Talking When You're Not Listening

by raendown

Summary

It always seems to be when something devastating happens that Sakura finds out the biggest truths. She's rather tired of deathbed confessions - even if Kakashi isn't really on his deathbed and she wasn't really supposed to discover this confession.

Notes

Written for KakaSaku month for the prompt "epistolary format"
She found them as they began cleaning out his apartment. He’d been in a coma for nearly a year and housing was tight around the village at the moment. Even if Sakura or Naruto could have afforded to pay the rent in his absence it was selfish to keep paying for an empty space when it was needed by so many others.

Many people offered to help pack away the Copy Ninja’s possessions to be put in to storage, some of them genuine offers of help and some of them opportunists trying to learn more about one of the most elusive nin in Konoha’s history. In the end only Gai-sensei accompanied them. He was Kakashi’s dearest friend and the only person who had been entrusted with an emergency key. As close as they had become with Kakashi over the years, not even Gai had ever been inside his apartment and they weren’t about to allow anyone else in either.

Naruto and Sakura brought boxes and storage scrolls, feeling like nothing so much as intruders while they went through things they knew they were likely never supposed to see. They learned more about the man who had become a good friend in that one afternoon than in the twelve years they had known him. They learned that many of the Icha Icha books that he carried were really adventure novels and poetry books in disguise. They learned that he had an extensive music collection with a wide variety of genres. They learned that he had more weapons hidden in more places than probably the rest of his building combined.

Sakura felt strange as she stepped inside Kakashi’s bedroom. It seemed wrong to violate his privacy like this but she supposed it was better that it be her, a friend, rather than some stranger who would toss his belongings to make room for their own. She decided to start with the desk first, setting the box down and sitting in the rickety chair to organize the papers atop the dented and aged wood.

Twenty minutes later she had cleared the top and opened the first drawer to her left to continue the task. Her first reaction was to be annoyed that the drawer was no more organized than the surface had been, with papers thrown in willy-nilly and no system or separation to sort them. Then she noticed what they were: letters. Sakura was a thoughtlessly curious girl by nature and without thinking about how wrong this was, how badly she was breaking a friend’s trust, her first instinct was to pick it up and read it.

Her eyes nearly fell out of her head when she noticed it was addressed to herself. Curious – flabbergasted – she flipped through the stacks of letters inside the drawer. They were all addressed to her, each and every one of them. Some were short, others three pages folded together. None were dated but as she set the stack on her lap and began to read through them a timeline became clear. And tears began to fall as she read them in reverse.

Sakura

That red dress? Stunning. I heard your friend Ino telling you that you should have gone with the green one but I can’t imagine anything that would look more amazing on you. Well, anything but your smile.

Love, Kakashi

Sakura

Congratulations. You told me to sound more enthusiastic and I couldn’t say it to you then but what I really wanted was to lift you off your feet and spin you in circles, to say it over and over until you were half as proud of yourself as I am of you. Congratulations, congratulations, congratulations. You earned this promotion and I’m so happy for you.
Love, Kakashi

Sakura
He didn’t deserve you. You always have been and you always will be too good for him. You deserve someone who worships you, who would bring the world to its knees for you, who understands that you’re too good of a person to want that. Divorce is never happy but neither was your marriage. Think of all the opportunities before you. I hope you smile more often now. The world is shadow and darkness and you are a shining star that lights the way for so many. For me. These are the things I wish I could have said to you tonight. I’m sorry I never have the words when I’m standing next to you. You take my words away. You take my breath and my will. The same as you’ve taken my heart.

Love, Kakashi

Sakura
You had cream on your lips and I wanted to lick it off for you. If it were my birthday instead of Naruto’s I would have forbidden anyone but you from eating that cake.

Love, Kakashi

Sakura
Come back. Come back. Come back. Come back. You are all that keeps me sane some days. How many more months before your mission is finished? It’s like each day lasts an entire year. I can feel myself sliding backwards in to old habits and the only thing that keeps my head above the water is knowing that someday you’ll come home and I will see you smile again.

