, Leo,” Raph said, “the Purple Dragon’s ambushed us!”

“These things happen,” Donnie said, cutting the two off. “Besides, it’s nothing life-threatening, just means Raph is going to be bedridden for a while at least to start, then after a while, we can try crutches and...”

“Crutches!” Mikey exclaimed, imaging his brother doing an aerial roundhouse kick while spinning on one crutch and bashing the Foot with the other. “Cool...!”

“Crutches around the lair, Mikey,” Donnie said, knowing exactly what his brother was thinking. “Anyway, we should let Raph get some rest.”

“I’m not tired!” Raph said, though as he opened his mouth a yawn erupted forth.

“Yes you are,” Donnie said, working with Leo to pull the covers over Raph’s recline frame. “Your body as has been in shock since the fall, but when the pain meds fully set in, which should right about now, you’re going to need some sleep.”

"Thanks, guys," Raph said his eyes starting to flutter shut.

"No problem," Don said as he, Leo, and Mikey moseyed toward the door. "Just next time you decided to jump down from a ten story building, try not to slip first."

"Hey, it's not my fault it was rainy...!" Raph said.

"Get some sleep, Raph," Donnie interrupted before shutting the door behind him. Raph laid stewing for a second, both trying and not trying to think about those harrowing few seconds as he tumbled to the ground. Soon his mind grew hazy and before he knew it, he was dozing off to sleep.

~~~~~

Raph lay in his bed staring at the ceiling as he had been doing for, well, he didn't know for how long. While he had been napping he must have knocked his alarm clock off the side of his nightstand and now time was just an amorphous enigma that seemed to drag on for eternity. Sure, the sleep had felt good, but now he was stuck laying in his bed with his comics across the room and simply waiting for someone, something, or anything to come by... He heard a knocked on his door and propped his head up. The door slowly creaked open and a warm smile spread across Raph's face: Mona Lisa.

"Mona!" Raph said as the salamander warrior rushed over to his bedside and bent down to give the recovering turtle a strong embrace.

"Raphael," Mona said, "I came as quickly as I could when I heard what happened."

"Oh, it's nothing," Raph said. "Just a little scrape is all."

"That's not what your brother Donatello said," Mona said with a concerned face. "He said you broke two of your bones."

"Well, technically yes," Raph admitted, blushing slightly as Mona grinned.

"You earthlings were always so fragile," Mona teased, running a finger down Raph's leg, stopping just before reaching his cast.

"Hey!" Raph said.

"I'm just joking, I thought you earthlings liked that," Moan said before jolting upright. "Oh, I forgot your gift!" Mona rushed out the door a returned a few seconds later with a small box in her hands.

"What's this?" Raph asked as Mona handed him the box.

"If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise now would it?" Moan chuckled as Raph quickly tore at the wrapping and popped the top off.

"Oh," Raph said, confused. Inside was a series of small, neon green balls that were speckled with dark purple spots. At first, Raph thought they might be some sort of marbles, but a strange sweet aroma slowly wafted into his nose; were these edible?

“They’re Rakkaka RaRaKa Balls.”

“What’s in them?” Raph said, picking one up and staring at it with a raised eyebrow. It was both firm and a little sticking between his fingers.

“It’s a coveted Salamandrian secret, I could get in serious trouble just bringing some to you!”

“Why?”

“We use these whenever one of our own has gotten seriously injured. They contain a lot of nutrients to help keep your strength up while you’re resting and recovering.” Mona said, sitting down on the bed next Raph, clasping Raph’s free hand. “I wouldn’t want you withering away while your body heals.” Raph held the ball up to his face and upon turning and seeing an encouraging look from Mona, opened his mouth and popped the ball between his lips. The sticky outer layer of the ball coated the inside of his mouth with a uniquely sweet flavor. He then positioned it between his teeth and bit down and instantly a sweet umami flavor coated tongue. It was a combination of flavors that Raph just couldn’t place, but it tasted incredible!

“Wow, Mona!” Raph said. “That’s really good!”

“I knew you would like it,” Mona said, grinning as Raph reached for another one and popped it into his mouth too. Mona picked up one of the balls and tossed it up in the air and caught it in her own mouth before tossing one into Raph’s mouth. Raph continued to suckle the sweet balls, not realizing how hungry he had been as they started to settle in his stomach. After noticing that nearly half the box had disappeared down his gullet, Raph figured that he should probably stop, but he was having too much fun with Mona after sitting bored for what had felt like hours; a few more couldn’t hurt...

~~~~~

Leo slowly wandered toward Raph’s door. He had been pacing and meditating most of the day, thinking about Raph, the ambush, the fall, and everything... Guilt in himself and frustration with his stubborn brother gripped his heart and though he knew Raph should be resting, he just needed to check in on him. As he approached the door though, he heard giggling and laughing coming from inside and then the sound of a familiar alien friend.

