Small Comforts

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/853.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	General (non relationship-focused)
Fandom:	The Lego Ninjago Movie (2017)
Relationships:	Sensei Wu (Ninjago) & Morro (Ninjago), Lloyd Garmadon & Morro (Ninjago)
Characters:	Morro (Ninjago), Sensei Wu (Ninjago), Misako "Koko" Garmadon, Lloyd Garmadon
Additional Tags:	5+1 Fic, Morro-centric (Ninjago), Human Morro (Ninjago), Young Morro (Ninjago), Young Lloyd Garmadon, Lloyd Garmadon and Morro are Cousins, Good Cousin Morro (Ninjago), Fluff, Hurt/Comfort
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of A Different Perspective
Stats:	Published: 2026-10-31 Words: 3,284 Chapters: 2/6

Small Comforts

by Subspace_Adventurer

Summary

Five times Morro comforted Lloyd, and one time Lloyd returned the favor.

Short snippets of Morro and Lloyd's relationship growing up, covering from when Koko left Garmadon all the way to before Reality Check.

Chapter 1: The Baby

Nine-year-old Morro scrunched his nose as he waited impatiently for his guardian to return. He hated this place. Wu had moved them from the dojo out in the wide open countryside to this huge—and crowded, very crowded—city all because his sister-in-law apparently had a new baby boy that she needed help caring for.

What a pain.

Babies weren't good at anything except making noise, and even that wasn't always a helpful skill for them out on the streets. Granted, this baby wasn't going to be out on the streets if Wu had anything to say about it. Which was why they were here.

Ugh.

He poked at a little paper crane he had made earlier before tossing it into the air. Instead of falling to the floor, a draft of wind caught it and spun it around the small room, letting it bob and weave as if it were a real bird.

He sighed as he slumped against the back of the wooden chair and watched the crane. Even when it was just him on the streets, the wind had always been his friend. It brought him secrets, steered him to safety or away from danger, and helped him find suitable shelter. The wind could not be tamed, but it could be helpful if one knew how to listen to it. It wasn't until the old man took him in that he realized the wind listened to him in return.

The wind was comfortable. The wind was familiar in a way people weren't. He'd promised Wu that he'd try to get along with other kids and make friends once he started attending school, but people didn't listen like the wind listened. They didn't care like the wind cared. They were much too noisy.

Like the baby was going to be.

The crane suddenly dropped as Morro growled in frustration and rose from his seat to open the round porthole window, letting a natural breeze fill the room. He didn't like the wind in the city. It was salty and stale like the ocean that bordered it. Like the ocean that sat beneath the Bounty. The boy shivered at that thought and tried not to think about it.

The only reason they were currently using the old boat was because places to live apparently cost a lot more in the city than out in the country. Wu did (somehow) own a warehouse on the opposite side of the city, but it was completely empty and needed a good deep cleaning. Not a great place for a baby to live.

So here he was instead, shut inside his cabin on the Bounty, trying not to focus on the huge, wet death trap that kept the ship afloat.

He wondered how much longer it would be before Wu came back.

The breeze scooped up the little crane from the floor and deposited it back onto the desk as Morro opened the door, a growl in his stomach directing him to go raid the kitchen. His eyes warily regarded the ladder to the upper deck as he passed by it. As long as he stayed inside, he would be fine. No risk of falling into that deep dark abyss down here!

As he dug through the cabinets searching for something to snack on, the sound of footsteps creaked across the deck above him and a wave of relief washed over him. Wu was back! Finally, he didn't have to be bored anymore!

…except he would probably have to meet the baby now.

He couldn't decide which was worse.

With suddenly less enthusiasm than before, the boy shuffled back to the central room and waited for the inevitable. Sure enough, a few seconds later Wu descended through the trap door followed by a woman with bright orange hair and a silver headpiece.

Wait a minute…

"You look kinda familiar."