Love, Kakashi

Sakura
I’m a terrible disgusting man, in love with someone else’s wife. Help me. Release me, for kami’s sake. I don’t want this, Sakura. I don’t want to love someone who will never love me back. I hate it. I hate this. I hate myself for falling so low.

Love, Kakashi

Sakura
Get out of my head. Please. You’re beautiful and kind and graceful and brave and intelligent and stubborn and everything I could ever want. But I don’t want to want this. I’m a broken old man and you’re engaged. So why is it that every time I see you I fall a little more?

Love, Kakashi

Sakura
I’m terrified. I think I’m in love with you.

Kakashi

The longer she read the more Sakura began to cry. There were dozens upon dozens of short letters, the journey of a man falling in love without being able to say a word. Reading them backwards was like reading a descent in to madness, like watching darkness consume him.

The one that she saved for last was the most recent, the one she had found on the top of the pile. After reading through the way Kakashi had struggled with himself, these lines broke her down completely.

Sakura
You will have my heart for the rest of my life. What is the point in fighting something so wonderful? You light up my day every time you walk in to a room and that will never fade. Not even as I grow old and you forget all about a jaded man who should have done so much better by you in so many things. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow. And the next time, and the next time after that. I look forward to seeing all the happy places your life will take you, be it the head of the hospital, down the
aisle again with a new love, or to another village following some fanciful dream. I promise to help you up if you ever need it. I promise to hold my tongue and be whatever you want me to be: a friend, a Hokage, or just an old sensei. I promise to never put this burden on you and force you to tell me what I already know. I know I can’t have you. But I promise that I will always be saying these words in my heart, every day for the rest of my life: I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you.

Forever, Kakashi

The calm acceptance after fighting so hard to reject himself hit her like her own chakra-enhanced fists to the stomach. Sakura buried her face in both hands and wept, gasping and crying out until Naruto and Gai-sensei came rushing in to see what was wrong. Naruto held her and asked question after question, his voice loud and demanding and never pausing for breath let alone giving her a chance to answer. Not that she could.

Gai-sensei gently took the letters from her and read through some of them, his thick eyebrows furrowing deeper and deeper the more he read. Eventually he set them down on the desk rather delicately. Sakura looked over at him through the veil of her tears, distantly surprised to see him so calm about this discovery.

“I did not know that my rival wrote you letters,” he mumbled. Sakura gaped.

“Did you know?” she demanded. “Did you know he was in love with me?”

“He what?” Naruto shot upright, his face incredulous. Sakura ignored him.

Gai gave her an uncharacteristically solemn look. “Yes, I knew,” he said. “He did not deal with it well in the beginning. It fell to me quite often to drag him home from the bar or to hold him back from partaking in the more desperate measures. He went through a...particularly reckless phase for a while.” Talking about Kakashi, that was saying something.

Sakura covered her mouth with one hand and closed her eyes for a moment, breathing deeply.

Kakashi had been in love with her for years and she had never had a clue. She hadn’t married Sasuke until a few years after the war had ended and it had fallen apart only a few years later. She’d been single again for four more years now.

In that time Kakashi had become her best friend. She couldn’t even say it was a case of him trying to ingratiate himself towards her because she was very aware that it was usually her that sought him out, asking him to lunch and sitting next to him at social events she had threatened him in to attending. She was closer to him than even Ino. She told him all her secrets, vented to him about bad days, went to him first with good news.

And this entire time he had been in love with her without her seeing a single hint. Sakura wasn’t sure what she felt more strongly: the shock of this revelation or the guilt that her best friend had been suffering in silence without her even noticing. Sure he was a private person but shouldn’t she have picked up on some sort of sign?

Naruto was still freaking out behind her chair but Sakura continued ignoring him as she stood up. She met Gai-sensei’s eyes and for a moment they simply stared at one another without words. Then the older man broke out in to his signature sparkling grin, turning his wheelchair with one hand while thrusting out an enthusiastic thumbs up with the other.

“YOSH! I could not be more happy for you! At long last my eternal rival enters the springtime of LOVE!” Sakura blushed but giggled. Gai reached up to her face and used one thick thumb to brush
away some of her tears. “Go to him,” he said, much quieter.

