

Turtle Houses

‘Turtle Houses’, are the words in the speech bubble of the faded mural of Donatello. Underneath reads, ‘Portable, single-occupancy, solar-powered pod-abodes for nomads’. They mean for the homeless. Instead of building houses. Tin-mini-winnies. Bet they’ve never tried living in one, not with a kid. Connector-pods don’t work. Hatchlings don’t bear up to attempted theft. That’s why my three-year-old ended up in mine, saving for a lifer to grow into. Now she’s ten, we’re back in separate shells. Video-coms is no substitute for a hug, but air’s too scarce to share. At three, she’d no clue what CO₂ does to a developing brain, how air-filters struggle with two, that we weren’t so much falling asleep as unconscious—she liked feeling fizzy. I’d open our capsule when she slept. They’re not called coffin-ships for nothing.

Now she’s ten, settled into her own shell, she can handle canal locks, docks at communal shower blocks, migrant kitchen co-ops, and shifts at waterway factories, hydro-plants and mills, for food and fuel. Tonight’s her first solo-flood and I’ll check her tether. One day she’ll surf flood to the sea or join a floating-village or settle in some Nepalese city-peak. Until then, each sunset we’ll leave with the low-tide queue, trudge mud-tracked roads with 24-hour drone-radio, pull our turtle houses behind, like a toy wagon-train, and when Donatello sings, we’ll join in and sing-along with the song of the turtle dome that turns a house into a home, pretending to believe until the dream bubble become real.