“Mona?” Leo muttered.

“Yeah,” Donnie said, starting Leo as he stood behind the blue-banded turtle holding a cup of coffee. “I gave her a ring and she came right over.”

“Why’d you do that?” Leo asked, collecting himself.

“I mean they’re basically boyfriend and girlfriend, right? That makes her family and she deserved to know.”

“*Sigh, you’re right,” Leo said, rubbing his temples.

“You should rest Leo. There’s nothing to worry about. Mona will keep Raph company and will distract him from his leg,” Donnie said, putting a hand on Leo’s shoulder. “Just leave them be for now. You’re off duty. Try and get some sleep.”

“You’re right, you’re right,” Leo said sighed, though he sounded more like he was trying to convince himself more than respond to Donnie. He eventually slumped off Donnie’s hand and meandered toward his bedroom, exhaustion washing over him. “You’re right...”

~~~~~

Leo yawned as he wandered along the hall, carrying a cup of tea. He knew he should probably lay down for a nap after getting up early for some extra mediation before practice that morning, but with the reading he wanted to do later in his war tactics book, he figured he was just going to be tired for the rest of the day. Maybe he’d turn in early tonight and... Leo’s attention turned as he saw Raph’s door open and heard some commotion from inside. It had been about a month since Raph’s injury and though Leo made it a point to visit his brother in his room every chance he got, Mona was often visiting and Donnie said he should give the two their space. They had been spending a lot more time together recently and though Leo was happy for his brother, he felt a little bit happier now that he didn’t hear the typical Salamandrian chortle coming from inside Raph’s room. Taking the opportunity, Leo poked his head around the open door and saw Raph, Mikey, and Donnie inside.

“...So you’re saying that I can’t sign your cast?” Mikey said.

“I said you can,” Raph said.

“And I say you can’t,” Donnie said. “I’ve seen you color enough over the years to know that you always get carried away with art projects and I don’t want you inadvertently messing up the cast or worse Raph’s leg.”

“How is your cast holding up?” Leo said, walking in.

“I don’t know, ask Donnie, he’s the one that takes care of it every day,” Raph said as Donnie sprinkled some baking powder on the edge of the cast before wiping it clean.

“It’s holding up well,” Donnie said before standing up with the cloth in his hand. “Now Raph, I need you to keep from laying in the same position all the time. I don’t want you to get a pressure ulcer. Have you been sitting up and laying down at regular intervals?”

“Yes,” Raph said as Donnie crossed his arms over his chest and stared at him. “Like now?”

“Like now,” Donnie confirmed.

“Fine...” Raph grumbled. He grabbed the second pillow beside him and propped it up against the headboard of his bed. He then shimmied his body up into a sitting position, letting his covers slip off his body onto his lap. “Happy?”

“Very,” Donnie said. “Now, how would you rate your pain level...” Donnie’s voice seemed to drown out as Leo stared at Raph. He didn’t know what it was, but something seemed different about his brother: did he look thicker? Leo didn’t know if it was just a trick of the light, his sleep-deprived mind, or something about Raph’s awkward sitting position, but Leo swore that Raph’s torso looked a little thicker than normal. The muscles on his arm seemed a little duller and his jawline seemed a little softer. Had Raph put on weight?

“Hey!” Mikey said, pulling Leo back to reality. He was pointing toward the edge of Raph’s cast that had shifted into view as he propped himself up. “Mona got to sign his cast!”

“So what?” Raph said.

“So...!” Mikey started to protest.

“So Mona’s a responsible adult and...” Donnie interjected.

“Did someone say my name?” Mona asked, popping her head into the room.

“Mona!” Raph said, his eyes lighting up.

“I hope I’m not interrupting,” Mona said.

“Not at all,” Donnie said, giving Mikey and Leo a look and motioning to the door.

“Oh Donatello,” Mona said as the turtles made their way out of the room. Leo paused and turned back toward Mona and Raph watching as Mona handed Raph a large unmarked box.

“Yeah?” Donnie asked.

“I just wanted to thank you for fixing my communicator.”

“No problem, it was my pleasure,” Donnie said.

“Speaking of which, Leonardo,” Mona said

“Yes?” Leo asked.

“Sal Commander wanted to meet with you about intel he obtained about a possible Krang and Purple Dragon collaboration. You can use my communicator to contact him.”

“Okay,” Leo said.

“Oh my god,” Raph said, pulling out a strange green and purple ball that Leo had never seen before out of the box and popping it into his mouth. “I can never get enough of these.”

“Are those Rakkaka RaRaKa Balls?” Donnie asked excitedly.

“They sure are!” Mona said, before narrowing her eyes, “not that you’re supposed to know what those are.”

“Don’t worry, you’re Salamandrian secret is safe with me,” Donnie winked.

“I know,” Mona said, her glare relaxing into a smile, “I left a few as thanks in the kitchen!”

“Suhweet!” Donnie said, rushing out.

“Hey, I want some too!” Mikey said, following Donnie.

“Good to see you,” Leo said, “I’ll call Sal Commander now.”

“Fantastic, keep me updated,” Mona said before turning back to Raph who was stuffing two of the scrumptious morsels into his mouth. Once Leo saw that Raph and Mona were no longer paying attention to him he quietly slipped out the door and headed off to the kitchen.

“...You sure these are safe to eat?” Mikey asked as Leo walked up to the kitchen counter. He was holding one of the balls up to the light while Donnie bit one in half and chewed.

“Of course!” Donnie said. “These things have so many vitamins, minerals, macromolecules, antioxidants, phytochemicals and everything else that they’re technically healthier than entire steak dinner with a kale and acai berry salad on the side! I’m pretty sure the Salamandrians use them to help their injured and fallen soldiers build their strength back up or something like that.” Mikey took a bite and let out a moan of satisfaction.

“Whoa, that is good! Leo, you’ve got to try this!” Mikey said, shoving in in Leo’s face. Leo solemnly looked at the ball before popping into his mouth and slowly chewing. “You’re not jumping up and down with joy, Leo.”

“What’s up,” Donnie said.

“Did something seem off about Raph to you?”

“You mean the fact that he’ll let Mona and not his own brother sign his cast!” Mikey huffed as he stuffed another Rakkaka RaRaKa ball into his mouth.

“No, I mean Raph’s appearance,” Leo said. “Did he look a little chubby to you?”

“Oh, then no,” Mikey said.

“I don’t think so,” Donnie said thoughtfully considering the matter. “Then again, I see him every day so any sort of subtle change like that could go under my radar.”

“He hasn’t been eating more than usual has he?” Leo asked.

“Not really,” Mikey said. “Well, I guess maybe in the last week he’s been asking for more seconds when I bring him dinner, but that I’m just taking as a compliment to the chef,” Mikey said, holding a proud hand to his chest.

“Well I guess there are all those Rakkaka RaRaKa balls that Mona brings him too,” Donnie said. “I sometimes accidentally walk in on the two to tend to his cast and see boxes of the stuff laying around his bed.”

“But didn’t you say those are super healthy?” Mikey asked.

“Yeah, in moderation,” Donnie said his tone turning to that when he goes into lecture mode; Mikey was used to that tone. “They’re packed with protein and healthy carbs and fats, but a calorie is a calorie. If the body doesn’t burn that energy generated from glycolysis, lipolysis, or proteolysis, then it gets stored in adipose tissue and...” Leo’s mind once again checked out as he watched Donnie and Mikey popping a few more of the nutrient balls into their mouths. The sensation of sweet and savory tingled along the inside of Leo’s mouth and he could feel the dense weight of the morsel as he swallowed and it slid down his throat into his stomach. He pictured Raph suckling down dozens upon dozens of these things and complaining about moving up into a sitting position; he wasn’t burning that many calories in bed, was he?