Sakura didn’t need telling twice. Naruto’s agitated yelling faded away as she dashed out of the apartment and headed for the stairs. The two men could finish packing up the apartment; she had a coma patient to go rant loudly to.
Chapter 2

Kakashi had the sensation of rising to the surface of a deep lake when he returned to consciousness. He blinked his eyes open to the sun rising outside of his window, dawn’s first light flooding his room with gold, and sighed.

The hospital again. Whoopee.

He only vaguely remembered the battle that had put him here but what he found much more important was that a glance outside told him it was spring. The last time he had been aware of the world it had been winter. The idea that he might have been lying here for a couple months as the season changed without him knowing had him shifting uncomfortably in his bed, surprised by how weak his body felt.

He considered calling for a nurse and letting them know he was conscious. If he’d been in a coma then it was probably best to get checked out as soon as possible. And he was going to do that – really he was – until his eyes fell on the stack of paper on the table next to his bed. He would know that writing anywhere. Sakura had been here and she’d been writing letters.

Too curious to resist, Kakashi reached over to pick up the letters. He stopped halfway to stare in horror at his own arm. Where there should have been corded muscle, years of hard work and dedicated training, there was nothing. His arm was wasted like someone who’d been stuck in a bed for much longer than a couple of months. This looked like years.

Swallowing down the panic and the fear that rose unbidden in his throat, Kakashi focused instead on the letters. He forced himself to see it as information gathering, falling back in to a mission mentality to keep himself calm.

The stack wasn’t too thick and it was mostly made up of half scraps of paper ripped off of a form or out of a notebook. All of them were in Sakura’s handwriting and as he read through them, Kakashi’s emotions took leaps and plunges he wasn’t properly equipped to handle at the moment.

Kakashi
You’re an asshole. Wake up you stupid man.
Love, Sakura

Kakashi
You never listen do you? I’m in here every day telling you to wake up and you just lie there like a lump. Wake up soon.
Love, Sakura

Kakashi
I can write letters too you son of a bitch now wake up so I can yell at you in person for how stupid you are. How could you never say anything? How could you think I would hate you? How could you make me find out this way? How could you leave me alone? Wake up. Please.
Love, Sakura.

Kakashi
I know you like to nap but two years is a bit ridiculous and if you think I’m ever going to let you forget this you are dead wrong. I can’t write flowery things like you but I can yell and you best believe you’ve got some yelling coming when you WAKE UP.
Love, Sakura

Kakashi
I miss you. Nothing’s the same. I’m lonely without you and I love all of my other friends but none of them are you. Will you have lunch with me today? Can I tell you all about the idiot who threw up on my brand new shoes?
Love, Sakura

Kakashi
Shishou says I’m not allowed to have access to your charts anymore because I thought I had found a pattern in your brainwaves and everyone made a big fuss but it’s been another month and you’re still asleep. Will I ever hear your voice again? Will I ever make you laugh again? I’ll do as many embarrassing bad impressions as you want, I promise. I can’t stand this. I need you.
Love, Sakura

Kakashi
How dare you make me fall in love with a man who does nothing but sleep! How dare you! I hate you!
Love, Sakura

Kakashi
I love you.
Love, Sakura

Kakashi
I think I’ve loved you for years and never realized. You’ve always been there and you’ve always been perfect but I closed my eyes and didn’t see. I looked only at Sasuke because I thought that’s the way things were supposed to be. And then he shattered my illusions so badly that I didn’t dare to look at anyone else. But you loved me the way he should have. Wake up. Wake up wake up wake up I need to tell you I love you too. I couldn’t stand it if you never got to hear it. Please don’t fade away. You can’t die thinking I never loved you back.
Love, Sakura

Kakashi stared at the papers in his lap, unsure of what he was feeling. He felt overwhelmed, too full, confused. He felt joyous but an instinctive need to rein the feeling in because he was, by nature, a cautious man.

He needed to see Sakura.

Out of habit he made to sit up fully and swing his legs out of the bed. It wouldn’t be the first hospital escape attempt he had made and it certainly wouldn’t be the last. His efforts were halted, however, by what an incredible struggle it was just to sit up. Kakashi looked down at himself and his brain finally recognized that it wasn’t just his arm that was wasted. His entire body had faded away while he slept, muscle and fat melting off due to disuse and atrophying until he was left as a shell of what he had been.