The woman removed her headpiece as she turned to him, allowing her bangs to flop inelegantly into her eyes. She pushed the hair behind her ears and held out a hand. "Just call me Aunt Koko, please. And you must be Morro! Wu speaks fondly of you."

Morro took her hand and gave it a firm shake, blushing slightly at the compliment. His eyes darted to the old man, who gave a small satisfied smile before nodding toward the woman again. "Starting today, Koko and Lloyd will be living with us here on the Bounty until further notice. I expect you will be gracious and hospitable to them during their stay?"

He nodded, trying to summon any and all etiquette lessons Wu had taught him. After mostly drawing a blank, he simply bowed to the woman. "I hope you like it here." As he lifted his head, he noticed a strange bundle of green strapped to her chest that began to squirm. "Is that…"

He didn't know how to address the baby. He wasn't even sure he was okay with the baby being here, but here it was anyway. He watched in fascination as Koko undid a couple of buckles on the side of the bundle and the baby was released into her gentle hands. She adjusted it in her grip, allowing Morro to finally see its small, chubby face with eyes screwed tightly shut. "This is Lloyd, your baby cousin."

As the bundle started fussing and the sound of its small voice crying filled the room, all Morro could do was stare with childlike wonder. This was his cousin? He'd never had a person belong to him before. He belonged with Wu now, but he didn't think that really worked the other way around. But Lloyd, on the other hand…

"Can I hold him?"

Koko smiled at him as she carefully bounced the baby to try and calm it down. “Alright, but don’t feel bad if he starts screaming louder.” Wu moved over to adjust Morro’s arms to the proper position, and then the squirming bundle was placed into them. He sat there staring for several seconds, too awestruck to know what to do at first, before he carefully copied the up-and-down motion the woman had employed previously.

Slowly, its—no, his. This wasn’t just a thing anymore—cries petered out and his tiny puffy eyes opened, revealing a bright blue-green coloring that seemed like they would suck in anyone who stared into them. Their surroundings seemed to disappear as the two stared at each other for what seemed like an eternity before Lloyd—his Lloyd—gave him a huge baby smile and started gurgling happily.

“Looks like someone just became his new favorite person.”

Morro finally had someone he could call his own. That wonderful thought never left his mind, even long after Lloyd had been returned to his mother.

Maybe babies weren’t so useless after all.

Chapter 2: That Sinking Feeling

Laughter filled the air as a little blond gremlin tore around the main deck of the Destiny's Bounty, finally free from the stuffy lower deck and gleefully terrorizing the seagulls that kept landing on the railings. Morro had positioned himself against the outer wall of the central room to make sure his energetic cousin didn't get into any trouble while also staying as far away from the water as possible. Having lived on the ship for a while now, he had gotten used to being on the ocean and staying above deck without Wu around was doable, but he still preferred to keep to the middle on the off-chance there was a rogue wave that decided to rock the old boat too much.

A lot had happened in the past four years. Garmadon began attacking Ninjago City only a few months after Koko and Lloyd left him and moved into the Bounty, and Wu—feeling responsible for his brother—became the city's defender. With his dad off fighting and Koko at work for most of the day, that left Morro to play babysitter while the adults were gone. His aunt had already taught him everything he needed to know about taking care of his cousin and he was excited, especially after overhearing the old man telling Koko about Lloyd's element that he'd have someday (something he probably wasn't meant to hear, but eavesdropping was a habit he still had yet to break from his time on the streets).

He enjoyed it for all of a day before he realized how much work taking care of a baby actually was.

There were alarms going off all. The. Time. Alarms for feeding times, nap times, play times, diaper changes, the whole works. Who knew babies were so needy? That first year or so was almost enough to make him give up and ask for someone else to take care of the child, but apparently ninja never quit and he didn't want to disappoint Wu or Koko.