~~~~~

Raph stifled a belch as he swallowed another large bite of Mona’s delicious alien treats. This batch had a slightly more acidic flavor as Mona had informed him that she had been toying with the recipe. She didn’t want Raph to get bored of the flavor after all, not that Raph thought he could ever; they just tasted so good!

“Full?” Mona teased.

“Considering you pushed me to finish three whole boxes, yeah I’d say I’m a little stuffed,” Raph said with a smirk.

“Hey, I never forced your hand on anything,” Mona said.

“Oh sure,” Raph chuckled as he stared at the empty boxes resting beside the bed. “Three whole boxes...” At that moment it really hit Raph just how much he had eaten, all of that after he had finished lunch not more than two hours ago. His train of thought meandered back to some of his recent meals, noting how he had been scarfing down two loaded plates of food lately, and though part of him wanted to blame Mikey for the proportions, he also remembered that whenever his brother was skimpy on the portions he’d always ask for a third helping. He was eating a lot lately, wasn’t he? He did usually eat that much, did he? He was just so hungry lately. Maybe his body just needed more? Raph didn’t know. Regardless of the reason, the amount of food parading across his mind as he thought back to lunch, breakfast, and dinner the night before seemed to have crept up on him out of no where, well not nowhere...

“What’s wrong?” Mona asked, noticing the look of contemplation on Raph’s face.