He was distracted from the disgust he felt at his own body when the door opened. Soft soled shoes make light noises on the linoleum that Kakashi did not hear. His attention was immediately attached to the beautiful face of the woman who had just walked in, one hand tucking her pink hair behind her ear as she looked down at the open folder she was carrying.

Sakura’s eyes stayed on the patient file she was reading as she approached the bed, then they closed as she leaned down press a soft kiss to his forehead, once again resting on the pillow after the effort to sit up became too much.
“Good morning Kakashi,” she greeted him. “You don’t mind if I sit in here for a while do you? I can’t seem to concentrate in my office. I hate the night shift.”

With a sigh she sat down, balancing the file across her knees while she combed her fingers through her hair, taming the kinks that were ostensibly from a long night on duty. As she did, her eyes fell upon the letters still spread on top of Kakashi’s blankets and she paused, frowning.

“Eh? Who was touching my letters?” She reached out to gather them up. “Who was in here!?”

Sakura screamed like a banshee when Kakashi took hold of her fingers, jumping two feet in the air with fright. When she finally looked in to his face with saucer-wide eyes, Kakashi was smiling.

“Maa,” he croaked past a dry throat. “No one but you.”

“K-Kakashi?” Sakura stared, unmoving. Her eyes watered and when she squeezed them shut and popped them back open tears spilled out the sides. Her free hand made a familiar seal and she exclaimed, “Kai! Kai!”

“That’s insulting.”

“Kakashi!”

He grunted as Sakura fell upon him. Then he smiled and held her as best as he could while she clung to his neck, sobbing and crying out his name over and over and over. Her body collapsed beside his on the bed, somehow remembering not to put too much weight on him, and he couldn’t think of a single happier moment in his entire life than right now.

It took her a long time to pull away and Kakashi soaked in every moment of having her so close, of having her wrapped up in his arms. When she sat up the tears hadn’t even slowed but she was smiling so brilliantly he almost had to look away. Her hands came up to pet his hair away from his face, fingertips lingering on his cheekbones almost reverently as they traced along the line of his medical mask.

“You’re awake,” she whispered. “You’re okay.”

“Maa-” Kakashi tried to respond and started coughing when the dryness in his throat caused it to contract.

“Oh! Hold on!”

Sakura flew off the bed and in to the adjoined bathroom, returning a moment later with a paper cup full of tap water. He gave her a grateful smile and, without pause, pulled down his mask. Sakura nearly spilled the water and her hands shook as she held in to his lips. He grinning once he’d swallowed a few mouthfuls.

“That funny looking, huh?” he asked wryly. Sakura shook her head.

“You’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen,” she whispered unsteadily. Then she kissed him.

Kakashi groaned, falling helplessly back against the bed while Sakura pressed in to him with slow gentle kisses.

“I love you,” she murmured against his lips. “I love you, I love you, I love you. You’re awake thank god – I love you.”
“I love you too,” he said. Her kisses tasted wonderful but the words tasted better. “Haruno Sakura I love you with every fiber of my being.” She touched their foreheads together and grinned.

“I know. I read all about it.”

“Hmm, you’ll have to tell me what exactly you were doing, going through my stuff. Those were private thank you very much. But…later. Hello. I hear you missed me.”

Sakura laughed and pressed another happy kiss to his mouth so he could drink the sound of it right from her lips. “I did. I missed you so much. I’m going to yell at you later when I’m not so happy. Stupid man, falling in to a coma for two years. Don’t you ever leave me like that again, do you hear?”

“Loud and clear, my love.” He felt giddy. His body was wasted and he would likely be hospitalized for weeks more. It would take a long time to gain his strength back and even longer before he was back to anything resembling normal. But Sakura was here; Sakura loved him. He could say all of the things that he had kept locked away inside for so long and expect nothing but smiles and kisses in return.

Kakashi tugged her shirt until she came down in to his embrace again. Then he held her in his arms, buried his face in her hair, and whispered the words over and over until tears were falling from both of their eyes.

“I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you…”

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