Oh yeah, that was another new thing. He had started training to be a ninja. Wu told him it was to help his element get stronger so he could protect himself from bad people, but the teen was pretty sure that he just wanted someone to help him fight Garmadon. Why choose a 10-year old kid though? The old man had never really made any sense before, so he supposed he shouldn't be too surprised. Maybe now that he's 13, he'll start being asked to help for real.

…if he's honest, he doesn't want to have to fight. On the streets, a fight usually meant a night without sleep or a day without food. The outcome of a fight depended completely on the strength of an individual, and having always been on the smaller, weaker side, Morro tended to avoid them whenever possible. Using brains instead of brawn usually got one farther anyways, special wind powers or no.

"Momo, look! The birdie gived me a fissie!"

Turning his attention back to his cousin, he was horrified to find that the boy was indeed clutching a live, squirming little fish in his chubby fingers. "Ew! Go throw that back in the water!" He jerked to the side when Lloyd tried to hold it out toward him. "You don't pick up things that fell out of an animal's mouth!"

The blond's face fell, his bottom lip pushing out as tears began pooling in his eyes. "But… he shareded it…"

Right. Koko had been teaching him about sharing lately. Knowing full well that the bird hadn't been sharing and had likely just dropped its lunch when the boy scared it away, he sighed heavily—doing his best to not roll his eyes—and put on his best explaining face before kneeling down to Lloyd's eye level. "Sometimes sharing isn't a good thing. If an animal shares something with you, you should never take it because it might get you sick. Remember that time when you were coughing a lot and your nose was all runny and gross?" The little boy nodded sadly. "You don't want the bird to share that with you. So let's throw that back in the ocean and wash our hands, and then we'll get out some coloring pages or something. Mkay?" Maybe he could get the gremlin to settle down enough that he could get some homework done.

Thankfully that seemed to do the trick, as Lloyd's bright green eyes sparkled with excitement. "Coloring!!" He threw the fish as hard as he could and ran inside, not waiting to see that the wriggling creature hadn't actually made it off the boat. Morro coaxed the wind to carefully lift the fish over the railing and back into the water before following after his cousin to make sure he washed up well.

While taking care of a baby was one thing, watching the boy grow up was a whole different experience. Aunt Koko had warned him about the "terrible twos," but it wasn't until Lloyd turned three that it really kicked in. The constant screaming and whining and refusing to cooperate was enough to drive anyone up a wall, as it did with Morro many, many times. The only thing that made it worse was the fact that when Lloyd did choose to obey, it was because he was imitating his older cousin. Apparently one does not simply "grow out of" having a favorite person, no matter how hard Morro wished that were the case. Having a loud little shadow that followed him everywhere and tried to do everything he did was not his idea of a good day, and no matter how many times his dad or Aunt Koko tried to divert the toddler's attention he always came back.

After Lloyd's hands were squeaky clean, Morro picked him up and let the boy ride piggy back as he grabbed crayons and paper. One good thing about having a shadow was that if Morro put things away, Lloyd would too. They didn't always end up in the same place, but they could almost always be found nearby, which the older was extremely grateful for. With coloring materials acquired, he headed to his room to pick up his laptop and stuffed everything into a bag before climbing back up to the main deck. He laid out the papers on a table tray and placed the crayons in its cup holder, and soon the younger boy was engrossed in scribbling out art.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Morro slumped back against the wall and opened up his computer. He had never really done well attending school in person; the few months before and the few months after the move to Ninjago City had proved that. It wasn't that the material was hard, just that he didn't learn well in group settings. There were always too many people around, too many (potential threats) distractions stealing his attention. But once Aunt Koko learned about his struggles, she found out that most Ninjago schools had online programs and helped his dad set up the technology required to make it possible for him to learn virtually (translation: Koko did all the setup for him. The old man had no idea what he was doing

when it came to anything electronic, and how he'd managed to learn to fly the Bounty was one of mankind's greatest mysteries).

Morro took to it like a moth to a candle.