“I was just thinking that I’ve been eating a lot lately,” Raph started to say.

“I don’t think you’ve been eating that much,” Mona said.

“I mean, I used to get full just from eating a box of those things and I just tore through three and definitely could fit more.”

“Oh?” Mona said perking up.

“Hmm,” Raph said.

“What?”

“You just seemed excited.”

“I am!”

“Excited that I ate three boxes of those Rakkaka RaRaKa balls?”

“And that you’ve still got room, of course!”

“Why?”

“Why, because that means they’ve been doing their job!”

“What’s that? I thought they were supposed to make me recover and in case you haven’t noticed,” Raph said, pointing toward his propped up cast, “after two months and a half months, my leg is still broken.”

“It is odd. The extra fat should have helped...”

“Extra fat?” Raph said.

“Yes, on Salamandria, we try and fatten up our injured soldiers.”

“What, why?”

“Because fat stores help heal wounds. It provides a cushion to help set broken bones and helps to preserve body heat and increase stores of vital vitamins and minerals that aid in healing other battle scars. Additionally, having that energy store means that at all times your body has enough energy to draw from for immediate use when it needs it during the healing process, like a natural battery. Is that not how fat works here on Earth?”

“I don’t think so,” Raph said. “And what do you mean extra fat when you were referring to me?”

“What, you haven’t noticed?” Mona asked, slipping her hand underneath the bed covers and placing it on Raph’s stomach. Curious, Raph flipped off the covers and for the first time glanced down at his stomach and stared in shock. He had a gut, well, the beginnings of a gut. His midriff bulged out of his torso a few inches, forming a rounded dome that spread out to the sides in the form of a pair of fat folds that compressed and stretched ever so slightly as he breathed. The jostle of his heaving chest revealed a

soft layer of pudge had formed where once he had sported a set of strong pecs. Raph placed a hand on his chest and felt what should have been muscle give way ever so slightly and while the flesh molded around his fingers like pressing them into a ball of raw pizza dough. While doing so, he noticed that even his fingers were looking a little thicker. They had a certain pump appearance that ventured up along his form and biceps, obscuring the toned muscles he had worked so hard for his entire life.

“Where did all of this come from!?” Raph exclaimed.

“I mean you said it yourself,” Mona said, rubbing her hand along Raph’s stomach sending a pleasing tingling up his spine and to the back of his skull. “You have been eating a lot lately.”

“Well I uh,” Raph stuttered as he tried to wrap his head around the internal conflict in his mind; he wasn’t supposed to like fat but why did it feel so good when Mona massaged it. “I only ate so much because you encouraged me!”

“Yes, isn’t it wonderful?” Mona said, wrapping her hand around Raph’s side and giving his love handle a squeeze. Raph let out an involuntary moan. “When the body is healing it naturally wants to eat more so it has all the nutrients it needs to make you bigger and stronger than ever!”

“I’m definitely bigger alright,” Raph said.

“Yes you are,” Mona said, leaning in and giving Raph’s forehead a kiss. “You look so adorable with your softer cheeks,” Mona said, giving Raph’s cheeks a pinch.

“Really?” Raph said, his heart fluttering.

“And your second chin,” Mona said, running her finger beneath Raph’s jaw. Raph could feel Mona slip her finger between the bone of his chin and pocket of flesh along his neck, making him even more aware of just how much pudge had caked to his frame.

“But this will all burn off right?” Raph asked.

“Shush sh shhhh,” Mona said, placing her finger on Raph’s lips. “You do not need to concern yourself with that right now. If anything, you should probably put on more weight.”

“Will that speed up the healing process?” Raph asked as Mona cupped his small, soft moob.

“It may, but it also feels great doesn’t it?” Mona asked. “On Salamandria, it’s traditional to indulge during the healing process. After sacrificing your body as a soldier in battle, you must replenish your spirit with indulgence and excess. It helps with morale, aids the healing process, and even has the benefit of helping you bulk up.”

“Bulk up?”

“Yes, when bedridden, it’s easy for the body to atrophy, but by indulging you can help maintain your body weight or ideally pack on more weight. The Rakkaka RaRaKa balls naturally help boost your appetite to help with boosting your weight.”

“Isn’t most of that weight fat?”

“Some, yes,” Mona said, “but with the fat comes the extra burden on your muscles, forcing them to work harder so they don’t wither away.” Mona pinched Raph’s arm and though the turtle could feel the notable layer of fat on the surface he could still feel his strong bicep underneath; maybe there was something to what Mona was saying.

“So you’re saying I should eat more?” Raph asked stifling a moan as Mona began to massage his belly again. Before the alien salamander could respond, a growl erupted from Raph’s middle causing him to blush.

“I think you already know the answer to that question,” Mona said, reaching down beside the bed for another box of Rakkaka RaRaKa balls.

~~~~~

“... Okay, now just tuck these under your arm,” Donnie said, handing Raph a pair of crutches. Raph was sat on the edge of his bed with his cast gently resting on the floor.

“Are you sure about this?” Raph said, staring at his cast warily.

“Yes,” Donnie said. “It’s been about four months since the break and by now the bones should have at least fused. There’s still a ways to go, but you need to start putting some pressure on the bones to help them attain their proper strength. Plus, with these,” Donnie said, giving the crutches a slap, “you’ll be a bit more mobile. You should still rest, but you don’t have to stay cooped in your room anymore.” A sense of relief washed over Raph though that feeling of apprehension still lingered. He tentatively pressed his casted foot down into the ground, expecting to feel pain but just feel pressure; harmless pressure.

“You can do this, Raph!” Mona said, standing off to the side with Mikey and Leo.

“Okay, okay,” Raph muttered to himself, huffing as he tried to hype himself up. Donnie signaled to Mikey who was standing to the side. Each stood on either side of Raph as Raph angled the crutches into the ground and with a grunt slowly pulled himself up from the bed. Mikey and Donnie stepped in and grabbed the side of his ribcage and helped hoist the turtle to his feet. Raph wobbled on the crutches still nervous about putting his full weight on his leg.

“It’s okay, just relax and ease into it,” Donnie said, feeling Raph steady. He and Mikey then slowly released their grip on Raph and stood back.

“There you go!” Mona said. Raph looked up and felt his heart flutter upon seeing her warm smile. He then caught a glance of Leo next to her. He was standing with his arms over his chest and Raph could see and feel the judgment in his eyes. He knew what Leo was staring at: his body. Raph had just allowed fat to keep accumulating on his sedentary frame after noticing the pudge almost two months ago. Sure Raph had had concerns then himself, but with everything that Mona was saying, and the attention she was giving him, and the massages of his soft sides, the pinches of his thick thighs, the squeezes of his hips and chest... it had all been so overwhelming. Since then, he had seen weight continuing to pack onto his frame, weight he knew that his older brother wouldn't approve of.

Every time Leo had come visit, Raph had made sure that he was thoroughly covered in sheets and blankets, right up to his chin, hoping that Leo wouldn't notice, though Raph knew that was a pipe dream in it of itself; Leo's keen eye never missed anything. Raph had a hunch that Leo had noticed the large meals he'd ask Mikey to bring him and at the assorted boxes scattered in the corners of the room that had once been filled with Mona's treats; Leo could definitely put two and two together. He probably could see Raph's face softening over the days and weeks and months, wondering if what he saw was just a figment of his imagination or not. Now though, as Raph stood balancing on crutches before his brothers and Mona, he knew his flabby frame was out in the open for all to see.

He was hunched forward slightly on the crutches, causing them to dig into his armpits as his shoulders and upper arms not only pressed up against but flattened across the supporting pads, nearly concealing the arm hold completely with splaying pudge. He could feel the weight of his chest and stomach sagging to the floor, the former of which was thick enough to sloped down the sides of his abdomen to join the multitude of love handles that had formed there and the latter looking more like a beach ball of pudge that sagged toward his thunderous thighs and wide hips. As Donnie huddled up next to him, adjusting the crutches, Raph could help but feel more aware of his enormity.

Donnie was the lankiest of his brothers, but Raph could see that his waist was easily fifty to sixty percent wider. His thighs looked swollen compared to Donnie's trim limbs and his calves were more than twice as round. The weight of his flabby frame weighed down on his feet and leg, revealing to Raph himself just how much weight he had packed on and though he felt a little embarrassed standing in front of Mikey and Leo, feeling their stares out of his periphery, there was a certain satisfaction he took from it. He met Mona's eyes again and saw the pride in them as Mona looked him up and down again.

She hadn't been kidding about wanting to get him to put on more weight. She was persistent in getting him to finish everything on his plate during meals and tried to push more food on him even when he complained that his stomach was full. She'd have him snacking throughout the afternoon and evening

all while massaging and relieving the tension from his perpetually stuffed middle. As a result, his appetite had soared in recent weeks, with his belly demanding larger and larger portions all on its own or else it would rumble and roar and until Mona or Mikey brought him more to eat. She seemed to love every pound that materialized on his body and though he was still unsure how to feel about the weight, her encouragement and seeming obsession with his pudge had so far been no deterrent to fostering more flab. Even now, he could feel the subtle jiggle of his torso as he grunted and breathed and the slightly jostle of his side as Donnie fiddled with the crutches, the sensations reminding him of the long hours Mona would spend running her fingers across his frame, exploring every fold and flap of fat. A content smile began to cross his face until he caught Leo's eye again and glanced down to the floor.

"There you go," Donnie said, giving Raph's back an encouraging slap. "Now, why don't we give those babies a spin."

"Yes, lets," Leo said, propping open the door. His tone was too neutral for Raph to get a gauge on how his brother felt at that moment; like he was hiding something. Was he just being polite in front of Mona? Raph didn't know.

"Think you can make it to the living room?" Mikey asked.

"I don't know," Raph said.

"How else are we supposed to play Smash together, then?" Mikey said, the awestruck look on his face changing to that of gleeful disappointment.

"What about the dojo?" Leo asked.

"Any sort of progress today is good progress," Donnie said, stepping in. "Now this may feel a little awkward, but you'll get used to it eventually." Raph raised one of the crutches and shuffled it forward feeling it jab into his armpit and causing his frame to shake. Raph hadn't been prepared for that and began to wobble again, but quickly steadied himself.

"Come on, you've got this!" Mona said.

"Yeah, I race you to the door, come on!" Mikey said, running in slow motion toward the door with overdramatic motions. Raph couldn't help but chuckle.

"Mikey quit being a goofball and give him some space!" Donnie said.

"What, I'm just trying to help," Mikey said. Raph narrowed his eyes, drowning out his brother's usual bickering and took another step forward. His leg felt heavy and tired, likely from lying in bed for four months, and extra weight no doubt, but he dug deep and took another step and another and another.

"There you go, you've got it!" Mona said. Raph felt like he was getting the hang of the awkward walking motion, though, by the time he had gotten out the door and into the hallway, his arms and legs

burned. He felt a streak of sweat forming on his brow but he couldn't reach up to wipe it away or risk falling flat on his face; he was already exhausted! Mikey, Donnie, and Mona continued to cheer him on as he eventually made it to the living room couch, and though Leo had joined in with the clapping and encouragement Raph couldn't help but read into his brother's eyes. As Mikey booted up the game and Raph continued to steal glances toward Leo, he couldn't realize that it wasn't disappointment in Leo's eyes, it was something else, something Raph just couldn't quite place his finger on.

Was it concern...?