It was a bit of a learning curve getting used to typing instead of handwriting like Wu had taught him (although he still took notes on paper for a couple years), but the ability to work at his own pace in the comfort of his own home did wonders. Once he understood the material, assignments were accurately finished in record time, and he had made a little competition with himself out of being the first one in the class to turn in a flawless assignment. And on top of the educational benefits, the setup allowed him to still watch over Lloyd when needed. With the number of times the boy had sat in on Morro's video meetings with teachers, he was practically a student himself.

Speaking of the boy, he had gotten up from his makeshift desk and was currently holding out a paper for Morro to see. "Lookie! It's Momo and mister Veggie Man!" And indeed, there was a stick figure with green eyes and green and black hair next to a big green ball-shaped creature, both of which were holding a green stick in one stick arm and an orange stick in the other. "Veggie Man makes sure everyone eats veggies just like Momo does. Even their carrots and yucky eeks."

The teen suppressed a smile as he remembered a few days back when Wu had fixed a dish with leeks, and Lloyd had refused to eat any of the vegetable until his cousin challenged him to a leek-eating contest. He only ended up eating three pieces, but it was progress. "Yep, 'cause veggies are good for you. Especially the green ones. Why do you think green is my favorite color?" He poked Lloyd in the side until he squirmed from the ticklish sensation and moved the paper out of his way. "Now go draw another picture, okay? I'm not done with homework yet."

Lloyd whined in protest, but Morro nudged him back toward his spot and ignored him until he sat. Once the boy quieted down, Morro dove back into his studies and tuned out the rest of the world. He was so focused that he didn't even notice the passing of time until a scream and a splash broke through his concentration. His head whipped up from the screen to find Lloyd missing, and his stomach filled with dread.

Frantically running to the railing, he was thrown into a panic when he saw Lloyd floundering in the water, barely staying afloat as small waves lapped against him and pushed him into the side of the ship.

His cousin was in danger of drowning, and here he was, feet frozen to the deck. The water in front of him was no longer the ocean, but a raging river crashing down the middle of a small village. The cries he heard became his own, the pressure in his chest his own inability to draw in breath. Morro hated water. It had almost taken his life, and now it was trying to take Lloyd's as well. His heart pounded in his ears as his knuckles turned white from gripping the railing so hard, and all he could do was stare at the blond while the waves claimed him as their own.

"Mo-Momo!!"

His body suddenly moved on its own and before he knew it, he was plunging into the freezing cold ocean and grabbing hold of his cousin. He didn't know how to swim, but he couldn't just let Lloyd die. Lloyd was his cousin, his responsibility. Someone to be protected and held and cherished. He…cared about Lloyd, in a way that he had never cared for anyone before; not even himself.

As he tried to push the younger up above the surface, he vaguely sensed the wind swirling fiercely around them. But that didn't make sense. They were in the water, weren't they?

As they were slowly lifted out from under the waves, Morro curled himself around Lloyd protectively. Whether to keep the wind from ripping them apart or to keep him from falling back into the ocean, he didn't know, but even when they dropped back onto the deck of the Bounty, he couldn't bring himself to let go until the boy started coughing and he realized there might be water in his lungs.

They stayed there on the deck for several minutes, Lloyd choking out fearful sobs while Morro patted his back to help get any water out. When the blond was no longer coughing he crawled back into Morro's arms and continued to cry; the teen simply let him, picking him up and carrying him below deck. Outside time was definitely done for today.

Lloyd physically clung to Morro for quite a while after his tears dried up, and the teen was inclined to agree with the choice. He had slipped up by allowing a lapse in attention earlier, but from now on he would never allow anything to happen to the boy again if he could help it. At some point he went back up to retrieve his laptop and Lloyd's art supplies, and they spent the rest of the afternoon drawing more soldiers for Veggie Man's army of vegetable-eating enforcers.

By evening Lloyd seemed to be back to his energetic gremlin self, and Morro, silently grateful for the return of normality, made a promise to himself.

As long as Lloyd had a cousin, he would have a protector.

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