~~~~~

"Come on, Raph," Donnie said. "You can do it! Give me one more." Raph wheezed as he clasped his fingers behind his head and with a grunt tried to sit up on the mat. His core burned and sweat glistened on his face. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to muster up every bit of strength he could but he wasn't making much progress. Instead, he felt his stomach pressing into his thighs and after a few seconds his core gave out and flopped back onto the mat with a weighty thud. Raph opened his eyes and wheezed. He saw Donnie standing over him and shaking his head as he jotted down a note in his notebook.

"How, was that?" Raph huffed, the words labored over his wheezing breath.

"If I'm going to be honest," Donnie said, "not good." Raph closed his eyes and groaned. Donnie just stared down at his brother. Donnie had expected his brother to put on a little weight from laying around in bed waiting for his leg to heal, but he had never expected Raph to truly balloon up as he had. It was hard to picture that same turtle from six months when he had first broken his leg as the one laying before him now was easily twice as big if not bigger.

Raph's stomach rose up into the air as a proverbial dome of pudge. The lard filled bean bag chair impersonation splayed out wide on the mat on the floor making Raph look more like a beach wall with his thick thighs, bulbous calves, and melon-sized chest. His head looked seemingly sunken into his torso and the ring of fat that had swollen out from his neck. His arms hugged his side, resembling soft pillows more than the arms of a ninja in training. Raph was beyond simply fat. He was obese and as such Donnie had taken it upon himself to help his brother get back into the swing of things once his cast had come off just a few weeks ago. Donnie knew he was going to have to ease Raph back into exercising and dropping some weight, but progress to this point had been nonexistent. If anything, Raph had put on even more weight over the last two weeks. Donnie sighed and sat down beside Raph.

"What's going on?" Donnie asked bluntly.

"What do you mean?" Raph asked.

"I mean what's going on with you? You haven't made any progress since we started these training sessions. You still can barely do a sit-up, you can't walk for more than five minutes at a time on the treadmill, and you get winded from stretching."

"It's hard..." Raph started to complain.

"You clearly aren't following my diet guidelines," Donnie continued. "I talked with Mikey and he admitted that he's been sneaking you double portions and desserts because you begged him, and as a result, you've put on at least ten pounds if not more." Donnie gave the side of Raph's stomach a squeeze.

"I, uh..."

"Now some of this lack of motivation and gluttony wouldn't have surprised me if say Mikey was in your position, but it's you Raph that we're talking about here," Donnie said. "Six months ago, you were a gym rat, a dumbbell junkie, a turtle proud of his guns with the starkly competitive, prideful nature that goes with it. Where is that fight now? Where is that drive? I can understand slow progress, but if I didn't know any better, I'd say you aren't trying. You aren't trying to work yourself back into shape, you aren't trying to better your diet, you aren't trying to lose weight." Donnie stared at Raph. "You're trying to stay fat, aren't you?" Raph simply glanced away, feeling his cheeks grow hot. Donnie sighed. "I need an answer Raph."

"Fine, yes," Raph said. "Yes I've been sneaking food and yes I haven't been trying very hard during these workouts. Yes, I'm trying to stay fat, are you happy?" Raph huffed. After a moment of silence, he meekly glanced over toward Donnie. "Are you going to tell Leo?"

"No... no, I guess not," Donnie said softly.

"Are you going to force me to lose the weight?"

"If we're being honest, I really don't care how much you weigh," Donnie said. "What I care about is if your leg is fully healed, which it is."

"Well, Leo cares," Raph said. "I see the way he looks at me. I know he hates all of this." Raph grabbed either side of his belly and gave it a hardy heft, sending a series of ripples cascading across his frame. "I know he hates this and hates me."

"He doesn't hate you," Donnie said.

"He does so!" Raph feeling his heart starting to pound in his chest and his chest starting to heave.

"No, he really doesn't," Donnie said, placing a calming, reassuring hand on Raph's shoulder. "He loves you Raph, more than you know."

"How do you know?"

“Let’s just say that I have a way of reading Leo,” Donnie said. “He’s not mad or disappointed or anything with you Raph. He’s mad at himself.” Raph turned toward Donnie with a confused look on his face. “He still feels guilty that you got hurt in the first place, even if he chastises you for it. He feels guilty that you were stuck in your room for four months and he feels guilty that he felt jealous that you were hanging out with Mona all the time during your recovery.”

“Jealous? Why?”

“The one thing that he cares about more than family is training and you were the only one that ever gives him a challenge during practice. You two may butt heads with each other, but he appreciated your hard work, passion, and skill and when you were injured he missed having those sparring matches with you. He missed hanging out with you when Mona was around and he felt ashamed of the jealousy that had spawned from it.”

“Why doesn’t he just come out and say that?” Raph asked. “Just because I hang out with Mona doesn’t mean we can’t still hang.”

“He wants you to be happy and he knows Mona makes you happy. He also knows about Salamandrian culture toward the injured.” Raph’s face dropped.

“How?” Raph asked.

“When he met with Sal Commander about the Purple Dragons he asked. He knew about Mona’s fattening stunt before I did,” Donnie said.

“Oh, I had no idea he knew...”

“Yes, this entire time. He didn’t want to say anything because he didn’t want to mess anything up between you and Mona, because he knew that she made you happy. Thus, he kept his distance and watched you pack on the weight from afar.”

“Why would he feel guilty about that?”

“Because before he felt concern about whether Mona was forcing you to put on weight when you didn’t want to or how it might impact your broken leg. He was afraid that if you got too big, that he might never have that sparring partner again that brought so much joy and light to his regimented day. When he realized that had been his first thought on the matter, how all of this was going to impact him, he felt self-centered, selfish, and vile. He was ashamed of himself and he continues to feel guilty as those thoughts emerge when he sees your plump figure. Those looks he judging looks are not for you, they’re a reflection of his own self-judgment of his own fear of not just losing his brother, but his friend.” Donnie gave Raph’s shoulder a squeeze. “He cares about spending time with you and he’s scared that’s never

going to happen again, not like it used to be. That's why he wants you to lose weight. It's the only solution that he can think of."

"But..." Raph said. "I don't want to lose the weight. I love the weight, but I don't want Leo beating himself up over it."

"It's a conundrum for sure," Donnie said. "You sure you don't want to just tell him the truth?"

"What, no...!" Raph stuttered. "What would I even say? Hey Leo, so I'm, like, purposefully getting fat because I love how soft and jiggly I feel."

"What's so wrong about saying that?" Donnie asked.

"You think the guy that trains every waking moment of his life is going to just accept that as an answer? No matter how much you claim he cares about me if I say anything along those lines he's going to blow a gasket and make sure that I only eat spinach for the next five years! No, it has to be subtler than that. You've got to have a plan or something that could work, right Donnie?" Raph looked at Donnie with pleading eyes; desperate eyes. Donnie sighed.

"I'll uh... see what I can do..." Donnie said. Suddenly Raph launched up from the mat and wrapped his arms around Donnie, pulling him down to the floor as Raph relaxed back with a weighty thud.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," Raph said, squeezing Donnie tight. Though Donnie gasped as he tried to wrestle free from the fat squishing up against him from all directions, he couldn't help but notice the rare display of gratitude from his brother; all five hundred pounds of gratitude...

~~~~~

Leo slowly crept up toward Raph's door and heard the familiar sounds of his brother and Mona giggling inside. The door was already slightly ajar and Leo took the liberty of pushing it open just a bit more so he could peer inside. He saw Raph and Mona on the bed inside with Mona draping her arm over the top of Raph's stomach as she fed him a Rakkaka RaRaKa ball. Raph's bulbous frame took up nearly the entirety of his bed with Mona leaning on her side on the smallest sliver of space along the edge of the bed.

"... So you don't mind the weight?" Raph asked as he let Mona pop the green and purple ball into his mouth. As he chewed, his jowls jostled and the upper part of his torso jostled as an undulating mass.

"I told you, it's just part of the healing process," Mona said.

"But I'm already healed," Raph said, flexing his toes and shifting his leg slightly. The barrel-sized appendages wobbled back and forth at the foot of the bed each easily as wide as the turtle's entire torso had been just a few months ago. It was hard to tell where his thick calf fat ended and his thighs and haunches began as the fat had seemingly merged, burying his knees beneath a sea of blubber.



“But you’re also adorable as a big pudge-ball,” Mona said grabbing another Rakkaka RaRaKa ball and stuffing it into Raph’s mouth. “They say that for a true warrior, the weight may never dissipate, a cosmic reward for all the lives saved and good deeds the warrior had done.”

“Are you saying I’m a true warrior?”

“You and your brothers are some of the greatest warriors in the galaxy,” Mona said, leaning in and giving Raph’s cheek a kiss. “Now eat up; the universe has determined you deserve it!”

Leo just chuckled as he stood back and continued his way down the hall. He’d visit Raph later. It had been nearly two weeks since Donnie had approached him about Raph and the turtles training progress. Leo had been expecting to hear poor results, having seen two new fat rolls appear on Raph’s side since the time he had gotten his cast off, but he hadn’t been expecting the heart to heart he had had with Donnie.

Donnie had told him everything he had Raph had apparently talked about at their last training session. How Raph had admitted he loved the weight he had put on and that he was scared to tell Leo. Leo first felt ashamed that he had put up such a wall for his brother that he didn’t feel comfortable talking with him, but then Donnie continued and seemed to put words to the feelings Leo himself had had a hard time articulating over the last few months; unconscious thoughts he was only vaguely aware of that had led to his self-imposed divide between Raph and himself. Apparently, Donnie knew him better than he knew himself and helped Leo come to terms with Raph’s new body.

Donnie also talked about the fake plan he had concocted and told Raph he was going to do, a plan that involved telling Leo some made-up medical or scientific thing as to why Raph physically couldn’t lose the weight he had put on; something about extraterrestrial epigenetic interference or something like that, Leo couldn’t remember. All he did remember was that Donnie told him to maintain the façade at least for a little while. Don’t let Raph know that he knew everything; just go along with the lie, mend the bridge that had formed between them and see if Raph would eventually tell Leo himself. Leo had agreed and had immediately gone to see Raph, a plate of sympathy cookies in hand. Leo wanted Raph to feel happy and he knew that all that weight and Mona made him happy; he wasn’t going to take those away. Sure, he was going to miss his sparring buddy, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t still compete on Mikey’s Xbox or argue about the lore of their comic books or something else. They could still be brothers. They could still be friends, even with Raph’s weight skying toward the six hundred and seven-hundred-pound range.

Leo continued down the hall and knocked on Mikey’s door. He heard a sudden commotion and a grunt and instead of waiting, swung open the door. Mikey was on his bed, his leg propped up and a cast around his ankle. Leo rubbed his temple; they really needed to stop going on missions in the middle of

rainstorms. Leo saw boxes of crayons and markers poking out from beneath the sheets and pillows around Mikey, haphazardly tucked away. Mikey stared at Leo with streaks of red and yellow highlighter on his cheeks and an abstract collage around the top of his cast. Leo crossed his arms over his chest and glared at Mikey.

“Whhaffth?” Mike asked before he suddenly caught himself and stopped talking but it was too late; Leo had seen the green and purple ball tucked into the corner of his cheek. Leo looked at Mikey’s nightstand and saw three familiar boxes stacked on top of each other. Mikey chewed and swallowed as Leo stepped forward. “Hey, hands off!” Mikey said. “Mona gave these to me!” He tried to reach out an arm to block Leo from confiscating the balls, but instead, his brother simply grabbed one of the balls and popped it into his mouth. He then sat along the edge of the bed and pulled out one of the hidden markers.

“Can I sign your cast?” Leo asked with a grin.